



BREAKING THE CYCLE OF AN EYE FOR AN EYE



As the Middle East Christian community faces increasing attacks, SAT-7 Founder and International CEO, Dr Terence Ascott, grapples with a question that is asked more and more often – how should believers respond to violence?

The recent brutal gun attacks and suicide bombings in Egypt have left many of our brothers and sisters there grieving, despairing, angry, and **feeling vulnerable**. SAT-7 plays a unique role in supporting them and reminding them of the need for a Christian response.

Jesus’ teachings on how to respond to such violence or oppression have always been a challenge. He called His followers to forgiveness, tolerance, and love at a time when their homeland was occupied by an often cruel and violent Roman regime. The command to turn the other cheek to a Roman soldier’s blow would have been as shocking then as it can be in today’s Middle East.

But, as Jesus describes in Matthew 5:38, a peaceful response is the only way to break the violent cycle of an “eye for an eye” – a cycle that remains prevalent in Middle Eastern cultures today.

Walking a path of healing together
SAT-7’s programmes walk alongside the suffering Church in Egypt, Syria, Iraq and other troubled countries in the region, helping them to process their feelings, know that God is with them, and understand the true value of a Christ-like response.

SAT-7 KIDS’ programmes also help **young viewers to understand** and cope with their feelings. With 60 million people now directly impacted by the conflicts raging in Syria, Iraq, Yemen and Libya, more and more communities are struggling to deal with issues of loss, displacement and injury. It is thought that there is not a child in Syria who

has not lost a member of their immediate family and the process of grieving and dealing with trauma is a lengthy one. There is denial, then anger and so on. We recognise there is no quick fix and a television programme alone can’t take away a child’s pain and anger. But our aim is to **work with them and their families**, step by step, through every stage of their response, praying for them and showing them God’s love.

Counselling programme “With Smyrna” tackles issue of trauma and parenting. We are also helping with special **programmes for women**, who often play a crucial role at times of crisis. Mothers are frequently the main example to their children of how to respond peacefully and constructively. Women are also the most likely to be a voice in society for compassion and understanding. By empowering women with logical arguments and an understanding of the power of a Christian response, SAT-7 helps spread Jesus’ radical message of forgiveness throughout families and communities.

Choosing to forgive in a “Shame culture”

To meet the needs of our male viewers, we firstly need to understand that they live in a “shame culture” in the Middle East, where it is dishonourable for a male not to take revenge for harmful actions against you or your family or even your tribe. If one does not respond like with like, they are viewed as weak – as cowards who have brought disgrace and shame on their family or community. SAT-7’s **programmes for men** seek

to counteract this prevailing attitude by bringing a Christian message that, to break the cycle of violence is not cowardice – it is an act of personal bravery.

Recent editions of “Keep on Singing” tackled the issue of fear and peace amid violence as a fruit of the Spirit.

How should we pray?

The question of how the state should respond to terrorism is, of course, a separate issue. A government is a God-ordained institution with a primary duty to protect all its citizens. We must pray for the different governments in the region – that they would act with justice and that local officials, some of whom are more sympathetic to Christians than others, would take the needed action to protect all minorities.

But, most of all, we must pray for our brothers and sisters across the Middle East and North Africa. They have suffered terribly, but they and their Christian witness remain. And, while this is a very painful time, it also presents a unique opportunity. The witness of people willing to die for their faith, to pray for their enemies, and to publicly forgive their attackers is powerful and undeniable. This is incredibly profound at a time of great disillusionment by so many in our region.

Please join me in praying for Arab, Iranian, and Turkish Christians – that the Lord will comfort and heal them, bless them, and enable them to continue as a shining light for Him. ■

FEEDING THE ENERGY OF YOUTH

Youthful energy, enquiry and potential. These aren't characteristics that immediately spring to mind when we think of the Arab world. But in a region where one third of the population is aged 15-29 and another is under 15, they reflect the dynamic potential of these countries, if only obstacles like conflict, weak political participation, scant job opportunities, and discrimination didn't stand in their way.

But many Middle East churches are working hard to help young people reach their potential – by running schools, youth camps, youth choirs, talent shows and mobilizing young people in service to the church and community. SAT-7 programmes regularly benefit from the input of talented youth and children's bands and choirs, like the Better Life and Good News teams in Egypt, and programmes on SAT-7 KIDS celebrate and showcase the positive activities of young people.

Praise Factory is a popular SAT-7 live worship show aimed at the under 15s that involves a large group of young singers every week. Each episode encourages young people to bring their situations and emotions to God in worship.

A recent episode introduced a new worship style to the show. 'Hip hop', the music genre which includes rhythmic and fast-spoken singing, is hugely popular in the Middle East but sometimes frowned on by adults.

Music that connects

Nevertheless, Tony Fayeze, a singer-songwriter and freelancer at SAT-7, writes lyrics and composes worship songs in this style to reach out to young people and help young Christians worship in a language they feel belongs to them.

"The fast rhythm reflects the passion, energy and speed of teenagers," Tony says. "That's the music they listen to when they are together. It's a good way to reach them using Christian lyrics that they can remember and sing along to."

The song Tony performed on *Praise Factory* was "I'm sticking to church". Its lyrics reflect a young person's love for church and his/her reasons for 'sticking to it'.

Go deeper

"The image of my Sunday School teacher playing the piano and teaching us hymns is ingrained in my memory," he recalls. "Teenage years are a fruitful time to plant Christian concepts through music. It is more effective than many sermons they hear as adults."

Tony began using the style with young teenagers after overhearing some in the street listening to an Egyptian song "Just Be Yourself". The song was a big hit with this age group because it expressed ideas of individualism, discovering your talents, thanking God and others.

Tony explains, "When I heard this song, I thought that if a mainstream, secular song could be so successful in spreading good concepts, then we can do the same with Christian songs to teach young people about Jesus."

It's an approach that has drawn some criticism. Traditional churches and some parents have said the music degrades Christian values. Tony believes you have to give young people some freedom to express their faith in ways that are meaningful to them: "Youth can and will do whatever they want. They can listen to whatever music they choose so instead of trying to fit them in a rigid form, we can reach out to them and speak their language." ■



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