FRONTLINE FAITH
Sharing The Inside Story Of The Persecuted Church

4 The Cost Of Following Jesus In India  /  6 A Lesson In Hope And Loss  /  10 Help The Indian Church Thrive
Welcome to another edition of Frontline Faith. I’m really excited for this edition. It’s all about India. But to be honest, it’s a place that I’ve always wrestled with.

India is the country in which I was born, from which I was adopted when I was six months old. It’s the country which played a huge role in my past, but I was never really sure if I wanted it to play a role in my future.

The cost of following Jesus in India is increasing rapidly. We hear stories of threats, destruction and attacks with increasing frequency.

But alongside this, we hear incredible stories of Indian believers following Jesus, no matter the cost. Their bold courage and selflessness in times of trouble astounds me.

An Unexpected Response

We ask you to pray for your persecuted brothers and sisters all the time, but did you know that they pray for you, too?

I’ll never forget gathering with a large group of Indian Christians, who were personally facing things that I could never imagine going through myself, and yet when they prayed, they prayed for their brothers and sisters in Iraq, Syria, North Korea, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa and Denmark.

They prayed for those who were persecuting them – the very people at whose hands they were suffering. This is the global Church at its best. And it’s so humbling.

When we go through tough times, we are often tempted to shut down and think internally. Yet our Indian brothers and sisters think externally; in the midst of suffering and violence and pressure, they pray for you, the body of Christ.

They are not deterred by the things that try to stop them from following Jesus but pursue faithfulness in spite of them.

In that moment, I was struck more than ever by the forces of darkness conspiring to keep over 1 billion Indian people from knowing the truth of Jesus. I was convicted of my personal stake in sharing the gospel with a renewed zeal.

The Heart Of The Persecuted Church

Throughout my 10 years at Open Doors, the persecuted church have become some of my most valued mentors. Every Christian is trying to figure out how to follow Jesus in this world. And we were never meant to do it alone.

We are in this fight, this body, this Church together. So, read on, and I guarantee that these stories of courageous faith will inspire and convict you to keep writing and telling your own.

Mike Gore
CEO Open Doors Australia and New Zealand

Disclaimer — You may notice that none of the photos in this issue show anyone’s face. We can’t show you these Christians’ faces because we cannot risk revealing their identities – being discovered as a Christian in India by the authorities is immensely dangerous.
The Cost Of Following Jesus In India

Life is not easy for Christians in India. Every year, persecution is rising and violent attacks increase. Believers are suffering for their faith more than ever.

According to the 2019 World Watch List, India is the 10th most dangerous country to follow Jesus. But in the midst of discrimination and extremism, Christians in India are following Jesus, no matter the cost.

Worth Dying For

Indian society is characterised by the caste system. This system categorises people into hierarchical groups. You cannot choose your caste, but are born into it.

Some groups are so despised that they are excluded from society altogether. They are known as “Untouchables” and are treated as sub-humans. They usually live in the most undeveloped areas and struggle to access education and employment.

Most Christians come from lower castes or these “Untouchable” groups, and experience additional discrimination.

But when a member of one of these tribes encounters Jesus, they discover the God who loves them, who transcends all earthly hierarchies and who says they are worth dying for.

Rupesh* is one of these believers.

After he and his wife came to Christ, they were not allowed to access community resources such as water from the communal well.

Their church was attacked, and they were told to deny Jesus. When they refused, their neighbours beat them and destroyed their house.

“They kept asking why I called myself a Christian,” Rupesh said. “Through the pain, I only repeated what I knew: ‘Jesus is real. I have seen the goodness of the Lord’.

“I don’t want to go from my village to any other place,” Rupesh said. “I will stay. Only then will God’s name be spread in my village.”

Fight For The Nation

Almost three-quarters of India’s population are Hindu and Hindu extremism is the main source of persecution against Indian Christians. It can be both vocal and violent.

Some Hindu extremists aim to make India an entirely Hindu nation. They see Christians as a threat that should be driven out. The leader of a radical Hindu group has declared he’ll rid India of Christianity by the end of 2021.

Pastor Samuel*, a local Open Doors partner, said, “They say, ‘If you are not Hindu, you are not Indian.’ But Christianity is not a foreign religion; it has been part of our country’s history for 2,000 years.

“We are not anti-India. We are not anti-Hindu. We are pro-Jesus and we want to display his all-encompassing love to India.”

Those who convert from Hinduism to Christianity are harassed, attacked, or even killed. The government’s inaction, and in some cases, denial of persecution against Christians has made extremist groups bolder.

“If the majority of the community is against you, the chances that the police or others will help you is slim,” Pastor Samuel said.

The cost of following Jesus is rising in India. But so, too, are the number of Christians.

Despite intense pressure on all sides, Christians are living out and sharing the gospel, and choosing to follow Jesus, no matter the cost.

You can help strengthen the Indian church and the global body of Christ by giving monthly.

Find out more at:
opendoors.org.au/give-monthly
opendoors.org.nz/give-monthly

*Names changed for security reasons.
Hope In The Depths Of Loss

Neelesh* and his family live in a rural village in India amongst a community that is predominantly Buddhist. Their neighbours oppose and conspire against them, and yet the family of six continue their ministry.

But they weren’t always a family of just six. They used to be a family of seven.

“I had a son, too,” said Neelesh. “He died in my arms. “This was ten years ago. My son, who was seven years old at that time, was badly beaten by the Buddhist boys in his boarding school who opposed Christianity. When I found out, I hurried to the school and drove him to the hospital.

“He died on the way. I could do nothing.”

A Vision Of Peace

Neelesh and his wife struggled greatly following the death of their son.

“It was unbearable,” he remembered. “We both started drinking heavily to forget our misery. “I was perplexed. I couldn’t see God’s purpose in all this. Why should he let my innocent seven-year-old die?

“One day, when I was extremely depressed, I went to a liquor shop and drank heavily. As I was stumbling back home, I met my old pastor. Gazing right into my eyes, he said, ‘Neelesh, do you want to meet your son?’

“I was so angry. I said, ‘Are you mocking me? You know he is dead!’ To my astonishment, the pastor replied gently, ‘If you drink like this and leave Jesus, you will never meet your boy, who is now in heaven.’

“His answer shook me to the core. Here was the truth! My son was just seven when he died, but he loved Jesus. Algerian women on the streets.

Neelesh with his daughter.

Loss And Gain

Neelesh and his family’s hardships did not end with the loss of his son.

People in his community who oppose Christianity burned down Neelesh’s house. The family rebuilt it, only to have it torn down again. Each year, they destroy Neelesh’s crops before he can harvest them. The police refuse to investigate.

But through everything, Neelesh has discovered what really matters, and he holds on to that.

“I have made up my mind now,” he said.

“I will live for Christ and if He wants, I will die for Him. Because what I lose for Him, I will actually gain in the end.”

In his letter to the Philippians, the apostle Paul said, “I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things.”

Nothing we give over to God is truly lost. When we are asked to give our most precious things to Jesus, we don’t lose them. We secure them. They are safe in His hands.

Neelesh lost his son that day in the boarding school.

But because of the life of another Son, Jesus Christ, Neelesh knows that he will see his son again one day.

There is no price too high to know Jesus, because of His surpassing worth. He is worth following, no matter the cost.

*Name changed for security reasons.
“Our relatives began getting jealous of us and started asking us to leave church, saying that it was against our tradition and culture,” Areefa said.

“My husband’s brother was jobless, heavily addicted to drinking, and used to live with us at that time. He used to very strongly oppose our faith. He started picking quarrels with us on petty things.”

Breathing His Last
One night, when Areefa’s brother-in-law was arguing with her, Areefa’s husband stepped in to defend her.

“He went to defend me and scolded his brother for verbally abusing me,” Areefa remembered.

In a fit of rage, her brother-in-law picked up a knife and stabbed Areefa’s husband in the chest.

“We thought it was a minor cut, but soon he was breathing his last. We took him to the hospital, but we had already lost him.”

After losing her husband, Areefa’s family tried to force her to move home and leave Christianity. They said if she didn’t deny Jesus, they wouldn’t help her.

“I wanted to hold on to Jesus,” Areefa said. “Even now, my relatives hate me because I chose to hold on to my faith. They never gave me any support in bringing up my children.”

When Areefa’s and her husband became Christians, their relatives began to notice a change in them.

“When my husband and I started to grow in our faith, everything improved,” Areefa said. “God blessed us, my husband stopped drinking, and we both worked very hard. We seemed to become more well-off than all of our relatives.

“God has made all these provisions for me. I am thankful to God and to all those who have helped me through Open Doors’ partners.”

Your support helps persecuted Christians like Areefa to survive and heal even in the midst of persecution.

For all those who give monthly, you are also helping our local partners run training seminars where believers like Areefa are taught about persecution from a biblical perspective. They learn why Christianity is opposed, and how to live faithfully in light of that.

“Jesus has promised He will be with me always, even until the end of the world. He has promised to strengthen me. I can feel Him with me, and I can feel His strength,” Areefa said.

Through training, practical support and God’s Word, you are helping people follow Jesus in India and all over the world, no matter the cost.

*Name changed for security reasons.
Help The Indian Church Thrive

Though cultural pressures and persecution are seeking to stifle the Indian church, they are learning to thrive in the midst of persecution. When you support the Indian church through this edition of Frontline Faith, you are helping them do just this! Read on to discover more about what your support looks like in action.

Equip The Next Generation

God’s Word is the most important thing, and you can be a part of helping children get their very own Bible!

By helping children access a Bible in their own language, you support their personal growth and relationship with God. You are helping them to grow deep roots that can withstand the strong winds of persecution, and enabling them to be the next generation of leaders in the Indian church.

Your gift of $7 will deliver a Bible into an Indian child’s hands.

Multiply Your Impact

By providing training and discipleship seminars, your support goes even further. When you train a leader, you don’t just equip one person, you also invest in all the believers they train.

These discipleship seminars grow believers in spiritual maturity, increasing their knowledge and understanding and helping them respond biblically to persecution.

Your gift of $250 will run a discipleship seminar for 100 Indian Christians.

Train Sunday School Teachers

In India, resources are scarce for Sunday School teachers. Many have no training in either theology or teaching. When you help train Sunday School teachers, you help them to reach the next generation of Christians.

By teaching the next generation about Jesus, you can ensure that the Indian church survives and is built on a strong and faithful foundation.

Your gift of $50 will train a Sunday School teacher to share God’s word faithfully and creatively.

You’re Making A Difference

There are always things that try to stop us from following Jesus. We can’t avoid that, but we can overcome them, together. When we stand together as the global body of Christ, we all learn to thrive.

You can make a difference for your persecuted brothers and sisters in India by supporting this project today.

Visit opendoors.org.au | opendoors.org.nz
Hold Everything
Loosely But Jesus

When Beena* and her family came to faith in a Hindu Indian village, they began to receive threats from their neighbours.

One day, the threats came to life.

Beena remembered, “The day of the attack, the villagers called us to a meeting and blamed us for breaking the village rules by leaving our traditional faith and not paying the annual festival donations to the Hindu temple.

“They hurled abuse and immediately started showering me with kicks and blows.”

When Beena’s husband stepped in so that she could run, the group turned on him.

“As we ran, I saw from the corner of my eye they were now tying my husband’s hands behind his back and preparing to throw him in the nearby pond.

“They shouted, ‘There is no chance he will escape today. He will die.’”

But Beena, who was fleeing with her son, could not turn back.

They ran and ran, until they came across some huts. They knocked on one of the doors, and the owners of the house agreed to let them in.

“They hid us and told the attackers that we had gone the other way,” Beena said.

“I said to my children: ‘I love you, I love you, but I love Jesus more.’ My family then threw me out of the house.”

“‘That was God’s intervention, his provision for our protection.’”

It Pains My Heart

Even after the attackers left, Beena and her son still weren’t safe.

“When the owners of the house learned that we were Christians, they asked us to leave as soon as possible,” she said.

They arranged a boy from the neighbourhood who could go with Beena and her son to their pastor’s house – about an hour’s walk away.

Beena remembered, “My son was so afraid… We had no slippers and our feet hurt – they were bleeding. It was cold and we had no warm clothes.

“The boy who agreed to accompany us kept telling us that Jesus was not worth it and that we should leave Christianity. Every word pierced through my heart. I cried and told him, ‘Brother, stop. Say anything to me and my family, but don’t say anything against my Jesus, it pains my heart.’”

As they approached the pastor’s house, Beena heard singing – a prayer service was taking place.

Among the voices, she heard one she recognised well. It was her husband’s.

“The door opened and the next thing I saw was my husband, seated and surrounded by a group of people from my church,” Beena said. “Out of all the thoughts I had in my head a few minutes ago, I had never imagined this… All three of us cried tears of joy.”

Miraculously, Beena’s husband’s hands had come untied when he was thrown into the pond, and he was able to escape with his life.

Things Above

After their remarkable reunion, Beena, her husband and their son went to stay with another believer from their church.

Beena and her family have faced severe persecution because of their faith, yet they continue to follow Jesus, no matter the cost.

Through all the events of that day – the fear of being physically attacked, the terror of watching her husband sink into the water, the anxiety of fleeing for her life – what hurt Beena most was when a young boy tried to tell her that she should let go of Jesus.

Colossian 3:1-2 says, “Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your heart on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not earthly things.”

When Beena reflected on her experience, she said:

“It hurt me so much when my village people spoke against Jesus. It hurt me more than when they beat me or even when they almost killed my husband.”

In the midst of suffering, Beena was able to hold tightly on to Jesus, and hold everything else with a loose grip, knowing that He is in control.

“This is truly following Jesus, no matter the cost.

*Name changed for security reasons.
Letter Writing Campaign

Encourage Children From Sri Lanka

As persecution rises in India, its neighbouring countries are not exempt from this.

On Easter Sunday, 2019, as churches in Sri Lanka gathered to celebrate the resurrection of Jesus, eight bombs exploded across the country. Thousands of lives were changed in an instant with hundreds dead, injured or missing after the blasts.

One of the churches most deeply affected was Zion Church, at which 30 believers (including 14 children) lost their lives and over a hundred more were injured.

Open Doors local partners are working with believers from Zion church and their families, many of whom are struggling to process the events of that day. Many of these believers are children.

Please pray for these children as they come to terms with what has happened. You can write to encourage them. Many do not understand English, so please keep your messages simple and colourful.

Your letters will be delivered close to Christmas, so you can include Christmas greetings if you’d like to.

Send your letters by 30 October 2019.

Australia: 11/10 Gladstone Road, Castle Hill NSW 2154
New Zealand: PO Box 51236 Tawa, Wellington 5249

Sixty Second Stories

Short Stories You Can Share

“Persecution will come when we serve the Lord.”
– Meeta*

Meeta’s family came to faith in Jesus after she was healed of a mental illness.

When people in their community heard of the miraculous healing, many started coming to Meeta’s house, which soon became a place for Christians and other seekers to gather.

“We started to hold a church service every Sunday,” Meeta said. “Many people who had never heard about Jesus before came from nearby villages.”

But not everyone was happy that Meeta’s house was used as a church.

“My father was attacked several times,” Meeta said. “But he never gave up on his faith. He encouraged us to trust in the Lord always, and we have to go through it. It is only through persecution that we can truly realise God’s blessings on our lives.”

“Names changed for security reasons

“We were shocked and said someone had brainwashed me,” Shikhar remembered. “They threatened me, bullied me and beat me every day.”

Shikhar became a Christian, he was the only believer in his family in India.

“‘You are not our daughter anymore.’”
– Shikhar

When Shikhar became a Christian, his family disowned her for following Jesus.

Sixty Second Stories

Short Stories You Can Share

“I do not fear death, but I will not stop preaching Christ.”
– Shikhar

When Shikhar became a Christian, he was the only believer in his family in India.

“I won’t leave Jesus.”
– Saree

Saree was only 11 when her family disowned her for following Jesus.

“I went to church secretly, but my brother found out,” Saree said. “He caught me after I came back from church. He beat me and dropped me into the house.

“I didn’t know what gave me the courage, but I replied, ‘If you think that what I am doing is a crime, you can kill me for it. I do not fear death, but I will not stop preaching Christ.’ That person left without words.

“I won’t leave Jesus,” Saree replied.

“‘They yelled at me, ‘If you continue to go to church, we will punish you!’”
– Saree

Saree is now living with an aunt in a nearby village.

“Because of my persecution, I cannot go to school. I also miss my family a lot. But God has said that He will never leave nor forsake us… He is a father to the fatherless.”
– Saree

*Names changed for security reasons

PODCAST

Bringing The Persecuted Church To Life

Episode 26 – Out Now.

Listen now on Apple, Spotify, Soundcloud or Podcast Addict on Android.

opendoors.org.au/podcast
opendoors.org.nz/podcast
International Day Of Prayer

Pray With The Persecuted Church Worldwide

3 November 2019

Register your church or group today:
opendoors.org.au/idop | opendoors.org.nz/idop