



THE DISTRICTS OF

ISTANBUL

a prayer guide



Step out the door and hear the horns honking, street dogs barking and the call of a local simit* seller bellowing out “Fresh simit! Fresh simit!” A gypsy woman sets up her street display—bright shades of orange and red daisies—and settles down on a short stool with a cup of tea, ready to watch the day go by. A businessman with a newspaper tucked under one arm and a briefcase slung over his shoulder dodges a taxi while crossing the street and also checking the soccer scores on his smart phone. Street cats congregate around a plate of fish that a benevolent neighbor has bestowed. The scented air outside a corner bakery tempts hungry passers-by.

This is ISTANBUL.

* A simit is a sesame-coated ring of bread



In the last two decades the city of Istanbul has experienced explosive growth, pushing its boundaries ever further, swallowing up green space and creating new districts. Each district, or *ilce*, functions like a small town, with its own government and priorities, all the while remaining a distinct segment of the city of Istanbul.

Most tourists visiting Istanbul are romanced by the charm of the old city, once known as Constantinople. They tour the top sites carefully marking attractions off their list:

- Hagia Sophia, *famed church-turned-mosque-turned-museum*
- Sultanahmet, *the Blue Mosque, exquisitely tiled Muslim place of worship*
- The Cisterns, *underground water system dating to the Byzantine era*
- Topkapı Palace and Dolmabahçe Palace, *homes of the Ottoman sultans*

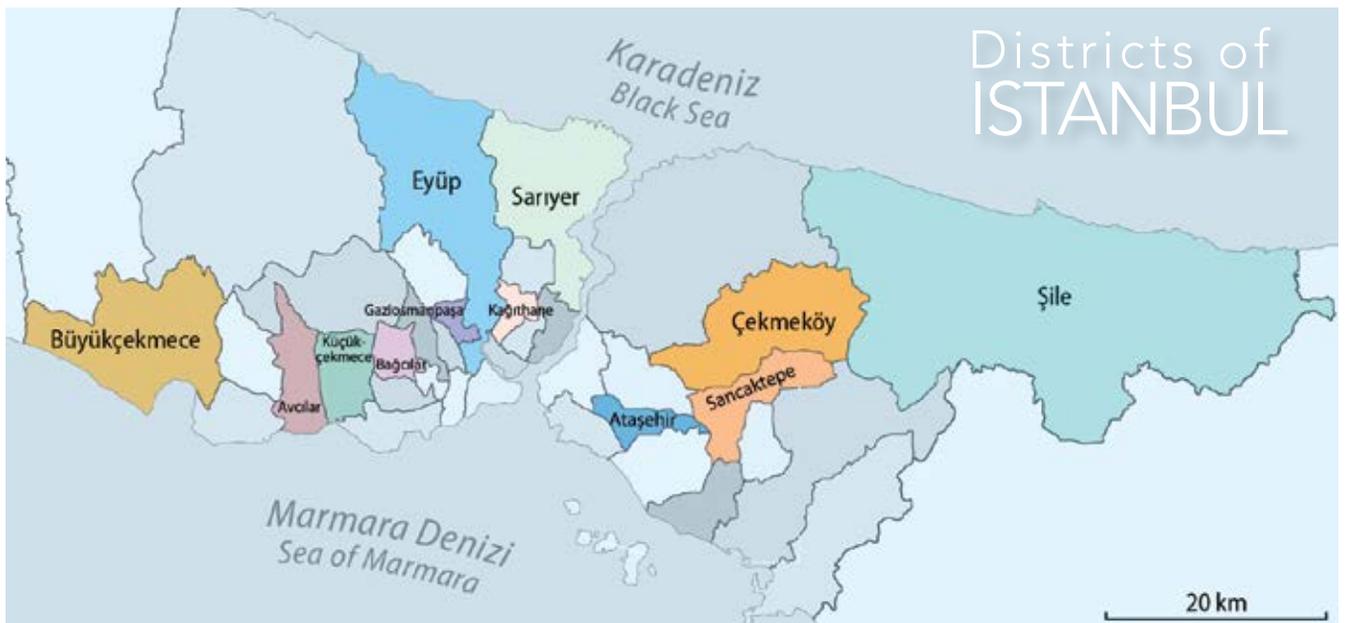
Most never see more than one or two of Istanbul's forty-one districts. They never tour the district of Bağcılar, where immigrants far from home work long days and sleep side-by-side next to strangers on the floor of a dingy room above a warehouse. They miss Gaziosmanpaşa and the troubled youth escaping into the shadows of gaming salons. They never notice the minority groups across the city—Kurds, Alevis, Armenians and Zazas—struggling to find acceptance in a society that suppresses the expression of their distinct cultures. Behind the Ottoman glory, behind the gleaming waters of the Bosphorus, and behind the postcards, the neighborhoods of Istanbul are in desperate need of the Gospel.



Join the Tour

We hope that this guide will open a door for you to glimpse twelve distinct districts of Istanbul that are outside the typical tour route. These twelve districts have been carefully chosen—many of them have no known believers or Gospel-teaching church. All of these districts are filled with hundreds of thousands of souls who walk in darkness and are desperate for God's mercy.

Two writers and a photographer have taken to the streets to explore these twelve districts. Come along and explore with them—see what they see; hear what they hear; meet those they meet. The journey of discovery is meant to inspire your prayers.



Pray

As you encounter each district, ask God to glorify Himself by having mercy on men and women in Istanbul. The vast majority call themselves Muslim. Some observe the Muslim rules strictly—fasting in the month of Ramadan, praying five times a day and carefully reflecting their religious fervor by using Islamic phrases at every opportunity. Others use the term “Muslim” loosely, priding themselves on liberalism and democratic secularism. A few secular Turks eschew the “Muslim” label, embracing atheism and living as if there is no tomorrow. These secular and religious segments of society often hold each other in contempt, unaware that they stand equally condemned as children of wrath before the One, True God.

Little do they know that this One, True God is rich in mercy. He has poured out His great love through the blood of His Son, Jesus Christ, who endured God’s wrath by receiving the punishment for the sins of His people. God has lavished His grace on the spiritually dead, creating life and adopting former “children of wrath” into his heavenly family.

Pray that God would pour out His rich mercy...

...on the devout Muslim woman pinning her headscarf

...on the grandpa habitually counting his prayer beads

...on the tattooed student chatting with friends in a bar

...on the frazzled mom, calming a crying baby

...on the professional texting while dashing to a meeting

Pray that the Holy Spirit would bring His Word with power to their hearts. Pray for God to build His church in each of these twelve districts. Pray that each of these districts would one day be home to healthy bodies of believers, saved through the sacrifice of Jesus, forgiven and committed in love to the Lord and to each other.

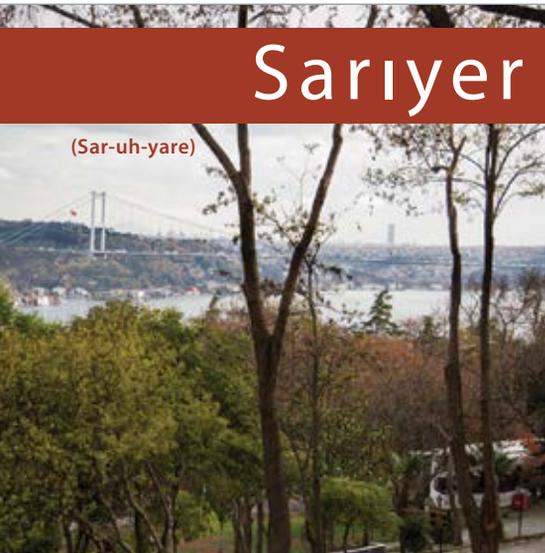
“And I pray this: that your love will keep on growing in knowledge and every kind of discernment, so that you can approve the things that are superior and can be pure and blameless in the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ to the glory and praise of God.”

—Phil. 1:9-11, HCSB



Sarıyer

(Sar-uh-yare)



GOOD TO KNOW

- ◆ There are few old Greek Orthodox village churches in Sarıyer, but they are mostly abandoned. There is no Gospel-teaching church in Sarıyer.
- ◆ Sarıyer is a massive district extending up the Bosphorus and along the Black Sea and deep inland into the Belgrade Forest.
- ◆ Turks boast that tulips originally came from the Ottoman Empire. Every spring, Emirgan Park in Sarıyer greets hoards of tourist packing into the park to see its breathtaking tulips.



PRAY

- ◆ Pray for believing students at Boğaziçi University to be bold and to reach out to the Sarıyer community with the Gospel.
- ◆ Pray that God would build a church in Sarıyer that truly is made up of every demographic– rich and poor united in the Gospel.
- ◆ Pray that residents of Sarıyer would hear the message of Truth, the gospel of salvation, and believe in Christ, to the praise of His glory.



I had been looking forward to visiting Sarıyer for quite some time. Location of an ancient 15th century fortress, host of an annual tulip festival and home to Istanbul's elite—Sarıyer had long captivated my attention.

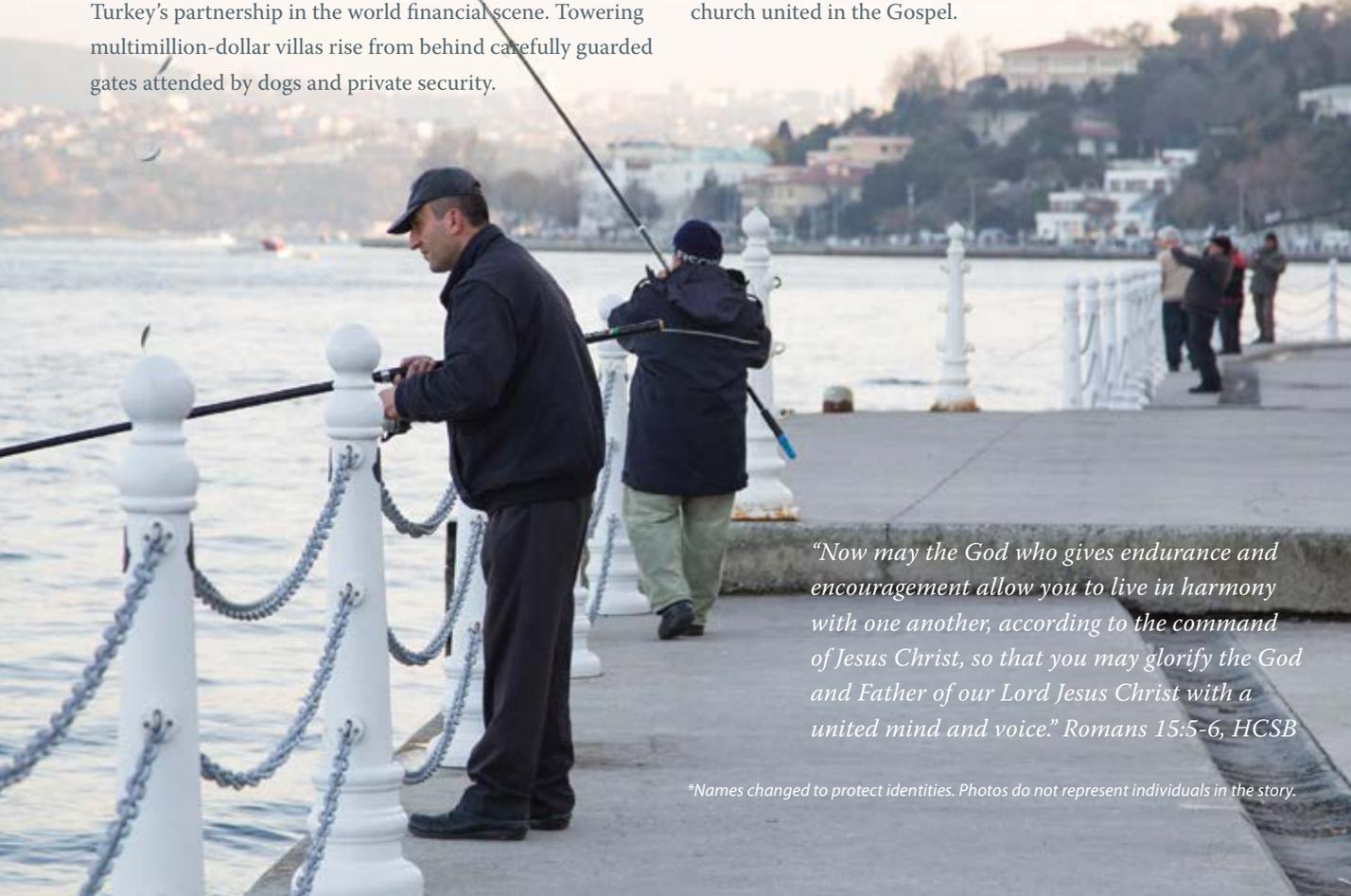
My bus slowly snaked its way up the sea road from Beşiktaş into Sarıyer. On one side, Istanbul fashionistas sipped tea in up-scale cafes. On the other side, local fishermen glanced over their shoulders as they skillfully cast their lines into the Bosphorus. Slicing through the air and into the water, the lines magically missed pedestrians strolling on the promenade at the water's edge.

The district of Sarıyer is the face of Istanbul's prestige. Young people from wealthy homes study at Boğaziçi University, earning not just a degree but also a pedigree. Children's school groups tour the Sakıp Sabancı museum, a fine arts museum created by a wealthy Turkish businessman whose money and status have long outlived him. Borsa Istanbul, Istanbul's exchange entity, works to increase Turkey's partnership in the world financial scene. Towering multimillion-dollar villas rise from behind carefully guarded gates attended by dogs and private security.

Yet there is another face of Sarıyer, and I didn't have to look far to find it. Sometimes directly next to multimillion dollar mansions are shabby, clumsily made homes, almost ready to collapse and clearly inhabited by the poor. These homes are called *gecekondu*, "settled at night." Hastily constructed in the dark of night, the *gecekondu*s were pieced together by squatters—and the government let it pass.

*Mehmet** is in his 60's and works at a yarn store. His family is one of many Black Sea peoples who migrated to Sarıyer. "My father moved here years ago," he told me. His family, originally from the city of Rize, travels back and forth from Rize to Sarıyer as the seasons change. He has lived in a Sarıyer *gecekondu* since its quick construction in 1979. We talked about the disparity in living conditions. "My rich neighbors move to Sarıyer for the sea view," he said completely matter-of-factly.

I leave his shop praying that God will receive glory in Sarıyer by redeeming the rich and poor together and building a church united in the Gospel.



"Now may the God who gives endurance and encouragement allow you to live in harmony with one another, according to the command of Jesus Christ, so that you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ with a united mind and voice." Romans 15:5-6, HCSB

*Names changed to protect identities. Photos do not represent individuals in the story.

Eyüp

(Eigh-Yoop)



GOOD TO KNOW

◆ Eyüp district in Istanbul is named after Eyüp Ansari, a close cohort of the prophet Muhammad. Eyüp was said to have come to Constantinople from Saudi Arabia during the first wave of warriors trying to conquer the city. Before dying in battle, Eyüp requested to be buried here. When the city was finally taken in 1453, the Sultan Mehmet ordered a mosque built over Eyüp's resting place. Since then, the Eyüp district has been considered a sacred place

PRAY

◆ Pray that the small Christian community of Istanbul will boldly, respectfully share their reason for hope. Pray that local Christian fellowships will provide an unconditionally loving family for those who will be exiled by their families for putting their faith in Jesus Christ.

◆ Pray that the people of Eyüp would begin to see the emptiness of following Islam.

The Golden Horn is a finger of water that curves around the northern border of the old city of Constantinople, reaching into the district of Eyüp. The neighborhood lies just beyond the ruins of the massive walls that once protected the fabled city from invasion. It was here that Mehmet the Conqueror's forces clashed with the Byzantines in 1453, when the city fell to the Muslim invaders.

The historic pedigree of Eyüp makes it a popular destination for tourists. Along the water's edge the buildings are well kept; but as I move further inland, the dwelling places become worn down and dilapidated. The old Ottoman style homes lie abandoned, their wooden shells gaunt as skeletons only hinting at their former beauty.

As I venture further from the water, there are more women dressed conservatively, wearing long coats and veils covering their heads. Men wear Muslim prayer caps and sport long beards.

The main shopping thoroughfare is called *Islambey*, Honorable Islam street—a nod at the importance of religion in this traditional neighborhood. I dodge cars and street vendors as I walk jostling with the people of Eyüp. I notice a shop called "Color," which ironically sells only long, dark coats preferred by conservative Muslim women.

**Names changed to protect identities.*

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The center of activity is the Sultan Eyüp Mosque. Rather than a place of somber worship, the mosque feels more like a carnival. Kiosks selling ice cream and cotton candy crowd the border of the mosque. Young children run on the expansive marble courtyard while their parents relax on the benches nearby.

Wanting to escape the crush of people, I find a side street and find a table at a rundown café called Sahra. Sitting by the door is a homeless man drinking tea given to him by the owner of the café. Everyone seems to know *Ali*,* greeting him by name as they pass by. I try to talk to him, but he remains silent and merely nods and smiles. Eventually, one of the workers at the café gestures for him to move along.

He leaves without protest.

A man sits at my table. He was born and raised in Eyüp and clearly loves his neighborhood. He tells me that during Ramazan (the holy month of fasting) Eyüp is flooded with tourists, but today I encounter only locals.

There is a gentility in this close knit conservative neighborhood where people passing on the street greet one another by name. It causes me to wonder how difficult it will be to see a church planted here. For many in Eyüp, turning to Christ would be seen as a betrayal to the faith of their fathers. I imagine it would be even more scandalous than a Baptist in Texas becoming a Muslim.



Kağithane

(Kya-it-ha-nay)



GOOD TO KNOW

- ◆ The Istanbul Sapphire, located in Kağıthane, is one of the largest skyscrapers in Europe.
- ◆ A 40-year resident of Kağıthane recently made a profession of faith.

PRAY

- ◆ Pray for those who have recently professed faith in Christ, that they would truly understand the Gospel and live as new creatures in Christ.
- ◆ Pray that God would have mercy on the people of Kağıthane and open their eyes to see the Truth. Pray that a church of genuine believers would be established in this district.

“Should I not care about the great city of Nineveh, which has more than 120,000 people who cannot distinguish between their right and their left...?”

—Jonah 4:11, HCSB

The bus ride to Kağıthane took me through streets lined with new buildings and attention-getting neon signs. There was no shortage of places to buy expensive clothes and furniture. But as the bus went downhill, the neon faded and the stores advertised staples rather than pricey fashion.

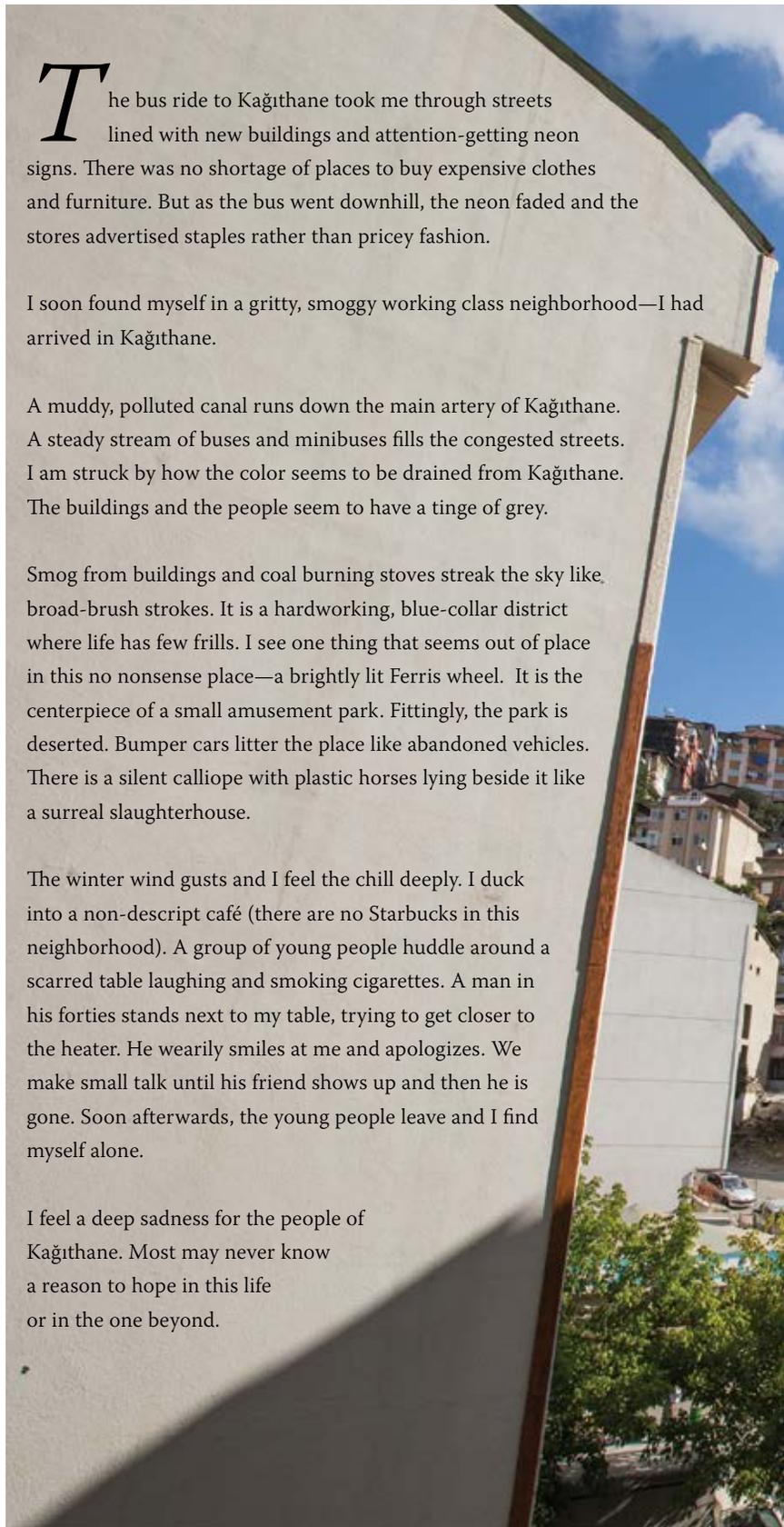
I soon found myself in a gritty, smoggy working class neighborhood—I had arrived in Kağıthane.

A muddy, polluted canal runs down the main artery of Kağıthane. A steady stream of buses and minibuses fills the congested streets. I am struck by how the color seems to be drained from Kağıthane. The buildings and the people seem to have a tinge of grey.

Smog from buildings and coal burning stoves streak the sky like broad-brush strokes. It is a hardworking, blue-collar district where life has few frills. I see one thing that seems out of place in this no nonsense place—a brightly lit Ferris wheel. It is the centerpiece of a small amusement park. Fittingly, the park is deserted. Bumper cars litter the place like abandoned vehicles. There is a silent calliope with plastic horses lying beside it like a surreal slaughterhouse.

The winter wind gusts and I feel the chill deeply. I duck into a non-descript café (there are no Starbucks in this neighborhood). A group of young people huddle around a scarred table laughing and smoking cigarettes. A man in his forties stands next to my table, trying to get closer to the heater. He wearily smiles at me and apologizes. We make small talk until his friend shows up and then he is gone. Soon afterwards, the young people leave and I find myself alone.

I feel a deep sadness for the people of Kağıthane. Most may never know a reason to hope in this life or in the one beyond.





Gaziosmanpaşa

(Gaz-ee-ose-man-pasha)



GOOD TO KNOW

- ◆ Gaziosmanpaşa is a working-class district with many immigrants from the Balkans who have come in recent decades.
- ◆ The unemployment rate is high in Gaziosmanpaşa.
- ◆ Gaziosmanpaşa was named after an Ottoman military field marshal and national hero, Osman Nuri Pasha, who eventually served as the Minister of War in the Ottoman Empire.

A bustle of activity over a red brick sidewalk greeted me in Gaziosmanpaşa. Young people wandered in and out of clothing stores. A young father, his child perched on his shoulders, cautiously crossed the street. Five city laborers dressed in fluorescent orange worksuits chatted and laughed together as they brushed their straw brooms over the street, catching any stray bits of paper or trash.

Nearby, a billboard boasted, “Gaziosmanpasa is changing and becoming beautiful!”—evidence that the district leadership was spending money to put a new face on Gaziosmanpasa, a district known for its drug culture. A van drove slowly down the street, its loudspeaker booming an announcement about paying a district “beauty tax.”

*Deniz** is a young woman with a warm smile and jet-black hair who recently entered into a new marriage and a new job in Gaziosmanpaşa. She once worked as a sports trainer in her single days, but now she waits on customers in a women’s clothes shop. She glanced at me, smiling sheepishly, and explained, “My husband was my student. He won’t let me work as a trainer anymore because it is a job with men.”

Her perspective on Gaziosmanpaşa is guarded. “It’s a nice place and there are interesting people here, but there are bad people too. You have to be careful.” Deniz’s words rang in my ears later as I glanced down a nearby alley and saw five young men gathered closely in a circle.

Deeper into Gaziosmanpasa, the quiet streets were lined with one colorless apartment after another. Trash littered the sidewalks. A lone street cleaner brushed garbage out of a muddy puddle. I walked gingerly over the broken sidewalks, looking down into basement windows to see hidden workshops—men laboring over sewing machines and steaming irons.

A fifteen-year old girl working in a nearby shop selling trinkets was giddy to meet her very first American. She followed me around with a silly grin on her face. “I work here every day,” she said. “People from the outside say they don’t like Gaziosmanpasa and wouldn’t want to live here. But I like it. It’s my home.”

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PRAY

- ◆ Pray that those caught up in the drug culture will recognize its inability to satisfy their deepest longings. Pray that they will come to know that the “fear of the LORD is a fountain of life.” Proverbs 14: 27, HCSB
- ◆ Pray that the Holy Spirit would open the hearts of unemployed men to the Truth as they struggle through this vulnerable time.
- ◆ Pray that district leadership will understand that man may look at the outward appearance, but the LORD sees the heart.





*"We have this kind of confidence
toward God through Christ...
For the letter kills, but the Spirit produces life."
—II Cor. 3:4-6, HCSB*

“**D**on't be deceived. Women in Istanbul are looking for a point to life and not finding it.”

My friend's counsel from just a few days earlier was ringing in my ears as I emerged from the Istanbul metro into the bustling center of Bağcılar.

I was fascinated by the diversity—women wearing tank tops and shorts dodging modestly covered women in Turkish headscarves. One man strode past me, accompanied by three women covered head to toe by black burkas. Just down the street, a woman carefully stepped out of her shoes and sat down on a platform behind the display window of a restaurant, where she skillfully began rolling dough for mantı, Turkish dumplings.

*Huyla** is a pharmacist who has owned a corner shop in Bağcılar for the past eight years. “If you want to see a picture of all of Turkey, come to Bağcılar. It is extremely crowded here, and there are people from all over—it's truly a mosaic.”

In Huyla's pharmacy people who would typically be wary of each other for political, religious or ethnic reasons stand side-by-side, waiting in line for help. Although she describes herself as a secular woman, Huyla makes a point to serve each customer with respect and professionalism.

Despite Bağcılar's diversity, there is an overarching air of Islamic conservatism. The local Great Union Party was hosting an event for devout Muslims. Four young women in long, dark jackets and brightly covered head scarves sat on a rickety city bench while the nearby speakers blasted an Enya-like song—“In The Name of Allah, The Beneficent, The Merciful” sounded repeatedly in Arabic. The four girls stood up, linked arms and strolled slowly away, chatting and laughing together.

Bağcılar is not a beautiful neighborhood—concrete is the overwhelming feature of its dreary buildings. Still, the population multiplies as cheap housing and living costs draw people not just from all over Turkey, but the world.

May the diversity of this district truly become a mosaic of grace, thousands of lives from all backgrounds brought into union with Christ Himself.

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Bağcılar

(Baaa-juh-lar)



GOOD TO KNOW

- ◆ Middle Eastern and Central Asian immigrants living in Bağcılar come to work construction and textiles or sell knock-off items on the streets of other districts. Many face employers who are dishonest about salary, hours and work permits.
- ◆ Bağcılar is home to an Olympics Sports Hall that has hosted a variety of sports events in its Olympic-standard facilities.
- ◆ There are many Kurdish families living in Bağcılar.

PRAY

- ◆ Pray that God would provide for the few believing immigrants who live in Bağcılar, and that their faith would be strong in the face of physical hardships and spiritual persecution.
- ◆ Kurdish families tend to be large. Pray that God would save entire families in Bağcılar, declaring them righteous through Christ's blood and reconciling them to Himself.

Küçükçekmece

(Kuchook-check-meh-jay)



Looking out the window from the highway metrobus, I spotted a stone bridge connecting a lagoon to a large, glistening lake. I knew I had arrived at Küçükçekmece. Just a short walk from Istanbul's busy E-5 Highway, Küçükçekmece's most notable landmark stands unmoved by the modernization that has sprung up around it.

The Ottoman period bridge was full of foot traffic as residents went about their business. An older lady wearing a simple white cotton headscarf leaned over the edge and tossed bread to the swooping gulls. Further down, a man reached into a large plastic bag and began hurling stale *simit** into the water, where they were quickly attacked by hungry birds.

A long boardwalk adorned by scattered willow trees stretched out from the bridge along the edge of the lake. As the young willows bended in the stiff lake breeze, only a few dog-walkers and runners braved the cold.

GOOD TO KNOW

- ◆ Many Kurdish families from eastern Turkey have come to Istanbul and settled in districts like Küçükçekmece, where they find cheap housing and a simple life.
- ◆ Shop names betray the Kurdish presence in Küçükçekmece by being named after cities in eastern Turkey—an Erzurum bookstore, Malatya dried food store, Adıyaman tobacco shop and a little store selling Antep pistachios.

PRAY

- ◆ Pray for the women who stay at home in Küçükçekmece, that they will be exposed to the Gospel and that God would open their hearts to His love in Christ.
- ◆ Pray for the men who are unfaithful to their wives to recognize their ultimate unfaithfulness to their Creator and fall at His feet in repentance.
- ◆ Pray that residents of Küçükçekmece would be created new according to God's likeness in righteousness and purity of the truth.



Just a few decades ago, Istanbul families would make a weekend trip outside the city to this waterfront to enjoy a peaceful day away from the city. Now this is the city.

Küçükçekmece has been inhabited since the Byzantine era when it was a distinct village with its own identity. Yet like so many of Istanbul's other districts, it has been swallowed up in Istanbul's suburbanization and incorporated into the city.

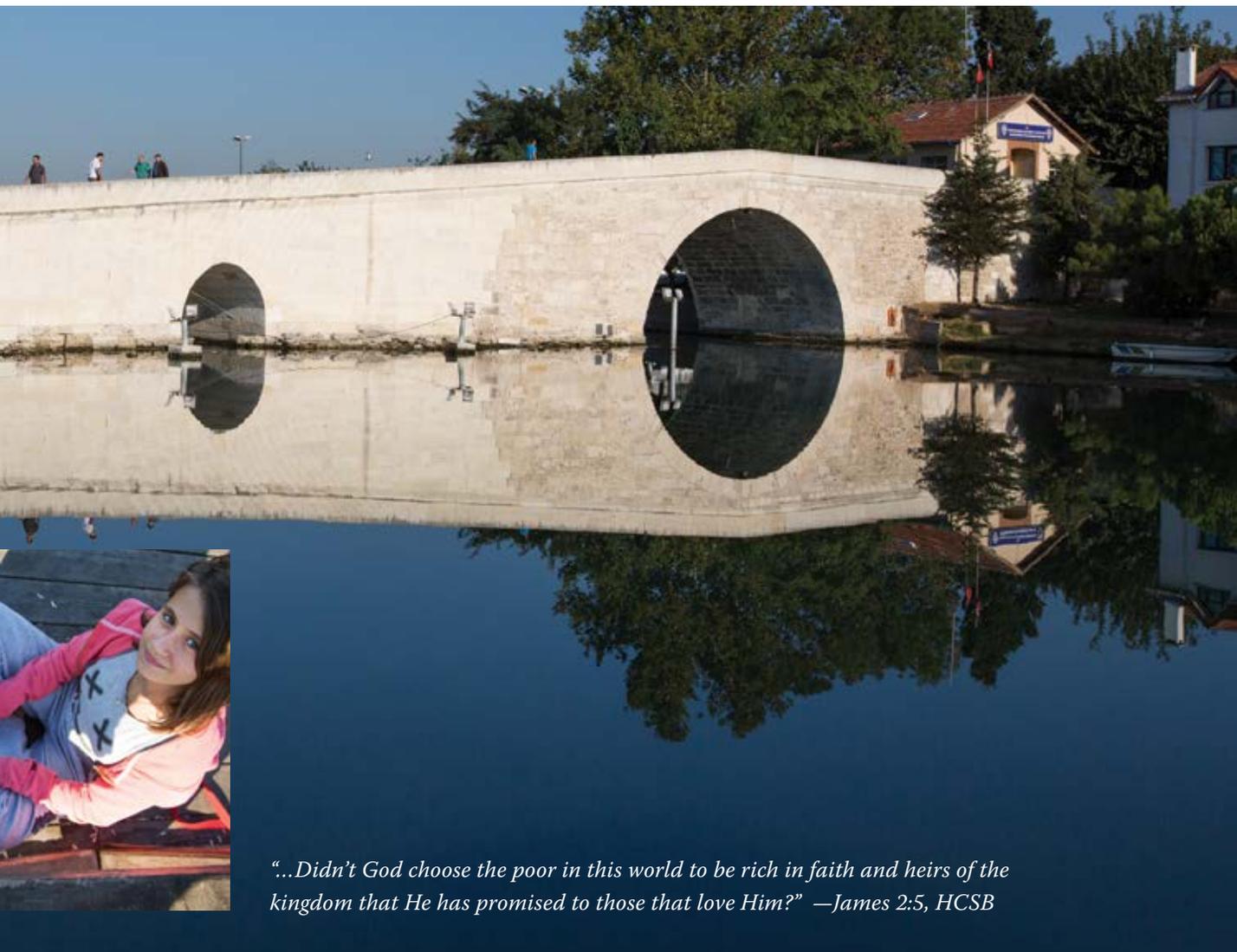
The streets of Küçükçekmece are narrow and poorly planned. Residents carry on with life, minding their own business in this low-income district. Men pass time sipping tea in the dark shadows of small local restaurants.

"There is nothing special here in Küçükçekmece," one young girl told me.

In a shopping area named *Cennet*, which means "heaven," I stopped at a café and settled at a table on the upper level with a view of the street below. Perched above the busy world, I looked down, recalling the girl's observation that there is "nothing special here."

In a sense, she seemed to be right. Two friends walked arm-in-arm. Another set of women hoisted a large pink bassinet and carried it carefully down the street. Yet does not God choose the poor in the world to be rich in faith? May God start something in this little neighborhood called "Heaven" that would ignite this district with a rich faith in Jesus as their Savior and Lord.

* A *simit* is a sesame-coated ring of bread



"...Didn't God choose the poor in this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom that He has promised to those that love Him?" —James 2:5, HCSB

Avcılar

(Ouhv-juh-lar)



GOOD TO KNOW

- ◆ When the Turkish Republic was established in the 1920s, there were 50 Greek families in the Avcılar district.
- ◆ As Turks moved into the region, the Greeks left and abandoned the only church in Avcılar, which was converted to a mosque.
- ◆ Avcılar was the only district in Istanbul that suffered casualties in the catastrophic earthquake in 1999.



In 1999 a massive earthquake struck western Turkey. That earthquake left Istanbul shaken, but largely unmarred—except for the district of Avcılar. Buildings collapsed and hundreds of people in Avcılar died, mostly because of badly constructed buildings.

Avcılar's earthquake scars are disguised by shiny, new apartment buildings and store fronts. The local municipality is taking great pains to enforce strict building codes to make Avcılar safer in future earthquakes.

In a visit to Avcılar with a young Turkish Christian couple, I was introduced to an aging couple attempting to patch the crumbling foundation of their home life. They are nominal Muslims with three grown kids and a troubled marriage. They turned to this young Turkish Christian couple for help.

The older couple moved to Avcılar from their village over thirty years ago when Avcılar was little more than a village. As they raised their family in the once quiet suburb, Avcılar was swallowed up by the urban sprawl of Istanbul. The non-stop noise of city life is mirrored in the home life of the couple.

"He never listens to me," the older woman complains. "If I say ten words, he hears two." The woman carries scars from her childhood in a village near the border of Georgia. She

was never allowed to express her opinion, but expected to simply cook, clean and raise children.

The foundation of their life together was built on the premise that women held little value. During a visit with the couple, the old man perked up when I paraphrased Ephesians 5:22, "Wives obey your husband."

Unsure of how they would react to a stranger like me referencing Christian scripture, I continued, adding that was only part of what the Bible had to say about being husband and wife. I then quoted Ephesians 5:25, "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her."

I said that Jesus set the example of being a servant leader. Husbands, while being leaders, should always look to serve their wives. The old woman said quietly, "Exactly," and her husband nodded in agreement.

The couple are trying to rebuild their lives, but they first must undertake the painful and humbling job of deconstructing the unstable foundation. They are doing it with the loving help of a young Christian couple who have built their lives on the rock of the Gospel.



PRAY

◆ Avcılar has a growing population of refugees. Pray that these families looking for a new life would hear and build their lives on the solid foundation of Jesus Christ.

◆ Pray for boldness for Christian couples to share their faith with people in the district of Avcılar.

Büyükçekmece

(Bu-yook-check-meh-jay)



The ride out to Büyükçekmece seemed interminable. Along the way Istanbul's urban sprawl gave way to trees, green spaces and finally a breathtaking view of the Marmara Sea.

The brightly colored summer vacation homes lining the shoreline offer an unobstructed view of the sea, but they sit in the shadow of a major highway. Just on the other side of the road glittering buildings and hotels encroach on what was recently a village.

Over the last decade, Büyükçekmece has morphed into a small city. Residents of Istanbul flocked to Büyükçekmece to escape the ills and stress of the mega city. As they moved here, so too did businesses looking to cater to them.

My mind wanders back to my first visit to Büyükçekmece years ago. I had made the long journey to have a meal and prayer meeting with a refugee family from Iran. Amir* was a dentist, who had made his own long journey to Christ. After leaving Islam to follow Jesus, Amir preached the Gospel to his friends and family. Before long, he and his wife were leading a house church in his hometown in Iran. His activities caught the interest of local authorities and eventually he had to flee Iran with his wife and small children.

Fueled by the Gospel, Amir became a spiritual leader in the Iranian refugee community in Istanbul. As we shared a meal in their apartment, I heard their stories of God's faithfulness to them in the most difficult times. Amir's wife cried as she told us about her concern for her family still in Iran. The couple also wept as they talked about how much they missed their home and expressed their worries about fellow believers still in the country.

I prayed with Amir and his family, moved by being in the company of genuine "heroes of the faith." As we got up to leave, Amir's wife handed me a small bag of saffron spice. Saffron is one of the most expensive spices and is used only on the most special occasions.

Her spontaneous act of generosity was a mark of the way she and Amir lived their lives. They shared the most priceless thing—their faith in Christ—with others. Their faith, like saffron bringing life to food, brought eternal life to countless Iranians and Turks.

*Names changed to protect identities.

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PRAY

◆ Amir and his family have moved to the west to begin a new life. There are still Iranian Christian refugees living in Büyükçekmece. Pray that God will raise up compassionate leaders among them to reach the district for Christ.



Şile

(She-lay)



The two-hour bus ride up to the Black Sea coast district of Şile was almost over. As high-rise apartment buildings faded from view and the landscape relaxed into hills and evergreen trees, I could hardly believe we were still in Istanbul.

When the bus, full of other city dwellers escaping from a hot summer city day to enjoy the Black Sea breezes and sandy beaches of Şile, emptied, I stepped out into the streets of Şile's town center. They were markedly different from many other city centers—bustling with activity, but relatively quiet. Advertisements announced an upcoming traditional olive oil wrestling competition.

GOOD TO KNOW

- ◆ Şile residents are proud of their lighthouse, which was commissioned by an Ottoman sultan in the 1800's.
- ◆ Ağva is a resort village in Şile, which attracts the wealthy with its summer homes. Because of the summer influx of Turks with summer homes in Ağva, Şile is noticeably more affluent in the warmer months.

“Şile is a pleasant place,” explained one local woman who has lived in Şile her whole life.

Şile is famous for its natural muslin-like cotton fabric, often carefully stitched with colorful designs and made into shirts, dresses and towels. I stepped into one of the many cloth shops and met *Meral*.* A grey-haired woman with sharp eyes looking out from a wrinkled face, she stood up from behind her sewing machine when I walked into her shop. “I live upstairs and I’ve worked in this shop for 35 years,” she said as she showed me piece after piece of intricately stitched clothing. “I just lost my husband. He’s gone. We used to work together.” Her voice trailed off; her gaze became distant.

Largely conservative in dress and behavior, the people of Şile welcome the more secular Turks who swell their town every summer to visit the beaches, shops and Şile's historical Ottoman lighthouse. After the summer rush, the local residents live quiet and largely rural lives. “There are no factories here,” a local shopkeeper explained. “There are a lot of fishermen in Şile.”

Surely these simple people—fishermen, farmers, shopkeepers and villagers—could influence all of Istanbul with the Gospel should God open their hearts. May this sleepy beach town become a hub of Gospel activity, radiating towards each visitor with the light and truth.

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PRAY

- ◆ Pray that God will bring true spiritual hunger among the residents of Şile. Pray for a spiritual desperation that will only be satisfied with the Truth of the Gospel.
- ◆ Pray that the Holy Spirit would bring new life to men and women in Şile and they would bear much fruit for God's glory.



Çekmeköy



(Check-mae-koy)

*“...Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul,
with all your mind, and with all your strength.”*

—Mark 12:29, HCSB

Not long ago, Çekmeköy was barely considered a part of Istanbul, but that has changed as upwardly mobile Turks have fled to the district as a respite from the cramped confines of more established Istanbul neighborhoods. Along with the construction of upscale apartment complexes with swimming pools and well-kept parks and playgrounds, there has been a proliferation of shopping centers and restaurants.

GOOD TO KNOW

- ◆ Çekmeköy became a district in 2009, seceding from a much larger district.
- ◆ From 1990 to 2012, the population of the area exploded from 13,000 to 188,290.

PRAY

- ◆ Pray for the men and women to realize that only a relationship with Jesus can bring true fulfillment and purpose.
- ◆ Pray for the believers in Çekmeköy that they will have God's word as a ready response to their neighbors.

A close friend I've known for 15 years lives in Çekmeköy. Harun* is a successful real estate agent. Over the years I've brought him a lot of business because he is honest and generous. Many of the clients I introduced him to were followers of Christ. In their earnest desire to share their faith with him, they gave Harun Turkish bibles, Jesus films and Christian books.

One day at lunch he confided in me, “Did you know that I have at least 20 bibles and 10 Jesus films DVD's?”

“No, I didn't know that,” I said.

“I have never read a single word or watched a single moment of those things. Is that wrong?”

“Well, what's in that book and that film is really important... it's life changing.”

“Why is it important to you, brother?” he asked me.

In response I was able to share my faith with him and our relationship went even deeper, but he soon put the Gospel on the back burner. Like so many businessmen who live in Çekmeköy, Harun is preoccupied by the pressures of work, financial worries and the political trends of Turkey. Harun has a loving family and is wealthy and respected in the business community. However, every time we meet, he expresses dissatisfaction with his life.

The residents of Çekmeköy are being tempted by materialism. Their hard fought path to success promises them happiness, but instead abandons them in a place of emptiness and despair.



*Names changed to protect identities. Photos do not represent the people in the stories.



Sancaktepe



(San-jak-tey-pay)

“**T**hey really are just village people,” *Elina** said. “Keep in mind, though, that I too have a foreigner’s perspective.”

Elina is Tatar, a Central Asian people group who live as a minority in Russia. After meeting her husband on the internet, she moved to Turkey to become his wife. She has called Sancaktepe home for almost two years.

Elina attends a daily women’s Quran class in Sancaktepe, where she is learning how to sound out the Quran in Arabic. “One day, I would like to learn Arabic,” she said. For now, she relies on a Tatar and Arabic side-by-side translation to understand the meaning of the Arabic words that she reads so proudly.

“There are a lot of Kurdish women in my class,” she said. “I was very surprised because many of them are uneducated—they do not know how to read and write in Turkish. They really are simple, village people.”

Just ten years ago, Sancaktepe’s large neighborhoods of Sarigazi and Yenidoğan were literally villages. It was only in 2008 that this area was formalized into a district of Istanbul. Elina’s apartment complex is one of many that has sprung up in the past few years. “A lot of the people in Sancaktepe have migrated from other cities in Turkey,” she explained. With an explosion of new residents, the infrastructure of this district has expanded with new parks, a public hospital, overpass and sports complex.

The call to prayer sounded from the nearby mosque. Elina excused herself to perform her ritual prayers on a green prayer rug thrown out on the floor by her bed. I gazed out the kitchen window. I thought of the thirty women in her Quran class. Perhaps some genuinely seek God’s favor; others no doubt simply long for friendship and community. May they find God’s favor and blessing in a way they least expect.

GOOD TO KNOW

- ◆ Damatris Palace, currently under excavation in Sancaktepe’s Samandira neighborhood, was built in the 6th century by Byzantine Emperors as a resort and hunting palace.
- ◆ Sancaktepe is home to four *cemevis*, places of worship for a minority Muslim sect called Alevi. Many Alevis have faced mistreatment for their unorthodox Muslim beliefs.
- ◆ The demography of Sancaktepe is young. Some believe that up to 80% of the population of Sancaktepe is under the age of 45.

PRAY

- ◆ There is a small group of believers in Sancaktepe that began gathering in 2012 to worship in Turkish. Pray that God would grow them in Biblical maturity and leadership. Pray that the community would recognize them as people of integrity and would be drawn to learn more about the Gospel.
- ◆ Pray that God would work among the Kurds in Sancaktepe and raise up a church that would use Kurmanji Kurdish as its primary language of teaching, worship and fellowship.

Ataşehir

(Ought-a-shay-here)



GOOD TO KNOW

- ◆ In early 2013, a group of believers began to gather in Ataşehir. A few neighborhood visitors attended their opening meeting. Within just a month, their meeting place was attacked.
- ◆ Currently under construction in Ataşehir, Metropol Istanbul is a series of building projects boasting a new financial world hub and one of the tallest towers in Europe.
- ◆ Most of the residents of Ataşehir have moved to the district in the last twenty years.

PRAY

- ◆ Pray that the people of Ataşehir will turn from the lure of wealth and success to the only true hope of the Gospel.
- ◆ Pray for the small group of believers that meet together for worship, that God would mature and strengthen them and that they would be a strong witness of Christ's love.
- ◆ Pray that God will save students studying at Yeditepe University and that a church would be planted on campus.

In a city of over 15 million it is unusual to be the only passenger on a city bus. Yet here I was, the sole passenger on a large bus that was winding its way into Istanbul's Ataşehir neighborhood. The bus slowed to a stop on a street flanked by flashy high-rise apartments. I stepped down to largely empty sidewalks, feeling oddly alone.

The air outside the Palladium shopping mall smelled like perfume. I knew Ataşehir is home to the affluent, but I wasn't prepared to feel so isolated. Underground parking garages swallowed cars pulling in from the street. Even the smaller, seemingly more accessible buildings were carefully protected with gates and security cameras.

Eventually wandering past these gated apartment buildings into a small park, I met an older lady sitting quietly on a bench. With greying hair falling out of a loose headscarf, *Havva** was anticipating the arrival of her thirty-year-old daughter that evening. "My daughter is a mathematics teacher," she told me. "She is returning from a summer in Italy."

Havva is the proud mother of a daughter who lives a privileged life as a single working woman with a university degree travelling the world. Most of the residents of Ataşehir are similar to Havva's daughter—professional and accomplished.

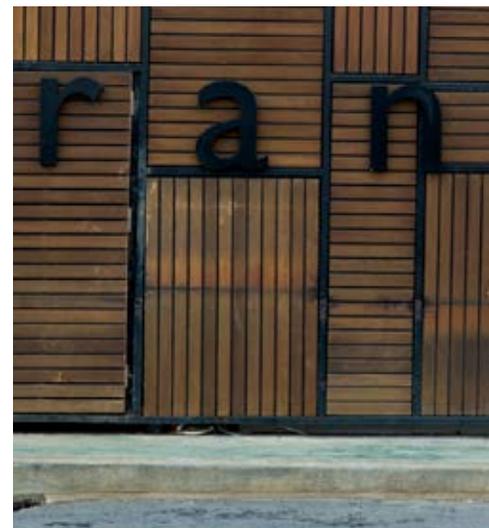
Havva described Ataşehir residents as successful, educated and "clean." Her choice of words surprised me. Surely she has no idea that Scripture measures cleanliness by a much higher standard than worldly success—the heart's relationship to a holy God.

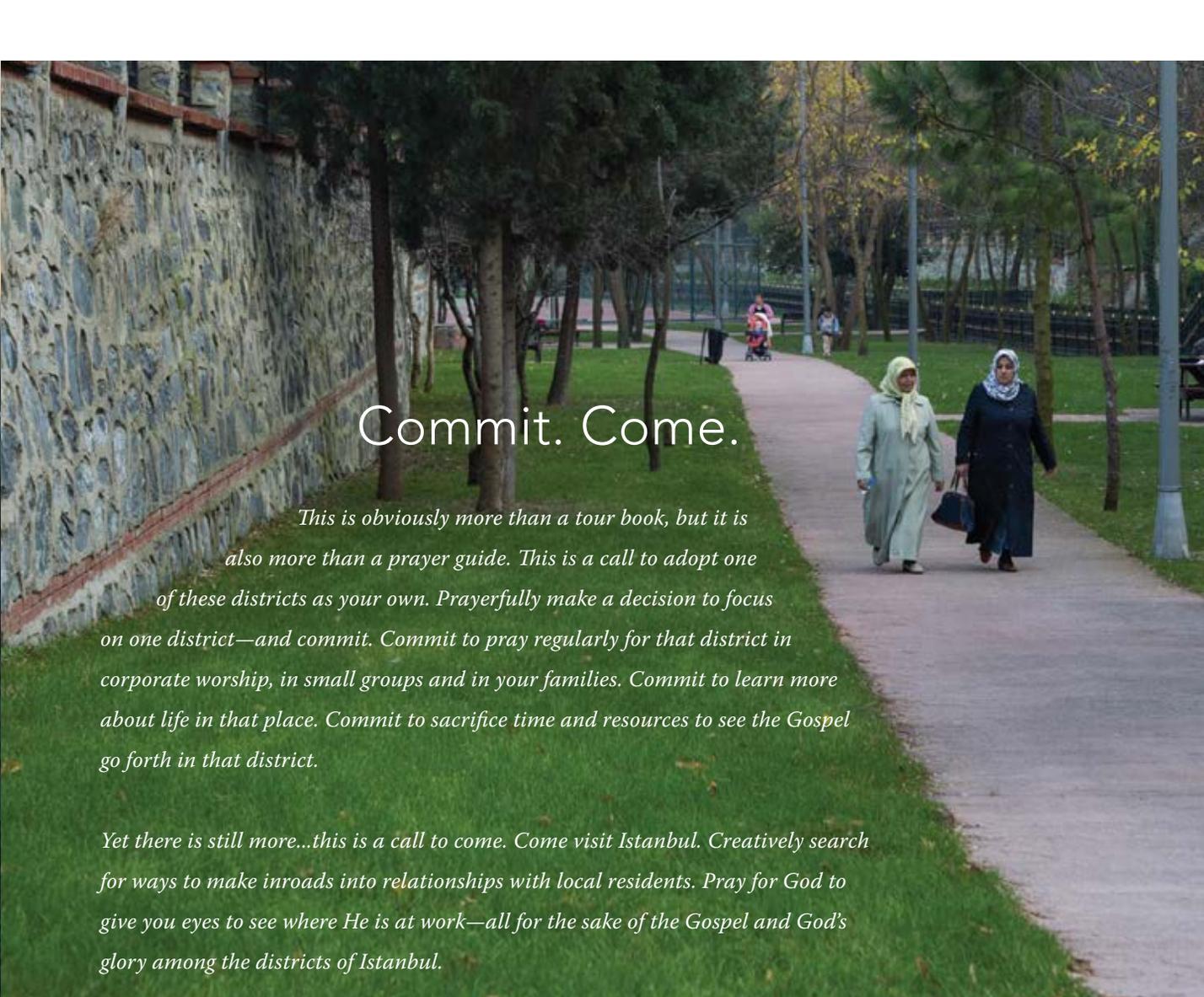
Many residents of this opulent district pursue idols of success, education and wealth. Their pursuits sparkle and flash, as if to mask the darkness of spiritual death. Yet there is a very small group of believers who recently started gathering together for worship. They believe and proclaim a Gospel of Christ's love that has the power to overcome the darkness. These few do not set their hope on wealth, but on God.

*Names changed to protect identities. Photos do not represent the people in the stories.



*“And who is the one who conquers the world
but the one who believes that
Jesus is the Son of God?”
—I John 5:5, HCSB*





Commit. Come.

This is obviously more than a tour book, but it is also more than a prayer guide. This is a call to adopt one of these districts as your own. Prayerfully make a decision to focus on one district—and commit. Commit to pray regularly for that district in corporate worship, in small groups and in your families. Commit to learn more about life in that place. Commit to sacrifice time and resources to see the Gospel go forth in that district.

Yet there is still more...this is a call to come. Come visit Istanbul. Creatively search for ways to make inroads into relationships with local residents. Pray for God to give you eyes to see where He is at work—all for the sake of the Gospel and God's glory among the districts of Istanbul.



“You are the light of the world.

A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.”

—Matthew 5:14–16

4 ways to connect with God's work in Istanbul

1

COMMIT

- ◆ Lead your church or small group in prayer for the districts of Istanbul.
- ◆ Observe the Day of Prayer for Turkey on April 18.
- ◆ Adopt one of the districts listed in this book. Pray faithfully for it until the church is established.

E-mail pray4turkeycities@gmail.com to adopt a district.

2

COME

- ◆ Come visit Istanbul and pray for the people you meet.
- ◆ Come to minister to local believers and to pray for them.
- ◆ Serve on short-term volunteer projects in the district that you have adopted.
- ◆ Replant your life—move to a district where there is no witness.
- ◆ For information on service opportunities: **imb.org**

3

ENGAGE AT HOME

- ◆ Research to find Unreached People Groups from Turkey living in and around your community. Invite them into your home and your church.
- ◆ Reach out to international students studying at local universities. They are rarely invited into Christian homes during their studies in America.
- ◆ Go to the Turks and Kurds in your state and befriend them, pray for them and love them.

4

GIVE

- ◆ Support ministry by giving to the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering and through the Cooperative Program.
- ◆ Learn more about how to give online or through a local Southern Baptist church at **imb.org**
imb.org/lmco



Pray for
ISTANBUL

Detach the bookmark at right and keep in your Bible as a reminder to pray for the districts of Istanbul.



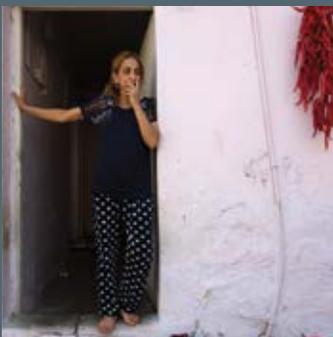
Sarıyer Eyüp Kağıthane Gaziosmanpaşa Bağcılar Küçükçekmece Avcılar Büyükçekmece Şile Çekmeköy Sancaktepe Ataşehir

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Pray for
ISTANBUL

PEOPLES

Turks Kurds Azeri Crimean Tatar Kazakh Kumyk Laz Hemşin Pomak Tatar Turkish Gypsy Northern Zaza Southern Zaza Pontic Greek



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