More than conquerers

How Christians in India are following Jesus—despite a high cost
You can be there through the Open Doors Frontline Partner monthly giving program.

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

BE THERE FOR PERSECUTED CHRISTIANS, NO MATTER WHAT.

By joining the Frontline Partner program through Open Doors, you’ll join the largest on-the-ground network of support for persecuted Christians in the world.

VISIT OPENDOORSUSA.ORG/PRESENCE-FLP TO SIGN UP TODAY.
How a woman named Kirti lost everything—except her hope in Jesus

What persecution really looks like
A firsthand account of the reality of persecution from an Open Doors field worker

Features

14
An unshakeable faith in India
How a woman named Kirti lost everything—except her hope in Jesus

22
What persecution really looks like
A firsthand account of the reality of persecution from an Open Doors field worker

Departments

4
Point of View
‘The risk is always there’

6
Impact Report
How you are changing lives

9
Persecution Watch

12
Ask a Persecution Expert
How do Christians who are persecuted by the government obey the command to submit?

13
Updates from Capitol Hill from Issac Six

24
Spotlights
People who help through their time and talents

25
1 Question
‘What’s your favorite Bible verse when you’re afraid?’

26
Devotional
A monthly reflection on God’s goodness, and what He’s teaching through Scripture and the witness of the persecuted church
‘The risk is always there’

By Robert Kenna

I’m sitting with Rajesh* in a small, abandoned house in a remote location. A small gecko crawls up the ceiling and outside we hear the sounds of birds. The floor is gray and the chipped paint on the walls shows layers of white, cream and orchid pink. The late-morning sun spills in from a small window next to Rajesh and casts light across the side of his face—illuminating only half of his smile.

Rajesh works with persecuted Christians in India, and he tells me about his experiences. On one of his first trips to visit persecuted believers, Rajesh visited a pastor in a remote village who had been beaten for his faith. When he arrived to meet this pastor, Rajesh was shocked: The pastor was smiling. “That pastor was badly beaten, but he was not in pain,” Rajesh says. “That was amazing for me to see. That was my first encounter with someone who was directly persecuted.”

But when Rajesh left the pastor’s home, it was clear something wasn’t right. All the people in the village were looking at Rajesh, and the others with him, as if they did something wrong. Then the pastor said: “Please leave now. As quick as you can!”

Rajesh’s heart started pumping. They got in the car, pulled out and drove away. When they reached a ravine, there were 20 young men on motorbikes blocking their way. Rajesh’s driver kept on the gas and somehow maneuvered around the bikes, but the young men chased them.

“They wanted to stop us and beat us,” Rajesh says, “and they chased us for around 10 kilometers. And the entire time our prayer was, ‘Lord, please be with us.’”

By God’s grace, Rajesh and the others escaped. And when he arrived home, Rajesh had a special message for his wife: “This is the ministry the Lord has called us to.”

For Rajesh, the work he does is a labor of love for Christ. “It is just a joy to serve the persecuted church,” Rajesh adds, his smile spreading across his face and catching the light. “Because when you serve the persecuted church, you actually serve the Lord.”

As we finish our conversation, Rajesh sings a special song for us in Hindi: “I Have Decided.” The familiar hymn has a rich Indian history. “It was birthed out of persecution,” Rajesh says, “and it’s very meaningful to Christians in India.”

Rajesh tilts his head toward the ceiling and his voice fills the space.

“I have decided to follow Jesus;
I have decided to follow Jesus;
I have decided to follow Jesus;
No turning back, no turning back.

The room is still for moments after he finishes the hymn. “If you love the Lord and live your life,” Rajesh adds, “the risk is always there. But God is always there to support us. God is always there to encourage us.”
“It is just a joy to serve the persecuted church.”
Impact Report:
Each issue, see how your support and prayers are changing lives around the world!

INDIA
Coronavirus relief

Open Doors partners delivered this critical emergency aid to believers in India impacted by the coronavirus pandemic. Many church leaders told Open Doors they heard from Christians that they were starving and desperate due to the crisis; this emergency aid provided a month or two worth of food for each family.
Recently, Open Doors helped with a number of projects in Syria. One of these is the dental clinic of Dr. Berj Haddidian. He used to have a clinic in Aleppo, but everything was stolen by Islamic radicals during the Syrian civil war. “I had a clinic in the Al Hulluk area,” he says. “It was occupied by extremists. I saw videos of them in my clinic; they broke and damaged everything, then made it a center for medical care of the injured members of their group.”

But then with the help of a Center of Hope—a local church supported by Open Doors to serve as a beacon of hope for God’s people in Iraq and Syria—he bought the equipment he needed to begin his practice again. “It has been 20 years since I’ve graduated, now I feel independent for the first time,” Dr. Haddidian says. “I waited for so long, but I always repeat this verse: ‘For they that wait for Me shall not be put to shame.’”

He says: “I would thank the Center of Hope because it is truly what it is called: They gave me hope. I was depressed after my clinic was taken. Now I feel joy and happiness every time I open or close the clinic. I thank God because this support has lifted me up high after I was at a low point in my life.”

Aman* from Sudan got to know Jesus when he was 23. Persecution followed soon. His life was in danger as his family tried to force him back to Islam. Aman needed to run. Thankfully he found safety with Christians where he could undergo discipleship. Supported by Open Doors, his new home offered him an opportunity to study the Bible, spend time in prayer, fellowship with others, undergo discipleship and receive timely encouragement. Through your gifts and prayers, Open Doors was also able to support Aman in the establishment of a small business.

But at some point, police found out about the church’s ministry to others. At the height of the changes the country was going through, police ransacked their home and locked Aman up with other converts from Islam. “I was in prison for 17 days because I had become a Christian,” Aman says. “It was difficult, but while I was there, I learned to be patient.”

Upon his release, Aman discovered he had once more lost everything. Open Doors, through the local church, continues to offer lifesaving support in the form of a roof over his head and discipleship. Thanks to the investment, his faith remains unshaken and he continues to share the hope of Christ with others around him.
Please continue to pray for the survivors of the Jolo Cathedral bombing in 2019. In the attack, 20 Christians were killed and more than 100 people injured when Islamic extremists set off two bombs. Thanks to your prayers and support, a team of Open Doors partners were able to carry out a trauma debriefing session with some of the survivors.

Laura* was one of the Christians who attended. “Maybe if I was not debriefed, I don’t think I know what would happen to me,” she said. “It seemed that I would go crazy thinking why they did it. I am thankful that we were given the chance to let out our burdens. When we heard that there would be a trauma debriefing, I told my mother I wouldn’t join, as I was feeling OK already. But she told me that I may seem OK, but deep inside, there are still wounds. Now that I have joined the debriefing, I feel so relieved.”

She asks for our continued prayers for her and the other survivors. “Please pray directly to God that we will be healed and that the anger inside my heart towards the people who did this will be gone,” she says. “Because, honestly, it is very hard to forgive, especially if many people were hurt and died. These people molded me in church. They were the ones I am with in the cathedral every day to pray, but then you suddenly see them lifeless.”

Pastor Roshan is the pastor of Zion Church in Batticaloa, Sri Lanka. On Easter Sunday 2019, a suicide bomber attacked Zion Church, killing more than 30 people and injuring 100 more. Pastor Roshan was traveling out of the country at the time, but returned to a grieving church filled with devastated people. But they still sought God in the midst of their trauma.

An Open Doors team had the chance to meet with Pastor Roshan during a recent trip to Sri Lanka. He shared his memories of that difficult time, about the resilience of Zion’s members, the vision God has planted in his heart and the support he has felt from believers around the world.

Pastor Roshan told our team: “I want to start by saying thank you. Sri Lanka has forgotten us, but you haven’t. Every word shared has been encouraging. Thank you for coming.”

Pastor Roshan gives thanks to Open Doors and believers like you for coming alongside Zion Church and shining a light in such dark times.

He asked us to share a message with you: “Hi, dear friends. I want to take this opportunity to thank each one of you. I don’t know you personally, but the Lord knows you. In our time of lacking, we had nobody on our side. You all came by our side. Challenges and needs were overwhelming, but God used you. He put a burden in your heart to help us. Every cent you committed has reached us. Pastor Sunil [an Open Doors local partner] has visited us many times, counseling us, helping us. Keep doing good. Only when we are alive we can do something. Jesus will come soon. When you can do something, you do it. Don’t hesitate. Do it now. Do it via Open Doors. It reaches us.”
**Persecution Watch**

**WHAT’S HAPPENING WITH GOD’S PEOPLE, STANDING STRONG FOR HIM IN PLACES WHERE FOLLOWING JESUS CAN COST THE MOST**

**IRAN**

*Serving neighbors in the midst of a pandemic*

As the rest of the world battled the coronavirus this spring, Iran was often in the news as it was the first Middle Eastern center of the pandemic. Though the numbers coming out of the country were high, experts believe the real numbers are higher, as many of the reported cases were government employees. A house church leader told Open Doors: “We are dying here and no one seems to care. A lot of people around us fall ill and end up in hospitals or are dying.”

Despite the difficult situation, Iranian Christians chose to follow Jesus and serve their neighbors. One church leader says: “We used to mobilize volunteers to make sandwiches and feed the street children who try to earn a little to support their families on empty stomachs. But, after the coronavirus outbreak, we had to prioritize provision of masks and sanitizing gels to help them stay safe.”

Another house-church leader stated: “We are doing all we can to provide food packages for the elderly and vulnerable who are unable to go out these days or for those who have lost their job in these difficult circumstances. Throughout the year we shared the good news of Christ with our neighbors and community; now we have a chance to be good news.”

*Names changed for security reasons*

**PLEASE PRAY FOR THE CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY IN IRAN AS THEY HELP THEIR COUNTRY NAVIGATE THE CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC AND ITS AFTERMATH. PRAY THEY WOULD HAVE COURAGE AND FAITH.*

**SRI LANKA**

*Seeking justice for the Easter Sunday bombings*

Almost a year after three suicide bombers blew themselves up in three churches packed with believers attending Easter Sunday services in Sri Lanka, in late March, Sri Lankan police finally arrested the handler of the bomber of one of the churches. Several suspects had been arrested and the investigation dragged on for months, but those responsible for the attacks were yet to be apprehended.

Following the arrest, two investigations were launched. One was to investigate if this arrested suspect had connections with the other two bombers (St. Anthony’s Church and St. Sebastian’s Church). The second investigation was to find out if the previous investigating team had deliberately left out some statements when they presented the evidence, covering up for the people behind these attacks.

A field worker shared: “It bothers me to think that while people were devastated and mourned their loved ones, the people responsible were free to roam the streets and live their lives for almost a year. This news brings back all the hurt and frustration we felt last year. But at least they’re making progress with the investigation now.”

Our local partner Sunil shared his thoughts on the matter: “Secrets can never be hidden for too long. I am confident God will pave the way to bring justice.”

*PLEASE PRAY FOR SRI LANKAN BELIEVERS AS THEY CONTINUE TO HEAL AND SEEK JOY AFTER SO MANY PEOPLE WERE KILLED ON EASTER SUNDAY 2019. PRAY THEY WOULD BE ABLE TO TAKE CARE OF THEMSELVES AND ONE ANOTHER, AND THAT THEY WOULD BE ABLE TO FEEL GOD’S PEACE AND GRACE IN THEIR MIDST.*
Recently, an Egyptian Christian young man named Romany Adly was killed, allegedly by Islamic militants, in Libya. Romany left Egypt in 2014 after the death of his father and traveled to Libya to find work to help support his mother and siblings. He used to communicate with his family daily. But suddenly, the communication stopped. The family tried to find out what happened to Romany and contacted Libyan authorities.

Two months later, they had an answer: According to the family, Libyan authorities told them Romany was kidnapped and killed by a terrorist group. They had tortured him to make him convert to Islam, but when he didn’t renounce his faith, they killed him.

His body was returned to Egypt in March and buried in his family’s cemetery. The devastating death of Romany shows how precarious the situation is in Libya for believers—Libyan and foreign alike.

PRAY WITH US FOR ROMANY’S FAMILY AND FOR THE COMMUNITY HE LEAVES BEHIND. PRAY FOR THEIR COMFORT AND PEACE. PRAY ALSO FOR LIBYA, THAT ORDER WOULD BE RESTORED THERE AND THAT EXTREMISTS WOULD BE STOPPED FROM COMMITTING ACTS OF VIOLENCE—AND WOULD FIND THE TRUTH OF JESUS.

A recent report from Open Doors found over 43,000 Christians in India experienced some form of severe persecution for their faith in 2019. There were 43,392 Christians involved in 825 recorded incidents across the year, ranging from social isolation by communities to disrupted church meetings, all the way to beatings, sexual abuse and murder. These are just the firsthand incidents of severe persecution reported to Open Doors’ local partners on the ground and likely represent only the tip of the iceberg when it comes to persecution against Christians in India.

Open Doors’ local partners received reports of 1,670 Christians in India being affected by physical attacks because of their faith in 2019, including 439 children; eight Christians were murdered. Of the eight Christians who were killed, one was a woman. She was killed by her brother-in-law because of her faith.

These stunning figures show the reality of life for believers in the second-most populous country in the world. Please continue to pray for and support your brothers and sisters in India as they seek to follow Jesus even in the midst of violence.

PRAY FOR INDIAN BELIEVERS AS THEY SEEK TO STAND STRONG FOR JESUS IN THE MIDST OF SUCH HEARTBREAKING VIOLENCE AND DEVASTATION.
In early February 2020, villagers in a remote tribal village in northern Laos woke up to an announcement from the village chief to come out of their houses with their hammers, knives and guns, and prepare to destroy the houses of three Christian families who were living in the village. The chief added that whoever refused to join would pay a fine.

While their homes were being destroyed, the believers who owned the houses asked the village chief and the committee why they were destroying their houses and who the order came from. The believers told the village authority that it is against Decree 315, or the Law on Freedom of Religion, of the country.

The village chief replied, “We know that it is stated in Decree 315 that you have the right and freedom to believe in whatever religion, but we are greater than the law.”

A few days after the incident, the believers went to the Home Affairs office to meet with the officers but were ignored. Two days later, they were called by the village chief for a meeting and asked if they would denounce their faith. But the believers refused to deny Jesus.

Immediately, the village chief called the villagers once again and they continued to demolish the believers’ houses. A truck also came to send these tribal believers to a rice field where they were forced to pitch makeshift tents as their shelters.

Open Doors worked with the local church to assess their situation and to work on the best possible intervention to be provided to these displaced believers.

JOIN US IN PRAYER FOR CHRISTIANS IN LAOS, PARTICULARLY THOSE WHO LIVE IN AREAS WHERE THEIR FAITH MAKES THEM TARGETS FOR SEVERE ABUSE AND VIOLENCE. PRAY THEY WOULD FEEL GOD’S STRENGTH AND THAT THEY WOULD FIND FAIRNESS AND JUSTICE FROM AUTHORITIES.
The passage of Scripture that persecuted Christians use more than any other for this tricky relationship is the words of Jesus recorded in Matthew 22:21: *Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s.*

There are three principles they use:

1. **The Caesar principle.** Is the government asking for something that is only due to God? For example, in North Korea the government asks you to worship at the cult of the Kim dynasty. That’s a clear case of Caesar asking for what is purely due to God.

   Nevertheless, how you do express this? There are Christians who say, “OK, we will not bow in the civic ceremonies to the massive statues of Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Il.” They get taken away to the labor camps. But other Christians say, “I’ll bow down as an expression of respect but not of worship—that goes to God alone.”

2. **The ethics principle.** This is where the state forbids Christians do what is right within their fellowships.

   When the coronavirus shutdown occurred in Wuhan, China, earlier this year, the government forbade everyone to feed the vulnerable and the elderly. But house churches—when they saw the elderly would starve because the government was not delivering food—rebelled and said, “We will deliver food to our brothers and sisters who are elderly or vulnerable because our Christian duty is to love one another.” So, they delivered food packages to their elderly members in defiance of government directives. Yes, they were careful. They left the packages outside. They disinfected them. But they would not allow the government to tell them they had to let their own precious members starve.

3. **The pressure principle.** This is when the state must be pushed to do what is right. In India today, when a pastor is beaten up or a church burned, the government apparatus will do nothing. The police won’t even come because the government comprises Hindu extremists who are careful to look the other way when Christians are persecuted.

   But Christians organize to force the government to—in the words of Romans 13—be a “terror” to bad conduct. They file first information reports; they force the police to attend to the scene; they employ lawyers; they try to make the Indian state enforce justice. It’s hard work, but they see their role as Christians as forcing the government to govern well.

   Caesar is always looking for worship. But only God deserves it. That’s where the persecuted live. And they put their lives at risk to tell Caesar he is not God. Every day!
A couple years ago, I was sitting across from a colleague venting my frustrations at what seemed like the endless amount of religious persecution taking place around the world. People were suffering, I said, and our work was moving too slowly. We had to try harder. He looked at me, acknowledged my frustration and went on to say something I’ll never forget: “This work is generational.”

I’ve thought about that often since. Sometimes, history seems to change in a moment. A pastor facing years in prison for his faith is suddenly released. A country that persecuted the church for decades quickly changes course and begins to build religious freedom, as Sudan appears to be doing this year.

Yet those of us advocating and praying for these breakthroughs know better. We know these changes took tremendous effort, sometimes by many people for many years, before any breakthrough was seen. We also know that in many places, we have yet to see the breakthrough for which we have been praying and advocating.

Take North Korea for example. Prayer, advocacy and efforts to bring relief to those suffering under North Korea’s brutal government have been ongoing almost since the country was founded in 1948. The advocacy that Open Doors USA does for the people of North Korea now is a continuation of the efforts started two generations ago. We all hope and pray this won’t be the case, but it’s possible that this advocacy will have to continue into the next generation, and perhaps the one after that.

Does this mean we should give up? No. In fact, it means precisely the opposite. The realization that our work is generational teaches us to set our sights far ahead, even as we work daily to bring relief to those who need it now.

Think how the world might look today if all the faithful who came before had not persevered in their work. Would the Soviet Union still stand and be closed to the gospel? Would the tens of thousands coming to know Jesus in the Middle East have ever heard the good news if not for those who risked everything bring it to them?
AN UNSHAKEABLE FAITH in India

By Robert Kenna

How a woman named Kirti lost everything—except her hope in Jesus
Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?
Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? As it is written: “For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.” No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.

ROMANS 8:35–37

In India, it’s said there are millions of gods; although, no one has an exact count. Worshipers often travel to ancient temples to make small sacrifices and mark themselves with a *talika*—a mixture of ash, clay, turmeric or sandalwood—across their foreheads as a religious symbol.
Kirti rejected the Hindu gods and now she follows “a foreign god” ... Jesus.

However, within the second-most populous country in the world, millions of people are finding the one, true God—and their lives are never the same. These new believers are not marked with a talika on the foreheads but with the love of Christ on their hearts.

One of these believers is named Kirti.* Or, at least that’s what I’ll call her. I need to keep her real name a secret so she doesn’t become a target for violence. That’s the reality for many Christians in India.

The day I meet Kirti is sunny, and the Indian sunlight caroms off the waving leaves in the Banyan trees above. Kirti wears a rose-colored sari with a gold shirt. She softly places her hands across her knees as she speaks—nodding and often smiling. Her story is one of loss and deep suffering for Christ, but there’s a lightness to her presence.

Kirti, a young mother in rural India, is one of the Hindu people who found the one, true God among the millions in her country. She turned from her Hindu gods to follow Jesus while attending a church service away from her village. As with many Christians in India, God miraculously healed Kirti from a debilitating disease at a worship service.

Although it would have been hard to anticipate the coming persecution, her conversion moment rooted her in Christ—with a deep assurance—and forever marked her faith.

Confronted by the village elders
When Kirti returned to her village, it only took a week for word to spread in subtle whispers—Kirti rejected the Hindu gods and now she follows “a foreign god” ... Jesus.

In a village like Kirti’s, the Hindu religion is part of the community fabric, and to go against the religion brings great risk and possible expulsion—or even death. The people in the village see this kind of conversion as an apostacy that could anger the gods and bring calamity and misfortune to the entire village. Therefore, rejection of the Hindu faith must be dealt with swiftly and boldly.

It wasn’t long before Kirti was called before the elders—along with the few other Christians in her community—to a special gathering. Everyone in the village was present.

“They called us to the meeting and told me to stand in the middle,” Kirti shares. “They told us to stop going to church or they would beat us.”

Some of the Christians agreed to stop worshiping out of fear, but Kirti’s family refused to deny Jesus. Frustrated with Kirti’s perseverance, the village elders told her to go home and come back the next day. In three consecutive meetings, the elders told Kirti to deny her new God and return to the Hindu faith ... or else.

“But we said we will not stop believing in Christ,” Kirti says. However, at a later meeting the villagers brought bamboo sticks and threatened violence. It was at this moment, out of fear, that Kirti and her husband said they would stop meeting with their church.
But the faith in their hearts was too large to keep that promise. Soon, they started a secret gathering in their house on Sundays. The few Christians gathered to pray and sing—quietly—and soon a pastor from another village started to lead them. Through their prayers, a young man was healed.

But in a small village, it’s difficult to keep anything a secret for long. This healing received the attention of the elders, and they brought the young man to a meeting for questioning—similar to the blind man who was healed by Jesus in John 9.

The elders didn’t like his answers, so they beat him and gathered a mob to confront the believers at Kirti’s house.

Like the rest of the world, India has been deeply impacted by the coronavirus pandemic this year. When the Prime Minister issued a lockdown for the country in late March, he did so with very little warning. This left millions of people—mostly poor workers and day laborers—scrambling to get home and fill basic needs.

Christians were not spared from this reality. Tara* is a Christian in a poor part of India who spoke to Open Doors. “We don’t have enough to feed our children,” she said this Spring. “I can’t watch them starve and we cannot go to our parents. Please, kindly do something to support the Body of Christ.”

When Open Doors heard these stories, we leapt into action. We immediately worked with local partners to deliver food kits and emergency aid to Christians who were in dire need. When the future of the church is at stake due to hunger, it’s part of our DNA to make sure we help Christians continue to be salt and light in their communities.

We worked with partners on the ground across Asia—including India, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and elsewhere—to deliver 20,000 food kits before the start of summer, and developed a strategic network to ensure these deliveries continue as long as they’re needed.

When we hear God’s people in need, we are committed to answer that need, no matter what. Our coronavirus relief efforts are part of that; emergency aid like this shows that, even in a global pandemic, we are one Church, one family.

To find out how you can help with ongoing coronavirus relief, visit OpenDoorsUSA.org.
They started a secret gathering in their house on Sundays. The few Christians gathered to pray and sing—quietly—and soon a pastor from another village started to lead them. Through their prayers, a young man was healed.

‘This is what you get for following Jesus’

“The mob came into my house,” Kirti says. “They searched for my Bible. They threatened to kill me if I continued to worship Jesus.”

Then the crowd dragged the Christians out of Kirti’s house and began beating them. “They were beating us with sticks, kicking and punching us mercilessly,” Kirti remembers.

While they were beating Kirti, they told her it was her fault all the village people were becoming Christians. They also kept yelling, “Leave Jesus!” at the Christians over and over.

The mob eventually found Kirti’s Bible, lit it on fire and burned it in front of her. Then they ransacked the house and stole all of her food—rice, wheat and vegetables—and even took her chickens and goats.

All the while, Kirti kept praying, “Lord, save us if you want to save us!”

Eventually, the mob got tired and left. Then, the elders made an announcement through a loudspeaker telling everyone in the village to come for a feast. It was there they cooked Kirti’s food and animals and shared it with all the villagers.
They literally ate her livelihood. “This is what you get for following Jesus,” they said.
All the Christians were injured, but Kirti received the worst of it with a broken back—something that still hinders her today. They were all rushed to the hospital where Kirti stayed for over two weeks in recovery. It was at this moment that Open Doors heard about Kirti and the Christians in her village and, through partners, helped pay the medical bills and provided spiritual care and support for the small number of courageous Christians in her village.
**Taken away at night**
When Kirti and her husband returned to their home, everyone in the village stopped talking to them and refused to let them draw water from the village well.

“‘I used to draw water secretly at midnight,’” Kirti says.

The believers in the village kept quiet for a while, but slowly a few Christians began stopping by Kirti’s home again for prayer. It was a dangerous act of defiance and when the elders heard their beatings and public shaming didn’t stop the believers from following Jesus, they were infuriated.

---

**“I pray for the salvation of my village.”**

So, late one night, a group of men carrying ropes surrounded Kirti’s home. They knocked on the door, rushed in and grabbed Kirti’s husband by force. Kirti tried to stop them—“‘Where are you taking my husband?’” she screamed—but the men ignored her cries, pushed her back in the house and locked her in her own home. Kirti yelled for help, but it would be hours before the other Christians in her village heard her and unlocked the door.

**A remote burial**
The men who took her husband tortured him in unthinkable ways for days. Kirti tried to
find him, and when she finally did, he didn’t recognize her. He was taken away and murdered. Kirti was only a short distance away and heard his cries. Then the men allowed Kirti and a few other Christians to take him. There were no arrests or prosecutions for her husband’s killers.

Once she returned home, the village leaders refused to allow her to bury her husband in the village cemetery. So Kirti took her husband’s body to a plot of land outside of the village and buried him there. A few other Christians joined her for a small ceremony.

The safe house
After this devastating event, Kirti left the village with her children for a safe house. During her time at the safe house, Open Doors partners helped Kirti and her children with food supplies, clothing, blankets, financial support and spiritual care. Her injuries prevent her from working, and she continues to be in great danger.

“You helped me financially and because of your help, my kids are attending school,” Kirti shares.

Through incredible suffering and loss, Kirti’s faith is still unshakeable. “I have committed everything into the hands of Jesus,” Kirti says. “When I feel sad, I remember the Word of God. In all my trials, He helps me. I cannot read or write, but I memorize what the pastor teaches me. Because of attacks, many new Christians are leaving the faith, but I’m stable in my faith. Thanks to your care and love, I’m still alive and a follower of Jesus today.”

But Kirti is not out of danger and her needs are still great, along with thousands of other Christians like Kirti—countless men, women, young adults and children—who have made the commitment to follow Jesus in a Hindu world.

As of today, Kirti has returned to her village to be a light for Christ once again.

“The people in my village want to chase me out,” she says. “[They] often threaten to kill me. [But] I pray for the salvation of my village, and I believe that my village will receive that salvation.”

Visit youtube.com/OpenDoorsUSA to watch Kirti’s story and to hear her powerful testimony.

*Photos and names have been kept anonymous to ensure security*
Let me tell you a secret: Persecuted Christians are human beings.

While this might not come as a surprise to you, think about it: How often do we romanticize the lives of persecuted Christians? Are you ever jealous of how God seems to intervene in every detail of their lives, and find yourself wishing you trusted God as much as they do? I know I do! But what I have also learned as I’ve traveled to the persecuted church is that the reality of persecution is dark—and it remains pitch black if you don’t light the fire of God’s presence.

There’s one visit I will never forget. The sun was already setting on the cornfields of rural Egypt when I reached the house of a boy who witnessed his father killed for his faith. When I shook the hand of Mina, 11 years old at the time, the empty look in his eyes struck me. His mother told me he had been too scared to even go to the bathroom alone.

I still regularly see Mina’s eyes in my mind. And when I do, it makes me sad. His pain was real and there was no easy solution. No angels came down from Heaven, chanting, “All will be OK.” It was dark; so dark that Mina didn’t seem to be aware of God’s love and care for him. Sometimes, all we can do is pray. Sometimes you don’t get answers. And so, I pray for Mina.

It is such an amazing relief for me when I do see a different picture—when I see how Christians discover God’s presence in the midst of darkness.

Let me take you back to 2015. The Islamic extremists of ISIS had just invaded the Nineveh Plains in Iraq, and thousands of Christians had fled to a safer region. As a field worker, I regularly traveled to Iraq and spoke with church leaders and refugees. Seeing all the misery of the believers there touched me deeply.

One afternoon, I visited a neighborhood in which several Christian families shared houses. A group of nuns and monks managed the refugee camp. The houses looked great from outside, but entering them I noticed the cracks in the walls and saw the discomfort of the thin mattresses on the floor.

A girl living in one of the houses told me how there were a lot of fights among neighbors, how youngsters were bored out of their minds and how frustrated spouses were by the lack of privacy. Here, again, the darkness of persecution was immediately visible.
That evening, after a packed service in a portable cabin church, the nuns and monks who led the camp invited me for tea. And that’s when I noticed something strange: in such a difficult situation, I had expected exhausted faces, depressed conversations. After all, they weren’t only caring for people in a miserable situation, hearing their complaints, dealing with their anger—they themselves were displaced, as well.

But what I saw wasn’t anger or exhaustion. Instead, I saw laughter, joy and, most of all, peace. I don’t remember the exact words they said to me, but I do remember the way they said it—full of Jesus’ love. Every part of them seemed to radiate it. And I was forever changed.

In the taxi ride back to where I was staying, I felt the glow of peace and love. I could have sung hallelujah all the way back to the hotel. I had never met people so full of Jesus. How could it be that I met the most full-of-Jesus people in such a miserable situation?

Then I realized that prayer was the basis of their religious lifestyle. They lit the fire of God’s presence in their lives in a very simple way: They prayed. Not once, not twice, but constantly. They didn’t need to be because they knew a God bigger than any superhero: the Creator of Heaven and Earth, our risen Lord Jesus Christ.

Persecuted Christians are human beings. And this is good news, because the amazing stories we hear about them don’t have anything to do with their capacities. Their stories ely and focus on their God. And just as He is there for them, He is there for you and me. So, I encourage you to spend time with God; seek His light in your darkness. You might get answers, you might not. You might “feel it,” you might not. But you will receive one thing for sure: His presence.

“They knew a God bigger than any superhero”
Egypt holds a very special place in my heart and prayers. First, I was impacted by the attacks on dozens of churches in August 2013. Second, the persecution became even more real in early 2015, when 20 Coptic Christians and one Ghanaian Christian were beheaded in Libya. The following Sunday, my wife and I mourned and prayed with our brothers and sisters at the Coptic Church in Seattle.

**WHAT’S A PLACE YOU HAVE A HEART FOR?**

Egypt holds a very special place in my heart and prayers. First, I was impacted by the attacks on dozens of churches in August 2013. Second, the persecution became even more real in early 2015, when 20 Coptic Christians and one Ghanaian Christian were beheaded in Libya. The following Sunday, my wife and I mourned and prayed with our brothers and sisters at the Coptic Church in Seattle.

**HOW DO YOU SERVE THE PERSECUTED CHURCH THROUGH OPEN DOORS?**

The Lord has opened doors into schools, mission conferences, churches across denominational lines and into a host of diaspora church communities. It is a tremendous joy and a great privilege to share and join in worship with brothers and sisters who have suffered for their faith in Christ.

**WHAT’S ONE PLACE WHERE YOU REALLY HAVE A HEART FOR THE PERSECUTED CHURCH?**

My biggest concern is for North Korea. I pray for those persecuted and the many Christians in prisons and labor camps. I pray for Open Doors teams in China as they work with North Korean believers who are able to escape.

**WHAT ENCOURAGEMENT WOULD YOU OFFER OTHERS WHO MIGHT BE INTERESTED IN GIVING, SERVING OR VOLUNTEERING WITH OPEN DOORS?**

If they can, I’d encourage people to give money to organizations that spread God’s message of His salvation around the world, in the most restricted places. The main thing I want to say is to support the work of God’s forgiveness.
1 Question

WHAT’S YOUR FAVORITE BIBLE VERSE WHEN YOU’RE AFRAID?

Aadan*
Open Doors worker, East Africa
Acts 18:10 “For I am with you, and no man shall set on thee to hurt thee; for I have much people in this city.”

Rashad*
North Africa
“Lamentations 3, the whole chapter but especially 19–26; these are words directly from the heart, I have experienced this several times.”

Amara
Palestinian territories
Psalm 23:4 “Yes, though I go through the valley of deep shade, I will have no fear of evil; for you are with me, your rod and your support are my comfort.”

Salman*
Arabian Peninsula
“I recite Psalm 23 when I am afraid or anxious. Remembering this Psalm helps me during fearful times.”

Joshua
Open Doors team leader in West Africa
“John 14:1 has helped me a lot. ‘Let not your heart be troubled: you believe in God, believe also in Me.’”

Natalie
Palestinian territories
Psalm 23:4 “Yes, though I go through the valley of deep shade, I will have no fear of evil; for you are with me, your rod and your support are my comfort.”

Fredd Petrossian
2 Timothy 1:7 “God has not given us the spirit of fear but spirit of power, love and self-discipline.”

Zámbó Dalma
Jeremiah 29:11 “For I know the plans I have for you, declares the LORD, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope.”

Vera Weston-Draper
Isaiah 41:10 “So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God.”

David Susan
Syria
“My favorite verse when I’m afraid is John 16:33. ‘I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.’”

Marjani*
Open Doors Researcher, East Africa
Isaiah 50:7 “Because the Sovereign Lord helps me, I will not be disgraced. Therefore have I set my face like flint, and I know I will not be put to shame.”

George
Palestinian territories
Psalm 55:22 “Put your cares on the Lord, and he will be your support; he will not let the upright man be moved.”

Kabyl*
North Africa
2 Corinthians 12:9 “But He said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for My power is made perfect in weakness.’”

Fannie Mae
Open Doors Researcher, East Africa
“Psalm 16:8 ‘I know the Lord is always with me. I will not be shaken, for He is right beside me.’”

Latif*
North Africa
Psalm 27:1 “The Lord is my light and my salvation—whom shall I fear?”

Sally
Palestinian territories
Colossians 1:17 “He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.”

Mart Jacobsen
Open Doors worker, South Africa
Isaiah 41:10 “So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God.”

Fred Petrossian
2 Timothy 1:7 “God has not given us the spirit of fear but spirit of power, love and self-discipline.”

Kabyl*
North Africa
2 Corinthians 12:9 “But He said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for My power is made perfect in weakness.’”

David Susan
Syria
“My favorite verse when I’m afraid is John 16:33. ‘I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.’”

Zámbó Dalma
Jeremiah 29:11 “For I know the plans I have for you, declares the LORD, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope.”

Sally
Palestinian territories
Colossians 1:17 “He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.”

George
Palestinian territories
Psalm 55:22 “Put your cares on the Lord, and he will be your support; he will not let the upright man be moved.”

Vera Weston-Draper
Isaiah 41:10 “So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God.”

Kabyl*
North Africa
2 Corinthians 12:9 “But He said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for My power is made perfect in weakness.’”

Sally
Palestinian territories
Colossians 1:17 “He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.”

Amora*
Open Doors field communicator, Central Africa
Psalm 91:1 “He who dwells in the secret place of the Most High, shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty.”
Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith.
— Hebrews 12:1–3

Rupa* is a young Indian believer who was rejected by her father when she felt a call to serve in church. She’s been cut off from him, and he forbids her mother and siblings from talking to her. But this young believer is quick to rely on God’s promises.

When asked about what helps her to keep going, Rupa instantly quotes Isaiah 49:15–16, which says: “Can a mother forget the baby at her breast and have no compassion on the child she has borne? Though she may forget, I will not forget you! See, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands.” Rupa explains, “These verses assure me that even though people may leave me, my God will not leave or forsake me.

“I have to run the race that is set for me, even if there are obstacles. I am inspired by the life of Paul, especially what he says in Philippians 3:13–14. ‘One thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.’”

How can we follow in the faithful footsteps of our Indian sister Rupa?

*Name changed to preserve security
Give a gift that keeps on giving!

Many Christians desire to leave a legacy that will help their favorite charities, like Open Doors—and leave a Christian testimony when they pass on.

Here’s how

Simply name Open Doors as a beneficiary of your assets or estate. You’ll have the joy of leaving a gift for persecuted Christians, and you’ll also save on estate and income taxes. It’s a wonderful way to support your persecuted sisters and brothers, and to secure your financial future.

For more information, please contact Karen Schneider at 800-659-5965, visit OpenDoorsUSA.org/Planned Giving or email her at karens@odusa.org
Text PRAYER to 32500
to download the Pray for the Persecuted App from Open Doors

Message and data rates may apply