How India's Christians cling to faith in the face of intensifying persecution
For secret believer Pastor Shekhar, following Jesus takes courage, prayer and a global community of Christians. ‘Our time of persecution has come’

SECRET BELIEVER

Mehr’s unshakeable faith in India

‘Jesus Is Everything To Me’

By giving $30 a month, you can provide your persecuted family with critical support and emergency relief.

You Can Be There.

About Open Doors

For over 60 years, Open Doors has worked in the world’s most oppressive countries, empowering Christians who are persecuted for their faith.

Open Doors Core Values

We are part of the Body of Christ, a people for people people
We are persecuted church-driven
We are people of the Bible
We are people of prayer
We live and work by faith
We are devoted to Jesus Christ and His commission
We are motivated solely for the glory of God

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Pastor Shekhar was arrested, jailed, tortured and told to leave his home with his family, simply because they are Christians in India.

Despite the pain, sadness, fear, and emotional and physical toll, Pastor Shekhar resolutely says, “I cannot stop serving God. I cannot live without God because I’ve surrendered my whole life to Him.”

It’s a radical statement. But it’s the power of God at work across India, one of the hardest places in the world for Christians to live.

In the United States, we’re blessed to have the freedom to attend church and worship Jesus, largely without repercussion. But for millions of Christians around the world, even in democratic countries like India, that opportunity to worship freely is often not the reality.

A recent Pew survey sheds some light on the current state of these religious realities in India, where an extremist strain of Hindu nationalism has emerged. While most Indians (and Hindus) say they are tolerant of other faiths, there’s a significant minority of hardliners who reject Christians as neighbors or even as Indian: 64% of Hindus in the survey say it’s important to be Hindu to be “truly Indian.”

The stats are one thing—but the real people behind the stats, like Pastor Shekhar, show how devastating the situation in India is. Mehr is another example. She’s a young Indian woman in her 20s who has endured severe verbal and physical violence and was even denied hospital treatment because of her belief in Jesus.

Yet her faith has been unshakeable. “Their words hurt momentarily, but my unexplainable joy in Christ overpowered all the opposition. The persecutors haven’t come across Christ. I believed and prayed that they would experience Jesus the same way we did,” Mehr says.

When I hear the stories of Mehr and Shekhar, I’m reminded again of both the urgent nature of our work and prayers—and the incredible hope of Jesus that our Indian family still looks to. It’s easy to become discouraged when we hear of situations like these, when it seems like government officials and religious minorities look the other way as religious minorities are brutalized. But persecution of the Church shouldn’t come as a surprise.

In Matthew 5:11, Jesus said, “Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account.” In India, this passage of Scripture isn’t just a nice sentiment—it’s a promise Christians cling to as they endure persecution, abuse and violence.

Believers like Mehr and Pastor Shekhar give me hope and encouragement, knowing that despite their incredibly difficult circumstances, they not only cling to faith but even pray that their persecutors would also come to know the joy of knowing Jesus. They are under great pressure, but they worship with great joy.

When we stand with Indian believers, we help them know they aren’t alone, strengthening their faith so they can live out the truth of Jesus’ promise: that anyone persecuted for following Him is “blessed.” When we do so, we can see how God is at work in India, restoring hope and joy through His people. No matter how governments may rule, Jesus is our message, and Jesus is our hope.
BURKINA FASO

“I HUGELY THANK YOU”—DISPLACED BELIEVERS SHARE MESSAGES OF GRATITUDE

Recently, thanks to your generous support, Open Doors was able to provide targeted relief to 2,100 Christian households now in displacement camps in Burkina Faso. They are families forced to flee their homes because of escalating violence from extremist groups where they live.

Since 2016, the church in the northern regions of Burkina Faso has come under attack from extremist groups, causing survivors from various villages to flee in droves to centers farther south. The Christians in displacement camps have struggled to provide for their families—a crisis exacerbated by the economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Each family received needed food items (rice, maize, beans, tomatoes, macaroni and cooking oil) to bring relief for at least a few months. As they carried away their packages, they shared messages of gratitude:

“We left our village because of terrorist attacks, and you brought us food when we had little. May God bless you and grant you long life.”
— GEMILA FROM KOUDOUGOU

MALAYSIA

THE GOSPEL GOING FORWARD

This is what your prayers and gifts are doing in rural Malaysia. After an early 2022 distribution of Bibles in rural areas of Malaysia, our local partners recently followed up with the recipients to help them learn to use the audio Bibles they received, as well as understand what they’re reading. In 2021 and 2022, Open Doors gifted more than 1,500 Bibles to Malay believers.

SRI LANKA

A ‘BREATH OF FRESH AIR’ FOR STRUGGLING CHURCH LEADERS

The toll of the COVID-19 pandemic continues to reveal itself. Recently, our partners in Sri Lanka heard from local church leaders who struggled to keep their faith strong during the pandemic lockdowns in the midst of isolation. The lack of spiritual nourishment and engagement with other believers took a toll on leaders’ spiritual health and their ability to disciple their congregations. Responding to the need, Open Doors partners organized a leadership training session for leaders and pastors. Most of the participants serve in rural areas where there is a lot of hostility toward church gatherings. The goal of the training was to inject hope and strength into the leaders.

For Nethmi, a church leader and theology student, the training was “a breath of fresh air.” She says, “This was much-needed training for me. The teachings were so practical and easy to understand. “For almost three years, I did not have the opportunity for training or learning the Word of God. Now I have regained the momentum I lost and can focus on moving forward in my leadership journey.”
INDONESIA

**EQUIPPED TO SHARE JESUS WITH MUSLIMS**

As home to the world’s largest Muslim society, Indonesia can be a difficult place for Christians. Tensions and disputes between Muslims and Christians often occur without any resolution, leaving a ticking time bomb. When that happens, the Christian minority is often the target.

To bridge this gap and rekindle a passion for evangelism in the face of persecution, Indonesians church leaders and teachers began teaching the Islamic Awareness Seminar (IAS) in 2013. Today it continues with 40 to 60 believers attending each session.

As challenging as it may be, the seminar attempts to remind Christians to see Muslims not as agents of persecution but rather as lost souls who repress others because Christ is absent in their lives. Not as people to fear, but as people to have compassion on.

For many IAS participants, what used to be seen as a threat has become an opportunity. Yacob* was once a Muslim; today, he follows Jesus. “In my church, outreach to Muslims was not encouraged. Deep down I wanted to reach out to them. Then came the seminar; it set my evangelistic spirit on fire.”

Yacob went back into the Muslim community and preached the gospel. “I never knew that God could use me to reach Muslims,” he said. “This is all thanks to the seminar.”

So far, more than 1,000 youth have participated in music projects at the Center of Hope ministry in Qaraqosh, one of the many towns on the Nineveh Plain. The activities were so impactful that teachers at the Center of Hope decided to replicate the experience for youth in other nearby villages.

“As Christians, we are called to leave a positive impact on people,” says Sam Salim, who teaches violin in Qaraqosh. “It’s like sharing the love of God through music.”

Sam has more than 250 students. “We learned that music helps to open up the minds of people in the communities, and through it, we try to reach out to our surrounding villages.”

In the beginning, Sam was afraid to go to nearby villages because they are predominantly Muslim.

“It was shortly after we returned after liberation from ISIS. One week later, I was able to control my feelings. They loved music, and connection was built between us. We need to do this to build a developed community.”

*Name changed to preserve security

**IRAQ**

**SHARING GOD’S LOVE WITH MUSIC**

Among many activities Open Doors local partners support in Iraq, a music project brings hope to area youth. For youth who returned to their damaged or destroyed homes after they were forced to flee the Islamic State group, music brings inner peace and hope, helping them process painful memories of displacement and return, as well as the fear of losing everything again.

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“Even if I lose my life, I will not stop serving the Lord.”

These were the often-repeated words of Pastor Yalam Shankar who served in Angarpalli, India.

Pastor Shankar’s name was on a list of 30 believers. He found the list tacked to his door in January, with a warning that if any of the people on it converted anyone to Christianity, they would be killed.

Despite the threats, Pastor Shankar continued to minister. A few months after the list went out, his body was found beside his house—murdered for his resolve to live out his words.

This is the type of violent persecution our family in India faces, especially in the north and central regions. Subsequently, dozens of other pastors in the area have been attacked or threatened by Naxalite rebel groups. These groups are often influenced by Hindu extremists bent on intimidating pastors into halting their ministry— and intimidating believers into either giving up their faith or at least giving up meeting together.

As if to give a stamp of approval to the ongoing persecution of Christians, elections in March brought to power the political party that favors the passage of anti-conversion laws and the philosophy that “to be Indian is to be Hindu.”

Those who wish to convert must register their intention, undergo interrogation, and be put on a list.

Join your brothers and sisters in India who earnestly pray for apostasy to die.

**INDIA**

**NO. 10 ON THE WORLD WATCH LIST**

**NO REPRIEVE FOR CHRISTIANS**

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**IRAQ**

**NO. 14 ON THE WORLD WATCH LIST**

**NEW BELIEVER MARTYRED FOR LEAVING ISLAM**

According to radical Islamic teaching, the punishment for apostasy is death.

She came to Christ despite being part of a Kurdish Muslim family, and she couldn’t contain her joy. She took to social media to say that she’d become a believer and planned to be baptized. Her witness cost the young believer her life.

Maghdid, also known as Maria, is believed to have been murdered outside a predominantly Christian district of Erbil by her uncle and brother—known in Muslim countries as “honor killings.”

According to reports in Asia News, “It appears that she was punished by her family for leaving Islam, specifically for being emancipated and embracing the Christian religion; in short, she was ‘guilty’ of apostasy.”

Join your brothers and sisters in Iraq who urgently pray for God to comfort them as they grieve their martyrdom. Pray for all of our family in Iraq who risk death for choosing Jesus.

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ON THE WORLD WATCH LIST

NO. 32
FRONTLINE FAITH

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attempted to burn down the school and dormitories. The seminary
extremists bent on crippling and eradicating the Christian presence

BURKINA FASO
SEMINARY ATTACKED BY JIHADISTS

The church in Burkina Faso continues to be targeted by Islamic extremists bent on crippling and eradicating the Christian presence in West Africa’s Sahel region.

Overnight, a seminary was attacked by suspected jihadists who attempted to burn down the school and dormitories. The seminary is home to seven teachers and 146 seminarians. Praise God that no lives were lost in the attack.

SECRET CHRISTIANS EXECUTED, FAMILIES IMPRISONED

A rare report reminds us of the brutal persecution the underground church of North Korea is facing today—and the urgent need to pray.

As we often report, the families of each believer were also punished. After the executions, authorities reportedly rounded up the family members—over 100 people—and arrested them. They have been sent to political prisons where living conditions are inhumane. Prisoners are treated as animals, tortured and forced to perform harsh labor without enough food or warm clothing.

Persecution events like these can be sobering for underground believers as they strive to faithfully live the gospel, pray in secret or gather for worship.

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Finding Jesus in India

Mehr,* a young Indian believer in her early 20s, wears an elegant red scarf with a pattern of gold leaves around her head. She places her hands in her lap and smiles. There are some white flowers in a vase on a table by the window, and beside it, Mehr’s Bible. Outside the window, the late afternoon sun shines through the leaves of a tree, dappling the room with light.

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*Name changed to preserve security

Finding Jesus in India

Mehr lives with her elderly parents and two sisters. She grew up as a Hindu in a Hindu family within a Hindu community. However, Mehr had always struggled with a chronic illness and could not find healing or peace through her Hindu religion.

One day, an uncle invited her to a church service. At that service, she first heard the gospel and desired to follow Jesus. Later, her mother and sisters heard God’s Word through a pastor as well, and the entire family committed their lives to Christ.

“I came to know Jesus as the true Healer—the living God—and I gave my life to Jesus,” Mehr shares.

The whispers in the community were inescapable:

Mehr and her family started to attend church...

They left the Hindu gods. Stay away from them...

She changed her religion—she must be doing it for money...

“Terrorism happens momentarily, but my unexplainable joy in Christ overpowered all the opposition. The persecutors haven’t come across Christ. I believed and prayed that they would experience Jesus the same way we did,” Mehr adds.

When anger turns to violence

After attending a local prayer meeting, Mehr’s mother and sister were stopped in the street by neighbors. This time angry comments escalated into physical violence, and the people began to beat her mother and sister. Mehr saw this from a distance and ran to rescue them, but the aggressors also began to attack her.

Mehr’s eyes well up with tears as she explains the situation: “The attackers started to beat me mercilessly and tried to strangle me with a cloth. I went unconscious, and a bystander called for an ambulance and stopped the attackers. I was wounded and bleeding and suffered several injuries across my body.”

When Mehr finally woke, she was in the hospital and saw her mother and sister at her bedside, with blood on their bodies and torn clothes. “You’re in critical condition,” her mother said. It took her

*Name changed to preserve security
a moment to understand where she was. During her time in the hospital, Mehr wrestled with anxiety. “Why would my neighbors attack me so viciously? How will I face them?” she thought. She felt hopeless and even contemplated taking her own life. “I was in shock and numbness after the incident,” Mehr shares. “I was not aware of my surroundings; everything came shattering down in my life. I grew weak. I lost my job. I did not speak to anyone and was always lying on the bed. I was in constant fear that the attackers would look for us again. I experienced anxiety and panic attacks whenever I remembered the attack.”

But her mother and sister encouraged her with Scripture and worked hard to lift her spirits—reminding her of the hope she has in Christ. They pointed her to Psalm 23: “for you are close beside me, your rod and your staff protect and comfort me.” Mehr testifies: “It is true that I was unable to understand all that was happening. However, when my sister or mother prayed with me, I was revitalized and strengthened by the Word of God that He protects me and comforts me. So I slowly started to fortify myself in prayer, reading the Bible, and writing down my thoughts to God in the form of songs.”

Relentless Oppression

“Though a complaint was lodged against our attackers, they were not arrested or questioned and were let free because they hold an influential position in the community,” Mehr shares. “Even while recovering from the appalling incident, the attackers constantly threatened us with abusive words.” And the persecution didn’t stop there. Mehr’s persecutors went so far as to bribe the doctors at the hospital—telling them to stop treating Mehr because she was a Christian. The bribery worked. “The nurses there did not come for my treatment and stopped all care,” Mehr says. This traumatic experience added to her anxiety and proved to Mehr that persecution could follow her anywhere. Open Doors partners heard about the incident and helped Mehr pay for her medical bills and move to another hospital—one friendly to Christians—to continue her critical treatment. “This kind of injustice should not be done to anyone, be it Christians or non-Christians,” Mehr says.

Finding healing and hope

“When we were in the hospital, we didn’t have money for treatment,” Mehr adds. “But as soon as Open Doors partners came to know about my situation, God sent them as divine helpers for us. “Your ministry paid for my hospital bills. So, I thank Almighty God for you. But unfortunately, when the incident happened, we all lost our jobs. And you are continuing to help us and support us with groceries and all our needs,” Mehr adds.

Open Doors continues to support Mehr and her family as they recover from the trauma of the attack. Across India today, Christians just like Mehr and her family are in urgent need of support for medical bills after attacks, food relief when they lose their jobs due to discrimination, legal help, discipleship, training—and at times even safe houses to escape extremists. And every prayer and gift helps communicate one crucial message to Indian Christians: You are not alone. “I am so grateful to my God. He certainly has

“I CAN TESTIFY AND CLAIM THAT THE PLANS OF GOD ARE GOOD AND NOT FOR MY HARM, AND EVERY CIRCUMSTANCE GUIDES ME TO A FUTURE AND HOPE IN CHRIST,” MEHR SAYS.
Mehr was also able to attend an Open Doors Persecution Preparedness Training. She has boldly shared her testimony in the seminar and touched many with her unshakeable faith in Christ.

“When this attack happened to me, it wasn’t easy to come out of it, but God put one thing on my heart: ‘Do not fear for I am with you.’”

Mehr has gone through a lot at a young age, but her faith is strong and she’s dedicated to being a light for Christ in India—no matter the cost.

“The plan that God has for my life is big. I will be used for God’s glory. Jesus Christ is everything to me,” Mehr shares. “Thank you so much for being an encourager in my life. Surely my cup overflows with blessings.

‘On behalf of my family, God bless you all.’

Please pray for Mehr’s complete healing. She is still recovering from her injuries, but she wants to return to work soon. Ask God to provide an excellent job for her to continue to support her elderly parents. In addition, Mehr’s strong desire is that all her neighbors—even the ones who attacked her family—will come to know Jesus. Continue to pray that Mehr will have the courage and boldness she needs to abide in Jesus, even when her persecutors hurl insults and threaten her because of her faith.
“All persons are equally entitled to freedom of conscience and the right to freely profess, practice and propagate religion subject to public order, morality and health.”
—The Constitution of India, Article 25

“Across the country [of India], most people (84%) say that to be ‘truly Indian,’ it is very important to respect all religions.”
—‘Key Findings About Religion in India,’ Pew Research Center report, June 2021

“Daily life for many Christian and Muslim communities in urban and rural India has become an excruciating struggle to earn a living and practice their faith while also remaining alive and under the radar…”
—The opening section of ‘Destructive Lies,’ an Open Doors report with research conducted by the London School of Economics

Pastor Shekhar’s son was supposed to be a minister.

Pastor Shekhar* had begun training him in the ministry, confident that the boy would continue in his father’s footsteps and serve the Lord in a pastoral calling. But then Shekhar’s arrest happened.

Being jailed, tortured and then told to leave his home changed everything. Shekhar is honest about his fears: “Sometimes when I think about this incident, I feel frightened,” Shekhar says. “My family also feels terrified. My wife is still in fear and shock and refuses to let our son be involved in ministry because we’ve seen so much pain in our lives.”

What happened to Pastor Shekhar and his family to inflict such wounds and leave such lasting scars?

It started simply because they are Christians in India.

Expecting persecution in India

India’s constitution guarantees freedom of religion—and by all accounts, many Indians agree. A 2021 survey from the Pew Research Center found that 84% of Indians consider respecting people of other faiths to be an important part of their religious identity. For decades, India has been a place of respite for people of many faiths fleeing oppression.

But the same Pew study shows a dangerous undercurrent in India: 45% of Hindus say they would not accept a person from at least one of the religious minority groups in India.

And that’s the reality that left Pastor Shekhar and his family reeling.

Pastor Shekhar is a church leader from southern India. We can’t tell you where he currently lives or works—India has become so dangerous for Christians who are active in sharing the love and message of Jesus (it’s No. 10 on the 2022 World Watch List), that sharing his real name, hometown or photo could put him and his family at incredible risk.

Shekhar found Jesus after someone gave him a Bible. He took it home and found himself stunned by the simple message of John 3:16. “I kept on thinking about this verse,” he remembers. “When I read the whole book, I found out that Jesus Christ had come to this world for our sins; He was beaten and crucified and was buried but rose on the third day from the dead. It made me realize that I am a sinner—that I need Jesus in my life for my salvation. And, at that moment, I

*Name changed to preserve security
prayed for repentance and accepted Jesus as my savior.”

As Shekhar followed Jesus, he was called into ministry. And because he has served God for so long in India, he’s familiar with persecution in his country. “Being a church leader, we come across people who blame us for conversion and accuse [us] of forcing people with money to convert,” Shekhar says. “They say we’re now Christians and have left our gods to start following foreign gods. We have to face many challenges—our relatives say that they won’t come to our house and that our children won’t get married because we’ve changed our religion.”

But for Pastor Shekhar and his family, the persecution became much more personal—and much more violent.

“It was then I was frightened”

On the day that changed everything, Pastor Shekhar gathered with some believers for a prayer meeting. During these meetings, they would worship God and pray, and read and meditate on passages of Scripture. They would also pray and fast for healing and deliverance of the sick.

This was nothing new for Pastor Shekhar. His ministry was largely geared toward these types of small meetings in peoples’ homes, particularly when people wanted healing or comfort.

But on this day, something changed.

“We were praying, policemen came,” Pastor Shekhar says. “They stopped the meeting and started to threaten us.”

“It was at this moment I realized that our time of persecution has come.”

Pastor Shekhar had always known significant and violent persecution could come. He read how Jesus told His disciples in Matthew 10 that they’d be persecuted for knowing Him—but that the Holy Spirit would help them.

So when the police broke up the prayer meeting, he was scared, but able to face the situation with courage. “I was a bit frightened at this situation from the inside but stood courageously and didn’t run away. The policemen seized our Bibles and books and threatened us; then they told us to come to the police station.”

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Once they arrived at the station, Shekhar realized the true persecution hadn’t yet begun. He and the other believers were harassed, beaten and tortured.

“It was then,” Shekhar says, “I was frightened.”

Shekhar and the others were abused for hours at the station—and then Shekhar was separated from the others and taken into the room where prisoners eat. There, he was brutally tortured.

The policemen beat Shekhar on his back and feet with bamboo canes. They slapped him so hard in the head that his eardrums burst. They interrogated him, demanding to know if he was paying Hindus to convert to Christianity. They slapped him so hard in the head that his eardrums burst. They interrogated him, demanding to know if he was paying Hindus to convert to Christianity. They interrogated him, demanding to know if he was paying Hindus to convert to Christianity.

They stepped on his feet and their feet with bamboo canes. They slapped him so hard in the head that his eardrums burst. They interrogated him, demanding to know if he was paying Hindus to convert to Christianity.

But even in the horror, Pastor Shekhar felt intense pain, swelling, sadness, fear and anxiety after that,” Pastor Shekhar says. “I was in intense pain, swelling, sadness, fear and anxiety after that,” Pastor Shekhar says.

The officers’ goal was to scare Pastor Shekhar so much that he would flee the area. They finally released him with a warning that if he and his family didn’t leave, they’d be thrown in jail.

The repercussions of trauma

The next day, Pastor Shekhar went to the police to report what had happened to him, in the hopes that other officers might investigate the attack. But rather than help him, the authorities simply repeated the ultimatum: Leave or else.

The police officers who tortured Shekhar also went to talk to his landlord—along with a number of Hindu extremists. They threatened the landlord and told him to make sure Pastor Shekhar and his family left their home.

Shekhar knew his arrest and torture had deeply impacted his family. “Through this all, I took care of my family and mediated on what is written in the book of Timothy—that I am a husband to my wife and a father to my children before I am a pastor,” he says. “It is my responsibility to take care of them and keep them safe. I decided to [leave our home] so that I could keep my family safe and continue the ministry.”

With no other options, he and his family packed up and fled their town.

Even though they have left the immediate danger, the effects of the attack continue for the family. “I am filled with pain after recollecting this incident,” Pastor Shekhar says. “I’ve grown to be more cautious and vigilant now about my preaching and teaching in society. I am also prepared for another incident like this.”

The sadness lingers for Pastor Shekhar. “It was the biggest heartbreak of my life to leave my church and all the members behind,” he says. “I left that place crying and weeping. I was saddened for a lot of days, and I (still) feel disheartened when I think about it.”

Pastor Shekhar’s wife and son are also still deeply affected. “My wife [refused to let me continue my ministry] and [wouldn’t] let my son be involved in the ministry, as we’ve gone through a lot of pain, sadness and fear. We don’t want to face more in the future,” he says. He told his wife that he couldn’t control what God would call their son to—and reassured her that the call...
The attack also financially devastated Pastor Shekhar and his family. His medical bills from the beatings were substantial, and he and his wife knew they would have trouble with groceries and rent.

But, though they had to leave their community, this family wasn’t alone.

“We stand strong like the prophets of old”

When Open Doors partners heard what happened to Pastor Shekhar and the other believers, they were able to come alongside the family and offer immediate support—thanks to your gifts and prayers. Open Doors partners were able to provide medical help, groceries and rent assistance for the family as they rebuilt their lives. “At that time of sadness, we could feel you as a family standing by us to pray all the time.”

Pastor Shekhar shares.

It was a glimpse of the global Church in action—one family of God, uniting in prayer and giving to help brothers and sisters who had lost everything.

“If an animal or a bird is injured, it’s unable to get up on its own—it needs treatment,” Pastor Shekhar says. “My life was also incapacitated at that time, and we were troubled and tired. I had faith and belief but didn’t have strength to stand on my own. You took care of me like an injured bird and gave me enough strength and courage to stand on my own, which is why I am standing today.”

Thanks to your gifts and your prayers, Pastor Shekhar and his family can continue to be a light for Jesus amidst the challenges in India through his enduring ministry. They weren’t wanted by their neighbors—but as part of the Body of Christ, this family belongs to a bigger fellowship than any that could kick them out. And Pastor Shekhar is grateful.

“You all have prayed for us and helped us; I am filled with gratitude from the bottom of my heart,” he says.

The situation in India continues to be extremely difficult for millions of believers who simply want to live out their faith in peace with their Indian neighbors. And despite a constitution that guarantees freedom of religion and a general population that claims to value tolerance, stories like Pastor Shekhar’s are all too common. But thanks to Jesus, there is still hope for Indian Christians who are attacked, abused, harassed and told they aren’t enough.

“When we follow the Lord after leaving everything, our relatives, neighbors and many people come and persecute us,” Pastor Shekhar says. “But Jesus says that the person who suffers for Him is blessed (Matt. 5:10). We are jailed and brutally beaten and tortured, but we stand strong like the prophets of old because we are strong in the Word of God.”

Pastor Shekhar tells us how we can pray with our family in India:

“We can pray for believers and churches, like I do, be it a pastor, leader or a believer. In times of troubles and sufferings, I pray that God strengthens their faith and that in good times, people will call on the name of the Lord. We can have all the riches and wealth of this world, but if there’s no faith, then we have nothing.

“I pray [that believers] may have faith in God ... to their last breath.

“Pray that we may have faith in God and be undeterred, remember God in all suffering and happiness, and live the Word and remain in God. This is how I’d want others to pray for us.”

of God on his own life was stronger than anything he might face as a church leader in India. “I’ll keep serving God till my last breath, even in happiness or sadness, even if I have to suffer greatly or slightly, even if I have to give my life for God,” Pastor Shekhar says resolutely. “I cannot stop serving God. I cannot live without serving God because I’ve surrendered my whole life to Him.”

The situation in India continues to be extremely difficult for millions of believers who simply want to live out their faith in peace with their Indian neighbors. And despite a constitution that guarantees freedom of religion and a general population that claims to value tolerance, stories like Pastor Shekhar’s are all too common. But thanks to Jesus, there is still hope for Indian Christians who are attacked, abused, harassed and told they aren’t enough.
We quote Jesus’ words about His Father’s house all the time. It’s a comforting promise that reminds us that one day we’ll all be with Jesus—and that He’s anticipated that reality by preparing for us.

But imagine you don’t have an actual home—just because you’re a Christian. That’s the situation experienced by our sister Samida*, a believer in Central Asia. Samida works with the animals, and it’s during that time she has brief opportunities to read the New Testament she keeps buried in the fields. But the rest of her life is incredibly hard. Her parents are furious with her because she follows Jesus. “I work day and night for my parents,” Samida says. “Now they tell me that there is no more room for me in the house, and it is better that I share the shed with the animals. In their eyes I am nobody.”

And yet, through Jesus, Samida shares in the promise of a many-roomed house. Jesus is preparing a house for Samida, just as He prepares a house for you. Samida remains strong in her faith and asks that we pray her parents would have a change of heart. Let’s also ask God to remind her that He’s already working on a permanent home for her—with Him.

READ

“My Father’s house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am. You know the way to the place where I am going.”

JOHN 14:2-4

REFLECT

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PRAY

God, thank you for the example of our sister Samida. I ask that you would strengthen her and remind her of your promises. I ask you would change the hearts of her parents. I pray that you would help me live in your promises in a new way—secure in the knowledge that you are already looking forward to being with me forever. Thank you for your grace and mercy. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

*Name changed to preserve security
Tell us about your church.

Journey Church
North Little Rock, Arkansas

We are in our fourteenth year, and we are a tiny gathering of 18 people. The vision of our planting congregation was that of “a new kind of church, that produces a new kind of disciple…people who realize that Jesus is not tacked onto a believer’s life, but rather is their life!”

How does your church serve persecuted Christians through Open Doors?

Through joining in prayer requests received through the Open Doors Prayer App, sharing the Frontline Faith newsletter, sharing the monthly prayer calendar, and through giving.

What’s one piece of encouragement you’d offer to other churches about caring for persecuted Christians?

The fact that we have a persecuted family around the globe challenges the very foundation of who God is to some believers. But when we walk with them, we will find that He is worth it. We will find a faith that is unlike any we may have seen in our lives. We will find the power of God at work in the least likely of His children.

When and why did your congregation begin to be drawn to persecuted believers?

Twelve years ago, a member of the congregation became aware of a story of persecution in Kenya. He talked with the pastors, became aware of Open Doors, and he researched and became a volunteer for the ministry. (That member became our pastor.)

St. James Anglican Church
Costa Mesa, California

What’s a place your congregation has a real heart for?

Persecution is happening to our family, wherever they may be located, and that’s what grabs at our heart. We believe we are to come alongside them in prayer, to be with those suffering as if we too were suffering (Hebrews 13:3).

What’s one piece of encouragement you’d offer to other churches about caring for persecuted Christians?

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When and why did your congregation begin to be drawn to persecuted believers?

In 1998 we started hearing about the persecution of Christians, and we realized how important our prayers for the persecuted church could be for the advancement of God’s Kingdom—and how much we could learn from the courage of persecuted believers.

What’s a place your congregation has a real heart for?

We have prayed for many countries over the past 24 years. If I had to narrow it down to two countries, I would select Sudan and Iraq because we had many special gatherings with the Lost Boys of Sudan now living in California, and we support missionaries in Iraq.

What’s one piece of encouragement you’d offer to other churches about caring for persecuted Christians?

We are one Body, and it’s so important to respond to the Lord’s call to pray for our brothers and sisters in Christ. It’s such a joy to see the Lord answer our prayers and advance His Kingdom through them. I believe that prayer for our persecuted brothers and sisters has really strengthened the faith of our congregation. It will strengthen your church as well!

INTERESTED IN GETTING YOUR CHURCH INVOLVED?
CONTACT CONNECT@ODUSA.ORG FOR MORE INFORMATION.
Real prayer requests now in real-time.

THE REIMAGINED OPEN DOORS PRAYER APP™

DOWNLOAD BY TEXTING ‘PRAYER’ to 32500

The Open Doors Prayer App™ has been redesigned with more urgent prayers, needs and tools to help stay connected with your persecuted family.