

# Open *Doors*

MAGAZINE

|

July 2019



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facing danger”**

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church in India

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£14 including postage/ Discounts for five or more copies. The pack cost includes a donation to send a Bible to a persecuted Christian

Open Doors is an international ministry serving persecuted Christians and churches worldwide.

Open Doors supplies Bibles, leadership training, literacy programmes, livelihood support and advocacy services. We also mobilise the church in the UK and Ireland to serve Christians living under religious persecution.

If you have any questions about the work of Open Doors, or would like to reprint any of the articles in this magazine, please do get in touch.

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**Cover image:** Mohan and his family were forced to leave their village when they became Christians. Open Doors partners have helped them survive by providing food, goats for their farm and ongoing spiritual encouragement.

**Letter from Henrietta**

# Influence

*"By this, everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."* John 13:35

At boarding school, I was taken to task by someone in my dorm who tearfully accused me of bullying her (she was right and I was mortified). Forty-five years on, I am still horrified by stories of school-ground bullying – made worse by being filmed and posted on social media. These films often show the 'innocent bystanders' looking unconcerned and doing nothing to intervene. But how often do we stand by and do nothing when we see others being victimised – when they have done absolutely nothing wrong?

The Hindu extremist group the RSS has threatened to wipe out non-Hindus in India by 2021, and the landslide victory of the Hindu nationalist party, the BJP, in recent elections only makes that more likely. The level of hatred directed against our Christian brothers and sisters in India is really distressing, particularly the attacks on pastors' wives and young daughters. Brothers in India speak of 'a whole network of Hindu terrorists who are well-trained. They used to come with sticks. Now they come with sharp weapons and guns'.

In effect, Hindu extremists in India are promoting a form of religious cleansing. The vicious attacks on Christians – and indeed Muslims – are simply wrong. Everyone should be free to follow the faith of their choice and to change their religion if they so wish. There have been times in the not-so-distant past when ethnic or religious people groups have been decimated, while the world just passed by on the other side. Today, we look back in horror at such events and find it difficult to believe that nobody intervened. Yet this could be true for India's Christians. The survival of the church is at stake.

Open Doors believes the witness of the church is key to India flourishing and we want to see a strong missional church rising by 2022, so we are doubling our support for local church partners over two years. And it's making an impact, with committed church leadership, confident women, capable youth, courageous children, resilient families – praise God! For all who have already given and prayed to support this, thank you, and please keep going. If not, now is the time to join in. The Foreign Office review into UK support for persecuted Christians worldwide (see p.5) has only been made possible through the influence of Open Doors supporters, so please keep praying. You can help us seize this pivotal moment to ensure our persecuted family are seen and heard.



*Henrietta*

Henrietta Blyth  
CEO, Open Doors UK&I

## ERITREA

### Mass arrests of Christians

Please pray for believers in Eritrea, where a series of mass arrests has rocked the underground church.

In one week in May, 141 Christians – 104 women, 23 men and 14 children – were arrested by security agents in the Mai Temenai area northeast of the capital, Asmara. On 17 May a further 31 Christians were arrested in the south of the city, and a further 30 members of Pentecostal churches a few weeks later.

Eritrea is number 7 on the Open Doors World Watch List. Only three denominations are officially recognised – and even these are rigorously monitored. Any other Christian gathering is considered illegal. Homes are raided and worshippers arrested. Please pray that believers will stand strong, and that they would know the presence of the Lord in a powerful way.

## ETHIOPIA

### The words that would not let Berhane go

Like the rest of her family, Berhane\* followed 'Waaqefannaa' – a traditional Ethiopian religion.

But she was often ill, with constant headaches. During one illness she was at her uncle's house. As if the headache wasn't bad enough, there was constant singing from the Christians in the house next door. Their words got stuck in her head:

*What you have done for me!  
Oh what you have done for me!  
What can I do in return for the goodness that you have done for me... what can I give back to you...*

The words stayed with her. And one day during worship, she started joining in with the words of the hymn!

#### COURAGE AND EXILE

Berhane gave her life to Christ. She was thrown out of her home, but she became



a pioneering, courageous evangelist.

"I go places where no one else dares to go," she says. "Even church ministers do not dare to go there and start up work... But God is my shepherd. He is the one walking with me."

Her courage has paid off and Berhane has helped plant nine churches. "God has performed a miracle, and there is a big church now." And her mother has become a Christian, along with around 100 members of her extended family!

Read more of Berhane's story at [www.opendoorsuk.org/ethiopia](http://www.opendoorsuk.org/ethiopia)

## DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO

### Open Doors calls for urgent prayer as violence escalates

Attacks against Christians in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) continued unabated in the first five months of 2019.

A group called the Islamic Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) launched a series of attacks on the mostly Christian population in the north-east. Open Doors sources report over 20 attacks, resulting in around 90 deaths. At least 131 people have been kidnapped, and an astonishing

12,000 people have been displaced and are now living in IDP camps, schools or with other families. At least six churches have been burned down and two church-run clinics and health centres have been destroyed.

The ADF has allied itself to the so-called Islamic State and announced that it aims to establish a caliphate and that it is deliberately targeting Christians, churches and church

institutions such as hospitals, schools and businesses.

Open Doors' team leader in the DRC, Pierre\*, says, "We need to pray more than before because the situation is drastically declining."

Open Doors has emergency relief ready to go, but the work has been frustrated by a local outbreak of Ebola, which is made even harder to control due to the insecurity.

## NIGERIA

### Esther's letter from the Foreign Secretary



Many of you wrote to Esther whose story was featured in our March magazine. Open Doors worker Hanna\* visited her recently to deliver a huge bag full of letters and cards. And among them was a letter from an unexpected source – UK Foreign Secretary Jeremy Hunt.

"How does he know me?" Esther asked.

"Christians all over the world have heard your story and are concerned about you," explained Hanna. "They are praying with you."

#### A LONG JOURNEY

Esther spent three years as a captive of Boko Haram in Nigeria, and was forcibly married to one of her captors. Eventually, heavily pregnant, she escaped. But at home, she was branded a 'Boko Haram woman', while her little daughter Rebecca was called 'Baby Boko'.

Open Doors trauma care workers have been journeying alongside Esther, helping her to see God's love for her, and restoring her dignity.

"Thank you everyone who has taken the time to write to Esther – your encouragement is strengthening her and filling her with hope," says Hanna. "It is helping her to realise that she is not alone!"

You can watch a video of Esther reading the letter at [www.opendoorsuk.org/nigeria](http://www.opendoorsuk.org/nigeria) Find out what the Foreign Secretary wrote to her, and what she wrote in reply!



### Foreign Office Review – Important Update

The findings of the Foreign Office Review into UK support for persecuted Christians worldwide are due to be released in July.

It is thanks to your support that this important review has taken place. Without your tireless efforts to raise the profile of the persecuted church in parliament, the government would never have felt the pressure to dig into this issue. It really is unprecedented that a review on the persecuted church

was ever commissioned.

Throughout the review process, Open Doors has been able to provide detailed evidence and challenging recommendations to the review team. Please pray that these recommendations would be followed up by the government.

Visit the Open Doors website from the end of June for updates on the review's findings and look out for details of what you can do to keep raising this issue.

For the latest news and stories of courageous faith visit [www.opendoorsuk.org](http://www.opendoorsuk.org)

# WHY IS THIS MAN CONSIDERED A THREAT TO INDIA?

**Abishek trusts in Jesus. That makes him a threat, according to the Hindu extremist movement the RSS. They have publically stated their aim to wipe out non-Hindu religions in India by 2021. It may sound impossible: there are 60 million Christians in India. But this threat is far from empty. The RSS has close ties to India's re-elected BJP government and is willing to use extreme violence to achieve its goal. If we don't strengthen the church now, many people may be lost forever.**

"We face danger from Hindu extremists," says Abishek. "They think that Christianity is not the religion of India – they think it is a foreign religion. They want to completely eliminate this religion, this people, from India. That's why they target us when we go to the field and help the believers."

You may remember sisters Meena\* and Sunita\*, whose stories we shared in 2016. They were forced from their homes and beaten with bamboo sticks when they left their Hindu faith to follow Jesus. Abishek, a local Open Doors partner who provides emergency relief to victims of violent attacks, helped

\*Name changed for security reasons





“I went to that family and I cried with them, I encouraged them, I comforted them from the Word of God.”

the sisters, as he feels called to serve his brothers and sisters as they face increasing persecution. It's a risky calling to follow, in a climate where research shows that more and more Christians are being targeted for their faith in Jesus. India has risen dramatically up the Open Doors World Watch List, from number 21 in 2015 to number 10 in 2019, because of the alarming increase in violent attacks on Christians. It is becoming difficult to meet for prayer and worship, to be baptised or even to admit to conversion from another religion.

“We are always facing danger,” says Abishek. “Danger from political leaders; danger from the Hindu extremists;

danger from the Muslim extremists. People keep their eyes on us. When they attack one believer in a village, then they look to see who is supporting this person. And when they see us, they ask a lot of questions: ‘Why are you helping? Who are you?’”

### **HEINOUS KILLING**

When Abishek hears of a family who have suffered persecution, he visits to encourage them and to provide practical support and legal assistance. One family that Abishek helped had lost their father, the breadwinner of the house.

“He was a very good man,” says Abishek. “He was not a

pastor, but he was a strong believer. He used to even distribute the Bibles. And he used to help the new believers and the poor believers in that area.”

This man came to the attention of the Naxalites, a militant Maoist group in the area. Extremist Hindus in remote areas co-ordinate with the Naxalites because the group is armed. Naxalites are known to kill Christians if instigated or bribed.

“At 4am, early in the morning, the Naxalites came from the jungle and took this man from his own home. They took him to the jungle, hung him from a tree and beat him. When he was

completely senseless, they shot him. It was terrible to see. Such a heinous killing, so brutal. They killed this man of God.”

As the family grieved for their father, their own lives were still at risk. The Naxalites threatened to kill the family - his wife Jenita\* and three young children aged just five, three and 18 months - if they went to the police to report what had happened.

Thanks to your support and prayers, Abishek was able to help the family move elsewhere to a safer home. He provided them with food and will continue to support them through life. When the children reach school age, he will be able to provide their school fees. This is made possible by supporters like you.

He was also able to bring the family comfort and encouragement, and the knowledge that they're not alone or forgotten. He says, “I went to that family and I cried with them, I encouraged them, I comforted them from the Word of God. Jenita was telling me, ‘Thank you so much. Nobody has come like that and comforted us.’”



### **RAPID RESPONSE**

Abishek often provides a rapid response to emergencies like this, when Christians are attacked for their faith. He says, “If somebody is struggling, or maybe somebody has been persecuted or attacked, my first job is to collect information, maybe from local leaders, maybe from local pastors. As soon as we get the information, if that place isn't too sensitive, then we go to the place directly and we meet with the believers.”

“We help them if their house is burnt, if their house is attacked physically. We provide them with some help to really repair that house. If they have been beaten up then we take them to hospital and we provide them with good treatment. If they have been expelled from their village or from their home then we give them shelter by

taking them into another village so they can be safe there.”

Abishek also says the comfort and care that he and other Open Doors partners are able to bring by being with persecuted believers in person is really vital. “We encourage them; we comfort them; we stand with them shoulder to shoulder and we share their sorrows.”

Rapid Response teams like Abishek's can provide emergency help and support straight after an attack of persecution. Attacks are increasing: in the first three months of 2018, more instances of religious persecution were recorded than throughout the whole of 2014 or 2015. In response, Open Doors is aiming to double its impact through local partners, reaching the most vulnerable Christians in every corner of India with persecution survival training, practical support and legal assistance.

### **WE'RE INDIANS TOO**

**A report into escalating human rights violations against India's religious minorities**

India entered the top 10 of the Open Doors World Watch List for the first time this year, as violent attacks against Christians continued to rise.

Our research team has drilled down into what these attacks look like and where they are taking place to produce the *We're Indians Too* report, which provides insight into what is happening, where it is happening and the cause of this escalation.

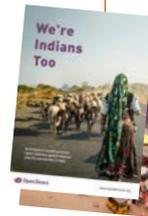
The report shows that

violence against Christians is increasing. The toxic narrative that ‘if you're not Hindu, you're not Indian’ has taken hold and legitimises these attacks. Worryingly, some of the states where the Christian population is smallest is where the most attacks are taking place. Anti-conversion laws are confusing and are leading some in India to question whether any Christian activity in the country is legal.

The report urges the UK government to pursue international monitoring of violence against religious minorities in India, changes

to anti-conversion laws and increased support for Dalit Christians who are especially vulnerable.

We've already seen impact! After years of debate, we're really pleased that the UK government has agreed to raise the plight of India's Christians! This ground breaking report is essential reading for all Christians. Equip yourself today. Go online at [www.opendoorsuk.org/indianstoo](http://www.opendoorsuk.org/indianstoo) to download a copy. Then, share its findings in your church.



## **“THEY THINK THAT INDIA IS A COUNTRY FOR HINDUS”**

Abishek explains that, while Christianity came to India in the first or second century, Hinduism has been in India even longer than that. “Therefore, they are inclined to think that India is a country for Hindus.”

But he believes this is wrong. “In our constitution it is plainly written that India is a democratic country, it is secular. There is no religion that can oppress another religion. All religions have equal rights and authority to live and practise their faith. No single religion can claim that this country belongs to them.”

He also explains that many high caste Hindus do not like Christianity because it threatens the power they have over lower caste Hindus. “They themselves do not like Christians and they also do not like it when the low caste Hindus turn to Christianity, because the high castes always dominate the low castes. But when the low caste Hindus become Christians, they do not give reverence to the high caste Hindus as they were previously. The high castes are afraid of losing their respect and dignity in society.”

The landslide victory of the Hindu nationalist party, the BJP,

in India’s recent elections only serves to validate the hatred and violence behind attacks on Christians and all who worship a non-Hindu God.

The time has come to strengthen the church in India to withstand persecution, before it is lost forever. Open Doors’ local partners can be your hands and feet on the ground, offering urgent relief and legal aid, persecution survival seminars, distributing Bibles and providing vocational skills training so persecuted Christians can provide for themselves and their families.

**“If you were not bountifully extending your hands, ministering to the persecuted church would not be possible”**

## **“WE LOVE YOU AND WE THANK YOU”**

India’s Christians may be under great threat, yet Abishek has a big vision for his country. He says, “We want to see our country India being completely Christ-centred. We want to see the name of Christ being lifted

up everywhere. We want to see all our leaders reaching every corner of our country to spread the gospel – to see people being transformed. To see people everywhere lifting up their hands and worshipping the Lord. People should feel that this country is a blessed country. As it is written in the Bible, ‘Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord’ (Psalm 33:12). So, we want to see our nation as a whole worshipping the Lord Jesus Christ as our God.”

He has a message for those who make it possible for him to support persecuted believers in India: “I would like to say directly that if you were not bountifully extending your hands, ministering to the persecuted church would not be possible in India. We are really standing on behalf of you and reaching out to the people of India. It’s all because of you and we do thank you from down deep in our heart for your support and for your generosity. I would like to say that we love you, and we thank you so much.”

**You can watch a video of Abishek sharing more of his inspiring story at [www.opendoorsuk.org/india](http://www.opendoorsuk.org/india)**

\*Name changed for security reasons



## **ABISHEK’S PRAYER FOR YOU**

*Dear Lord, we praise You for all the goodness that we receive from Your good hand. We thank You and praise You for Your people, those who live abroad and those who live in India, those who generously stretch forth their hands and give to us. We do pray that you would kindly please help them,*

*strengthen them, bless them bountifully. Fill their resources and granary in the coming days that they will be able to support your people more and more.*

*Father God, we pray for their children and their family members, that whatever their heart’s desire is, Lord, You*

*fulfil their heart’s desire, You fulfil their dreams. We thank You, Lord Jesus, we lift them up into Your mighty hand. Bless them abundantly, make them great. Help them, Father God, that they will excel more and more in all their ways. Thank you, Lord, for hearing us. In Jesus’ name we pray.*

## **Strengthen the faith of Christians in India**

### **PLEASE PRAY**

India needs prayer now more than ever. You can pray regularly with Christians in India using the bi-monthly prayer diary and our monthly email. To sign up for our monthly email go to [www.opendoorsuk.org/email](http://www.opendoorsuk.org/email)

### **PLEASE GIVE**

**Every £30** could equip two Rapid Response teams for a month as they bring emergency aid to victims of violence.

**Every £50** could provide persecution survival training and materials for two church leaders, equipping them with a biblical response to persecution and helping them to understand their legal rights.

If you haven’t already, could you consider setting up a regular gift? By giving monthly, you can help our local partners to be there for our church family for the long-term, and to respond

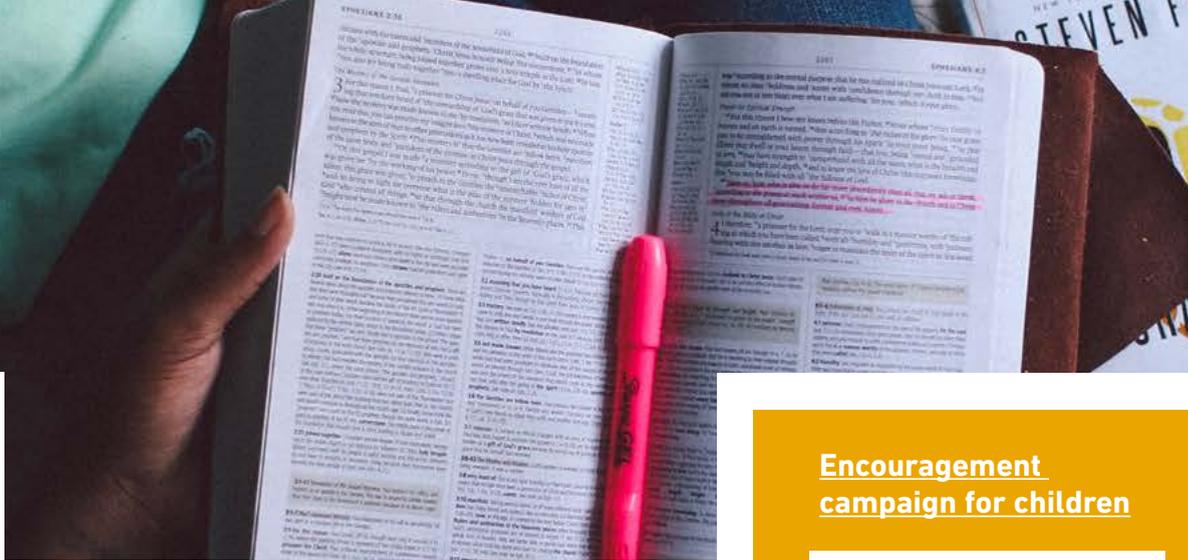
immediately when there’s an emergency. To set up a regular gift, use the response form, visit [www.opendoorsuk.org](http://www.opendoorsuk.org) or call **01993 460015**.

### **PLEASE ENCOURAGE**

Abishek risks his life to encourage persecuted believers in India: please write to encourage him. Turn to page 12 to send your message of encouragement to Open Doors partners in India.



# Stand by me



## Encouragement campaign for adults

If you saw your friend being threatened by a bully, wouldn't you want them to know you were on their side? With this step-by-step guide to our digital encouragement campaign, you can encourage persecuted Christians in India and let them know they're in your prayers.

When life is hard, you need encouragement. You need to know that you're not alone. It's true for every Christian, but it's especially true for persecuted Christians, as Abishek's story (pp.6-10) shows. That's why Open Doors has launched a digital encouragement campaign so that believers in India can be strengthened in their faith by their Christian family around the world.

You can write to Abishek and other Open Doors partners to encourage them. In addition, on our website you can find the stories of other believers. For safety reasons, we have to protect the identity of the Christians who will receive your messages, so we can't give you specific names. But we will make sure they go to those who are most in need of encouragement.

It's amazing to be able to connect with other believers in this way, and there are lots of ways to do it – photos, video, audio – but if you're not sure where to start, here's a simple step-by-step guide.

### STEP ONE

Read the article about Abishek on p6 – or go to our website – and notice how it makes you feel. What would you say if you were to meet Abishek, or one of the Christians he serves? Perhaps you can imagine yourself talking to a mother, a father, a teenager, a child, a pastor, or an Open Doors partner.

### STEP TWO

Remember a time when you were sad or worried. What helped you get through it? How did God bring encouragement to you? Maybe there's a Bible verse or story that's significant for you.

### STEP THREE

Write a short message, addressing your letter to 'Dear brother' or 'Dear sister' using the guidelines below. You can attach a photo, if you like, or even a short video or voice recording. Feel free to be creative, but please DON'T mention Open Doors in any messages, send money or make offers of help or mention anything to do with

the news, religion, politics or government of India.

Please consult the additional guidelines on our website – all of which are important. Remember, this is a **digital** campaign, so you can't send a physical letter or card. Instead, please go to [www.opendoorsuk.org/write](http://www.opendoorsuk.org/write) and email your message to: [messages@india@opendoorsuk.org](mailto:messages@india@opendoorsuk.org)

Here is an example message for inspiration:

*Dear brother,*

*My name is Ray and I work in a hospital. When I was 14, I decided to follow Jesus and I've never looked back. I just wanted to share this word from Psalm 84:5 'Blessed are those whose strength is in you'. I pray that the Lord will turn your desert into a place of springs (v6). Although I sometimes feel that He has forgotten me, the Bible assures me it's not true. Jesus is with us. The story of His birth, life, death and resurrection gives us that certain hope.*

## Encouragement campaign for children

Imagine you are 10 years old. You live in East India with your parents, two brothers and a sister. You learned about Jesus through some of your friends who then took you to church. There, you were overwhelmed by the love they showed you.

For a while, no one in your family minded you going to church where you enjoyed hearing stories about people like David and Goliath and the Good Samaritan but, in the last few months, they have begun to object. Perhaps it was because your neighbours noticed what was going on? They warned your parents that if they didn't stop you going to church, you would become a Christian.

You continued attending – but in secret. One day, your mother found out – so she told you off and beat you. This happened several times. Now you are much more careful and only go to church occasionally.

**This is the real story of a boy in India who managed to attend a children's seminar organised by Open Doors partners. There he told them: "Christianity is considered a detestable religion in our village."**



If you'd like to involve children in sending messages to Christians in India, order our new resource POST IT! It gives you all you need to know for the India digital encouragement campaign, as well as how to send messages to Christian children in Colombia and Central Asia.

All campaigns in POST IT! run until 31 December 2019. Order this resource now by going online, or phoning the Inspire team on 01993 460015 – and get posting!

**"I think your resources are so excellent and am recommending them to every Sunday School teacher I meet – especially the lesson plans."**  
– Lesley, Strathaven

For more information on how to send messages of encouragement to persecuted Christians, go to [www.opendoorsuk.org/write](http://www.opendoorsuk.org/write)

# Conquering fear with love

## How your support is strengthening our Christian family in Sri Lanka

Your prayers and gifts are bringing comfort and hope to Christians bereaved and injured in Easter Sunday's bomb attacks in Sri Lanka. With your help, Open Doors teams are working to provide around 250 families with long-term trauma care, counselling and livelihood support.

The children and teachers of Zion Church's Sunday school in Batticaloa were on their way back to the main Easter Sunday service when a bomb went off, killing 29 people – 14 of them children. It was one of six attacks that took place that day: three on churches, three on hotels.

Open Doors has been present in the region for many

years, so our team set off straight away to meet with pastors of the affected churches to assess their immediate needs. In the days following the attack, they attended funerals and visited bereaved families to offer comfort and support. "When we were with them, there was nothing else to do but cry and pray," said team leader, Tala\*. "There is so much pain still, but God grieves with them, and He is at work."

Among those who lost their lives at Zion Church were 13-year-old Jackson and his Sunday school teacher and aunt, Verlini. Her husband Ranjith also died, leaving behind two young children. Open Doors workers, including Tala, were able to visit

Jackson's father, Verl - who was also Verlini's brother.

"My son, Jackson, and my sister died on the spot," said Verl. "Jackson was team captain of his basketball team. He's my only son.

"Losing someone hurts," he continued. "They are special people. They were not killed. They were sown. They are like seeds. And the blood of the martyrs are the seeds of the church."

Despite the heartache and loss, Verl's faith in God's goodness is unshaken. "God is good," he said. "God is great. My foundation is Jesus Christ. I'm zero. Jesus is everything.

"My son was mine for 13 years, but he is His forever."



Pastor Kumaran's son Malkiya also died. "He loved the Lord and cared so much for others."



Open Doors' network immediately raised prayer for victims of the Easter attacks

### 'MORE THAN CONQUERORS'

Pastor Kumaran, the assistant pastor at Zion Church, also lost his teenage son in the attack. Malkiya was just 12 years old.

Tala recalls how he shared his devastating loss: "Tearfully, he said to us: 'I'm not asking God why, I'm only asking how I can pass through this, and how long.' Nevertheless, the service at Zion Church struck a hopeful note with a reading of Romans 8:35-39: 'Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? ... No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons... nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.'"

### COURAGEOUS FAITH

Although churches were advised to cancel services the Sunday following the bombing, some went ahead. A co-worker who visited one service said the church leader was only expecting 10 people, but was

thrilled that 20-25 attended - with several new believers, too!

"I was touched by the courageous faith of this small congregation," he said, "The bombings, though horrific, have made a distinction between those who shrink back and those who stay on and persevere. It's showing me that we're on the right track in prioritising the strengthening of the Christian family in Sri Lanka."

believers to share support and encouragement. Persecution survival seminars are planned for churches in the three affected areas, and families who have lost their breadwinner are receiving livelihood support and help with education.

### 'PRAY FOR LOVE TO CONQUER FEAR'

Please continue to pray for God's healing for His people, and the entire nation of Sri Lanka. Verl is but one of hundreds of people whose lives have changed forever - please pray for him and his family. Pray also for Pastor Kumaran and all who've lost children or relatives, that they would find strength in the Lord at this time.

Tala says: "Please pray, too, for peace in the country. It is so easy for hatred to be sown at this time. The Christians are scared, but so are the Hindus, Buddhists and Muslims. The Muslims right now are in fear of retaliation - some have been driven out of their homes. Pray for love to conquer fear among different communities in this country."

\*Name changed for security reasons



Jackson (CENTRE), his aunt Verlini (LEFT) and uncle Ranjith (RIGHT) were all killed in the bomb attack on their church



Jackson's father Verl (RIGHT) told the team: "Jesus is everything. My son was mine for 13 years, but he is His forever."

# Meet your extraordinary family from North Korea, Nigeria and Syria



Image used for illustrative purposes

## STANDING STRONG Open Doors Celebration 2019

**Do you remember the first time you held a Bible? For Kim Sang-Hwa\* from North Korea, it's something she'll never forget.**

"I come from a Christian family, although for a long time I wasn't even aware my parents were believers," she says. "In our house was a hidden closet. When I was 12, I accidentally

found a Bible. I don't know why, but I started to feel inside the cabinet with my hand. I felt a book and pulled it out, opened it and began to read."

Kim read the first few verses of Genesis. "I began to shiver and dropped the book. I was so scared. My discovery could cost me my life. I was afraid to

touch the Bible, but I couldn't just leave it there. I closed my eyes, picked up the book and put it back. I weighed my options. Should I tell my teacher? Should I visit the local security official? For 15 days I couldn't think about anything else. I knew it was my duty to report this illegal book. But it was my family that was involved. And I also had all these questions: 'Who, or what, is this God?'

Eventually Kim could no longer keep this secret to herself, and so she told her parents that she'd found the Bible. They were surprised, but supportive, and answered some of the questions she had.

"My mother taught me to memorise Bible verses and the Apostolic Creed and also explained the full gospel to me. My grandfather showed me how to pray. 'It is just talking to God. Nothing more, nothing less,' he said. I also read the

Bible for myself. But I realised it was dangerous. My father always emphasised not to share anything with anyone else. Then he would start to pray in whispers, almost inaudible. 'Father, help the North Korean people to seek Your Kingdom first.'"

Kim and her family

witnessed God's protection again and again. "Once there was a random house check and it seemed this man also knew we were Christians. But this official was a really great guy and really nice. He never gave us away. All this strengthened my father's faith in God. He always experienced so much peace. I

really think most believers in North Korea experience more peace and trust God more than believers in free countries."

After Kim got married, she and her husband slowly began to grow discontented with life in North Korea – and so they made their escape into China...

\*name changed for security reasons

## WANT TO HEAR MORE? BOOK FOR STANDING STRONG TODAY!

You can hear Kim tell the rest of her incredible story at Standing Strong! Join us for a time of worship, prayer, inspiration and challenge from the persecuted church and hear how your support is making a difference in their lives. Our guest speakers from North Korea, Nigeria and Syria will leave you with a fresh understanding of how God is at work in some of the darkest places to be a Christian around the world.

This year we are excited to announce that there are events taking place across England, Wales, Scotland and Ireland – places are filling up fast, so book today! You can also save £5 per ticket\*\* when you book before 31 July.

### GLASGOW

9 November – 10am-4pm  
Findlay Memorial Church  
Early bird adult ticket - £10 (after 31 July this will be £15)

### IRELAND

12, 13 and 14 November – 7.30pm-9.30pm  
Donegal Presbyterian Church, The Jethro Centre, Lurgan and Union Road Presbyterian Church, Magherafelt  
Tickets will be £5 (\*\*no early bird pricing)

### WALES

12, 13 and 14 November – 7.30pm-9.00pm  
St Asaph Cathedral, Vine Christian Centre, Bridgend, and Newtown Evangelical Church  
Tickets will be £5 (\*\*no early bird pricing)

### BIRMINGHAM

16 November 2019 – 10am-4pm  
Bethel Convention Centre, West Bromwich  
Early bird adult ticket - £10 (after 31 July this will be £15)  
£5 per child at Birmingham

### CHILDREN'S PROGRAMME

Our children's programme for ages 5-11 is back at Birmingham this year! It promises to be jam-packed with age-appropriate activities to engage your children with the stories – and people – of the persecuted church. Spaces are limited, so book today!



**"The event was amazing; I came away heartbroken but inspired. I think all Christians need to attend something like this."**

STANDING STRONG 2018 DELEGATE

**SAVE £5 PER TICKET BEFORE 31 JULY!**

For more details and to make your booking, go to [www.opendoorsuk.org](http://www.opendoorsuk.org).



Kim Sang-Hwa discovered her family's secret Bible and couldn't resist opening it...

# TEARS OF GOLD

See how God is turning grief to joy for the women of the persecuted church using this powerful new church resource



The women proudly display the self-portraits they painted at the trauma care workshop

Ladi had only returned to her village in Nigeria because it was a school holiday.

She never made it back to



school. She was abducted by Boko Haram extremists and forced to marry a Boko Haram soldier.

"I became pregnant and gave birth to my son, Emmanuel," she recalls. "From there I decided that it was time for me to escape. One night, I took to my heels and kept running."

Sadly, Ladi's experience is not unusual. In sub-Saharan Africa, Islamic militants are using sexual violence as a weapon against Christian women, stripping them of their security, identity and self-worth.

Ladi is just one of seven Nigerian women and girls featured in our new church

resource, *Tears of Gold*. The pack features portraits of these women, painted by UK artist Hannah Rose Thomas, and self-portraits painted by the women during trauma care workshops run by Open Doors partners (ABOVE).

For Ladi, this was life-changing. "Before, I could not hold a pen and do anything, but now through this art project I have learnt how to draw. I drew myself and when I looked at it this morning I saw how beautiful I am."

Many of the women painted tears of gold on their faces. And that's what this pack is all about. It's about how beauty can emerge from brutality, how trauma and tragedy can be transformed through the love of God into signs of hope, forgiveness and redemption.

It's about how tears of pain can become tears of gold.

## Order your *Tears of Gold* pack today!

### Services and home groups

The pack includes:

- 14 postcards – seven portraits and seven self-portraits
- Ten 'Portraits and Prayer' guides to help people pray
- Service guide - help your church to pray for persecuted women, and give everyone their own Portraits and Prayer leaflet to take away
- Small group outline - perfect for prayer groups or small

groups. Use the postcards for prayer and reflection. Includes a Bible study and ideas for action.

### Stage an exhibition

The pack includes details of how to stage a *Tears of Gold* Art Exhibition using extra materials available online. Display the portraits in a suitable venue, and invite others to come and engage with the stories.



### SEE. CHANGE.

Persecuted women are doubly vulnerable to persecution because of their faith and gender. Our vision is that every woman who is persecuted is seen, valued and empowered to reach her God-given potential.

"Today I am filled with joy," Ladi says. "I want to thank my brothers and sisters all over the world for the support that they have sent. When I go home, anywhere I see a paper and pen I will pick it up and try to draw my beautiful face."

### Don't forget!

You can still sign the handmade petition to show MPs and those with influence your concern for the suffering of your sisters. A handmade petition instruction guide is included in the *Tears of Gold* pack.

Order your pack today at [www.opendoorsuk.org](http://www.opendoorsuk.org)

“Jesus is my inspiration”: Loving your neighbour in Bangladesh



What does Jesus’ love in action look like in Bangladesh? Mansuri, a Christian from a Muslim background and mother of three, sees it as her life’s mission to serve her community – in particular, the poor and the downtrodden. She and her family came to faith through her husband, Rahim, who is also a believer from a Muslim background.

“WE WILL REMAIN IN OUR CHRISTIAN FAITH”

As Christian converts, Mansuri and her family face persecution from many directions.

Her children were mocked by their teachers and other students at school. Mansuri went to their school to see the principal and class teacher to stand up for their rights. She told them, “Religion is a personal matter. We have the right to choose. Why are my children treated like this?”

In another incident, Mansuri and Rahim were pressured to recant their Christian faith and return to Islam in a family meeting. Mansuri’s in-laws then

tried to pressure their children to return to Islam. But the children also refused, saying, “We will remain in our Christian faith and we love our parents.”

In Bangladesh, which is number 48 on the 2019 Open Doors World Watch List, your religion is considered to be part of your identity. Believers from Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist or tribal backgrounds suffer the most severe persecution as they are considered to have betrayed their identity, and the Bangladeshi government is increasingly giving in to the demands of local Islamic groups, which monitor these minorities.

“WE ARE SUPPOSED TO BE DIFFERENT”

The family moved to Bangladesh’s capital, Dhaka, where, despite the persecution, Rahim enrolled in a seminary to study for three months for a diploma in Christianity. The Lord also opened up a way for Mansuri to study the Bible herself...

A friend told her about discipleship training being run by Open Doors – training, that, thanks to your support, she could attend for free! She joined the programme and graduated a year later. At her graduation, she was reminded to pass on to others what she had learnt, and



so to disciple others.

Mansuri started her first discipleship class by inviting seven families from her church to her house. Later, another three women joined the class, making a total of ten women.

Mansuri was inspired by what she learnt from the training and wanted to put it into practice. “As children of God, we are supposed to be different. Jesus always helped the poor. I am inspired by that and I want to help the poor too,” she said.

She knows that this ministry might cost her everything. But she is becoming bolder about her faith in Christ and wants to impact her community.

“JESUS IS MY INSPIRATION”

Mansuri visited the families of the poor living in the slum area near her home. She brought their children to her home, where she fed them breakfast and taught them Bangla, English and Maths. They also learnt to draw and sing.

She even started a class inside the slum area itself; 18 children attended her first class!

She also encourages the other women disciples to join her in putting into practice what they learn. They do community service together and sweep the public roads in front of their homes. They also gather for a whole night’s prayer once a

month, and now they are seeing miracles happening in the lives of those they pray for!

“Jesus is my inspiration,” Mansuri says. “He worked for the people. I want to do the same, too. Jesus died for me. And He taught us to love our neighbour as ourselves.”

Open Doors works with local churches in Bangladesh to support persecuted believers like Mansuri through training, literature distribution, socio-economic development and providing relief to victims of persecution. Please pray for Mansuri and her ministry.

INSPIRE YOUR CHURCH WITH STORIES OF COURAGEOUS FAITH LIKE MANSURI’S

If you’re looking for an exciting way to share the stories of the persecuted church with your own congregation, then the 2019 World Watch List Church Pack is a great all-age resource enabling you to do just that! Order your free pack today at: [www.opendoorsuk.org/resources](http://www.opendoorsuk.org/resources)



# COULD YOU DO THE IMPOSSIBLE?

**What if God called you to take on a fundraising challenge for Open Doors? Would you say yes? These three supporters did – and learned about God's incredible faithfulness along the way.**

"I'm not someone extraordinary, just someone who was prepared to say yes, as Brother Andrew did," says Mervyn Smith. Last year he did do something extraordinary: a solo motorcycle trip from his home town of Highley to Hammerfest in the Arctic Circle. His ride raised

over £10,000 to provide for persecuted Christians through Open Doors.

Mervyn's journey began not on the back of a motorbike, but in a doctor's clinic. A shock diagnosis changed both his plans – and his perspective. "I was about to take a long-haul flight to Australia, when I went to the doctor thinking I had asthma because of my

shortness of breath. I discovered I'd had a serious heart condition since birth and needed major open heart surgery. So God's hand was on that and I made a rapid recovery."

The experience prepared him for an encounter at the Open Doors Standing Strong



event the following year, where the testimonies of persecuted Christians made an impact.

"I thought, 'What could I do to make a difference?'" says Mervyn. "I felt God dropped an idea into my spirit: you could ride a motorbike to the Arctic Circle."

## GOD'S PROVISION

Mervyn planned his journey with support from the team at Open Doors and set a fundraising target of £10,000. At one point, he was worried the fundraising wasn't going well and decided to lower the target.

"Within two or three minutes, a church in Kidderminster phoned up and told me they'd like to donate £3,000! The target was back on!"

The whole journey proved a lesson in God's provision, protection and the power of prayer. Mervyn says, "It was much more exciting when I ran out of hotels to stay in. Then it was just me and God, and He provided for me all the way. So many people were praying for me and I felt God's protection and providence."

While Mervyn was donning leathers and riding north, Sam Khaliq was also battling the European heat as he took a

group from his church to Cyprus. Their plan: to complete a 52-mile 'walk of faith' in two days.



Why? Sam says, "I'd never done a challenge like this in my entire life. I felt the Lord calling me so I said, 'Show me a sign. Who should I raise money for?' Every time I googled, Open Doors came up. The stories of persecuted believers really touched me."

The walk was an opportunity to grow in faith and experience God's provision in unexpected ways. Sam says, "We were only expecting to raise about £500-£700, but our total was over £1,200. More non-believers gave money than believers! I was really happy about that."

## MAKE YOUR OWN CHALLENGE

You don't have to travel to complete a challenge, as retired vicar Richard Cook proved when he was inspired to take on a challenge at a Standing Strong event. He decided to swim the equivalent of the Channel, as a way to inspire his congregation. He wanted to draw attention to the refugees and asylum seekers who cross the Channel, and to open up conversations about the persecution Christians face all over the world. Richard swam 50 km over 23 swims and raised £430.

He says, "Usually when I swim, I think of the psalm of the number of the length I'm doing. On this swim, I prayed for the country on the Open Doors World Watch List for each length. It was a good help to focus not on my little life but on someone else's."



Richard says he would definitely encourage others to take on a challenge of their own – however big or small. "There's a possibility of making a challenge that suits your circumstances. You might do a swim, you might do a grand knit, but we've got the job of inspiring and informing people about what our persecuted brothers and sisters are going through."

## **"If God has laid something on your heart, just go for it"**

Mervyn agrees. He says, "There's a Mark Twain quote that I took to heart: 20 years from now you'll be more disappointed by the things you didn't do than the ones you did do. You don't have to do something as outlandish as what I've done – it could still have the same impact. If God has laid something on your heart, just go for it. He'll honour it for you as he did for me."

## READY FOR YOUR CHALLENGE?

Do you love to bake, run, cycle or sew? Could you use your passion to fundraise for your persecuted family as Mervyn, Sam and Richard have done? If you've had an idea for a fundraising challenge – now's the time to make it happen! Please contact Fiona or Sally on 01993 460015 or [challenge@opendoorsuk.org](mailto:challenge@opendoorsuk.org) and we can offer you the support and resources you need.





## This grieving family is considered one of India's primary threats

### Could you make it your primary goal to strengthen their faith today?

The Hindu extremist movement the RSS has threatened to wipe out non-Hindus in India by 2021. When Christian families are attacked, Abishek\* helps. He's reaching out to the most vulnerable, providing persecution survival training, emergency relief, pastoral support and legal assistance to persecuted families.

He says, "We help them if their house is burnt. If they've been beaten up, we take them to hospital. If they've been expelled from their village, we give them shelter."

If we don't act to support Christians like Abishek today, there's a real chance the church in India won't survive.

**Every £30** could equip two Rapid Response teams for a month as they bring emergency aid to victims of violence.

**Every £50** could provide persecution survival training and materials for two church leaders, equipping them with a biblical response to persecution and helping them to understand their legal rights.

You can strengthen the faith of Christians in India. Please pray regularly using the bi-monthly prayer diary. Will you also consider giving a regular gift to India today, to help our local partners to be there for our church family for as long as they're needed? Use the response form, call **01993 460015** or visit **[www.opendoorsuk.org](http://www.opendoorsuk.org)**. Thank you

\*Name changed for security reasons

Photo: Abishek, an Open Doors partner, comforts a bereaved family with prayers, encouragement and practical support.