



THE Voice OF THE Martyrs

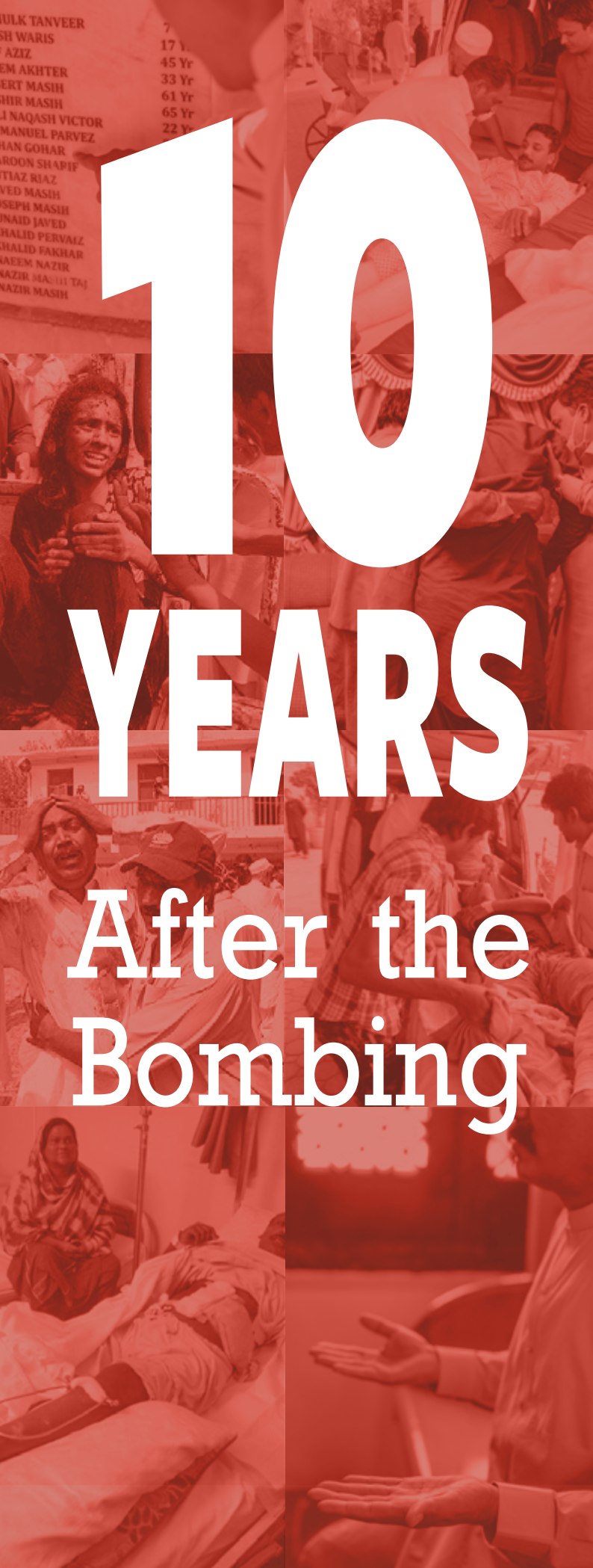
January 2024

AFTER THE BOMBING...

WHERE ARE THEY NOW?



"Remember them that are in bonds, as bound with them." Heb 13:3



On 22 September, 2013, suicide bombers attacked the All Saints Church in Peshawar, Pakistan, after a Sunday worship service. One faithful couple, who lost two children in the attack, have helped bring hope and healing to their church — along with a biblical obedience to forgive their persecutors.

Anaya almost stayed home from church that Sunday morning.

Her husband, Fahmi, a youth ministry coordinator in their province, was on the other side of the globe at a Christian youth leaders' conference. So Anaya had to get their 11-year-old son, Ishan, and 9-year-old daughter, Naher, up and ready for the morning worship service by herself.

Naher had woken up with a fever that morning, and Anaya was hesitant to take her to church. But the children begged their mother to take them to Sunday school, even enlisting their father's support during an early morning video chat. Anaya relented, and they headed to All Saints Church, just as they did every week.

"They were worried they would miss the Bible story," Anaya said. "They were always curious and interested in going to church."

Naher's enthusiasm was no match for her fever, though, so she came to the sanctuary to rest in her mother's lap about halfway through the morning service. The closing hymn repeated the chorus "O Lord Jesus, we all need you."

Anaya planned to skip the regular fellowship time after the service so she could get her sick daughter home, but she stopped briefly to talk with her sister and brother-in-law, and Ishan ran off to play with some friends.

Then Anaya's world was shattered.

At 11:43am, two suicide bombers detonated their explosives amid the roughly 700 congregants who had gathered in the courtyard for a fellowship meal. The death toll was initially reported to be 81, including seven children, with at least 150 more people injured. Anaya was seriously injured, while Ishan and Naher were among the seven children killed.

A Long Trip Home

Following the youth leaders' conference, Fahmi had spent a week with some cousins in another country. A local Pakistani congregation had asked him to speak at a youth event that Saturday, and after the event he stayed up late to talk with Anaya and the children nine time zones away via video chat.

In the middle of the night, Fahmi was roused from sleep by a phone call. His cousin, who was working a night shift, had seen footage of the Peshawar bombing on the news.

Fahmi immediately called Anaya's phone, but got no answer. Then he called his older brother and got no answer. He called every family member and friend he could think of, but nobody answered his calls.

"I turned on a Pakistani news channel and I saw the faces, all those faces familiar to me, who were injured," Fahmi recalled. "It seemed I was watching all of my family on that

television.”

He continued to make phone calls until he finally got through to a friend from another church. “The friend said that it is a very horrible situation in my church, but he didn’t know about my family,” Fahmi said. Eventually, Fahmi reached a friend who told him that Anaya was badly hurt. He knew nothing about the children.

Within hours, friends helped Fahmi get an early flight home to Pakistan. “I was just praying to God, ‘Please don’t let anything bad have happened, that everything will be all right,’” he said. “That was my prayer in my travel. I was sensing that something had happened, but even then I was praying, ‘Please, God, let me see my family.’”

He gathered bits and pieces of information as he travelled, checking the news and continuing to call between flights. He learned that his mother, two uncles, his brother-in-law and some cousins had all been killed. In addition, his brothers, nieces and nephews, sister-in-law and many friends were injured. And finally, someone confirmed that his precious children were gone.



▲ This clock, which hung in the All Saints Church sanctuary, stopped when the bombs detonated.

A Place of Prayer and Peace

All Saints Church is a conspicuous and beautiful building, set inside the old city walls of Peshawar. Its ornamental crosses and Bible verses painted on the gate mark it as Christian, but the mosque-like architecture was intended to make it welcoming to Muslims, who make up approximately 98% of the Pakistani population. Painted over an arch in the front of the sanctuary are words from

Isaiah 56:7, “I will make them joyful in my house of prayer”.

Peshawar, with a population of more than 2 million, is the gateway to the dangerous border frontier with Afghanistan. It is the capital of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK) province, a violence-plagued area in northwestern Pakistan where bombings and assassinations are common. Its mountainous, cave-riddled terrain has made KPK the hideout of numerous Islamic terrorist groups, including al-Qaida and the Taliban. The militant group Jundallah, an offshoot of the Pakistani Taliban, claimed responsibility for the All Saints bombing.

Two Jundallah suicide bombers, each wearing 5,9kg of hidden explosives packed with ball bearings and other metal pieces to cause maximum damage, slipped into the church with local workers who were delivering food for the fellowship meal. One of the men was stopped near an outside gate, but the other was nearly at the front door of the church when they detonated their explosives.

Now, 10 years later, the bombing remains one of the deadliest attacks



Above and lower left: Ishan was 11 and Naher was 9 when they were killed in the bombing. Fahmi’s mother (upper left) was also killed in the blast.



committed against Christians in Pakistan. The final death toll, including victims who succumbed to their injuries weeks or even months after the bombing, was 127 people.

Through all of the suffering and grief, All Saints Church remained a light to the community. A week after the attack, the church was open and filled with worshipers, including many of the wounded and bereaved. And when, near the close of the service, a car bomb was detonated in a market only blocks away, churchgoers responded in prayer rather than blind panic.

Hope After the Horror

When Fahmi arrived in Peshawar, his first stop was to see his wife at the hospital. She was in the intensive care unit, passing in and out of consciousness, her body burned and riddled with shrapnel from the bombs. Because of her fragile condition, doctors advised Fahmi to hide the truth about the children's deaths from Anaya. So he smiled and encouraged her to focus on getting better, dodging her questions about Ishan and Naheer. The visit lasted only a few minutes before nurses sent him away. Fahmi's next stop was the morgue, to identify his children and see his mother's body.

For Fahmi, the days that followed were a blur. "Most of the time I spent in the hospital," he said. "My whole life was only my wife, because the kids were no more, so where else would I have been?" Between short visits with Anaya, Fahmi visited others who had survived the attack. He prayed with and comforted widows, widowers, orphans and parents who, like him, had lost family members in the blasts. He sat with the injured and provided encouragement, while privately carrying his own grief.

"I was in the denial stage for a long time, so I didn't cry," Fahmi said. "Friends said, 'Why are you not crying, when you have gone through all this suffering and lost so much?' I was just looking at God; I was praying to God, but even sometimes I didn't know what to pray and how to pray and what to say to God."

About 10 days after the bombing, a pastor visited All Saints and shared a message from Romans 8. "He put a question before us," Fahmi said. "Who will separate us from the love of God? Will this persecution? Will something else that is this bad? I asked this question of myself while I was sitting in the church. Then I gave the same answer as Paul did: Nothing can separate us from



the love of God. So that was the first motivation and strengthening of my faith."

When Anaya was moved to a regular hospital ward, Fahmi finally told her about the deaths of Ishan and Naheer. She was stunned, and then she was angry that Fahmi had kept the truth from her, angry that she had not gotten to say goodbye.

Despite Anaya's anger, Fahmi was relieved that they could finally mourn the loss of their children together. Anaya had been reading the book of Job in the weeks preceding the bombing, so those words echoed in her heart during her recovery. And just as Job was faced with accusers, some friends suggested that Fahmi and Anaya might need to repent of some secret sin, as if the loss of their two children meant they were being punished by God.

Fahmi and Anaya knew that was contrary to what Jesus taught about loss and suffering, but they were still hurt and confused as they tried to process the tragedy.

"When I was in the hospital, my faith was a little bit shaken and I was asking God why He had taken both of them," Anaya said. "Even then I was not blaming God; I didn't give up my faith. In all this mourning and throughout this situation, God was with us. It was God who consoled us and gave us comfort."

Anaya began to have dreams of her children, seeing them in a place she recognized as heaven. "That also gave me some comfort that my children are in this place," she said.

Because Anaya was not able to attend church, Fahmi arranged for family and friends to come to their home for prayer

and worship services. "All the family members gathered," Anaya recalled. "That was a time for us to cope with the suffering, and God was with us through these worship services. It helped us a lot."

In the months following the bombing, Fahmi's eyes were opened to a new ministry opportunity. A Korean missionary friend had begun visiting the bombing victims in their homes, and Fahmi felt led to join his friend. His presence in these visits, comforting others while going through his own suffering and grief, had a powerful effect on those he visited. He was reminded of 2 Corinthians 1:3–4, as he comforted others with the comfort he himself was receiving from the Lord.

"It gave me more encouragement when I was helping others," Fahmi said. "It helped me overcome my own suffering, my own pain and grief."

When she was able, Anaya joined Fahmi in these visits, especially the visits to children who had lost one or both parents in the bombing. Praying over these orphans held special meaning for them. "When we visited these children, we put our hands on their heads and told them we would be like their *spiritual* parents," Fahmi said. "This gave them much encouragement and courage and peace and comfort."

A few months after Anaya's release from the hospital, two gifts from God brought the couple unexpected comfort and healing. In the new year, Anaya became pregnant with a daughter. Fahmi and Anaya also received biblical counsel in another country for their trauma and loss. For 10 weeks, they processed what had happened to their



“My faith was a little bit shaken and I was asking God why he had taken both of them. Even then I was not blaming God; I didn’t give up my faith.”

family and gained a clearer vision for serving their anguished church.

“There are a hundred families who were victimized by this bombing, but only my wife and I got this opportunity,” Fahmi recalled thinking as they considered next steps. “Now it is our time to go back and give comfort to them.”

When Fahmi and Anaya returned to Peshawar, their desire to develop a biblical counseling ministry through the church only grew stronger. They prayed that God would provide opportunities for them, and He answered their prayer. With the approval of the church leadership in Pakistan and the support of brothers and sisters in Christ, they relocated in 2015 and Fahmi began pursuing a degree in pastoral counseling.

Faith and Forgiveness

After Fahmi graduated, he received offers to serve in safer places, both in Pakistan and abroad. But the family returned to Peshawar, where Fahmi took up a teaching position at a nearby Christian seminary while

initiating his counseling work.

“Here in our country there is no ‘counseling culture,’” Fahmi said. “People are suffering, but they don’t want to seek counseling.” He said people are often afraid of being judged or rejected as sinners if they open up about their pain and struggles. So instead of waiting for people to come to him, Fahmi goes to them for informal chats and prayer over tea.

“Listening is very important, so I focus more on listening,” he said. When there is a request for help or a natural opening, Fahmi then offers Godly counsel and scriptural encouragement. It is a slow process, but more families are finding healing from the trauma of the 2013 attack as a result of this outreach.

Remembering how others tried to explain the deaths of Ishan and Naher as some kind of divine or karmic punishment, Fahmi works to uproot the unbiblical views that he and Anaya faced, replacing them with a biblical view. Through trauma seminars, care camps for the survivors



Praying for children who were orphaned in the attack helped Fahmi and Anaya heal from the grief of losing their own children. Natasha Nazir, now 26, was just a teenager when she lost both of her parents in the bombing. As the eldest child, she became responsible for raising her four younger siblings. “It seemed difficult to me to survive 10 years ago, when I was just 16 years old,” she said. “But I have observed God supporting us. God’s supporting hand is with us, as my younger brothers and sisters are getting an education and one of my younger sisters got married last year.”

Shalom Naeem was 11 years old when the bombing occurred. Both of his parents and his older sister died that day. Afterward, Shalom was raised by his grandfather. “It was such a horrible situation for me 10 years ago,” he said. “I was alone and looking here and there for any help or support. But God held my hand. God is helping me in all the steps of my life. In fact, God is my strength.” □



◀ The Masih family have found healing since losing their daughter in the bombing. They continue to worship at All Saints Church.

► Fahmi and Anaya had two more children after the attack. They said modeling how to trust God and persevere in trials is important for their family.

and other teaching opportunities, Fahmi explains to participants what Scripture teaches about suffering and persecution. The result, he said, is that the church has grown stronger in faith since the attack. Fahmi and Anaya have seen God heal much of the brokenness in their lives and equip them to be instruments of restoration in their church.

That restoration has also meant coming to terms with Christ's teachings about forgiveness.

"When the media came and asked many of the victims in our church about forgiveness, everyone said that we had forgiven them," Fahmi recalled. But he said they answered that way because they knew they should, not because it was really true. "This is really difficult, to forgive those who kill your children," he said.

But time spent in solitude and contemplation, as well as his pastoral counseling studies, forced Fahmi to confront the unforgiveness in his heart. He considered Jesus' teaching about loving one's enemies and blessing those who persecute, and he meditated on Jesus' act of forgiveness on the cross.



Fahmi knew that forgiving the militants who committed the bombing was not only essential for his and Anaya's healing but also a matter of faithful obedience to God.

"It was a long struggle," he said, "but after 10 years I can say that we have really forgiven them, because our Lord Jesus forgave those who persecuted Him."

The message Fahmi clings to today, and the message he wants other Christians to learn from the bombing, is that to be a Christian is to walk by faith rather than fear. "Ten years has already passed away, and I live by faith," he said. "Even this suffering, persecution, pain cannot separate us from the love of God. To live by faith should be our commitment to God and our way of life. Anything could happen at any time, anywhere, but if we have strong faith in God, if we believe Jesus is with us, there is no need to fear." ■

Survivors and their families have each been on unique journeys of healing since the bombing in 2013. At a recent care camp, some participants shared about their struggles and how God had been at work in their lives since that day to heal them and restore their hope.

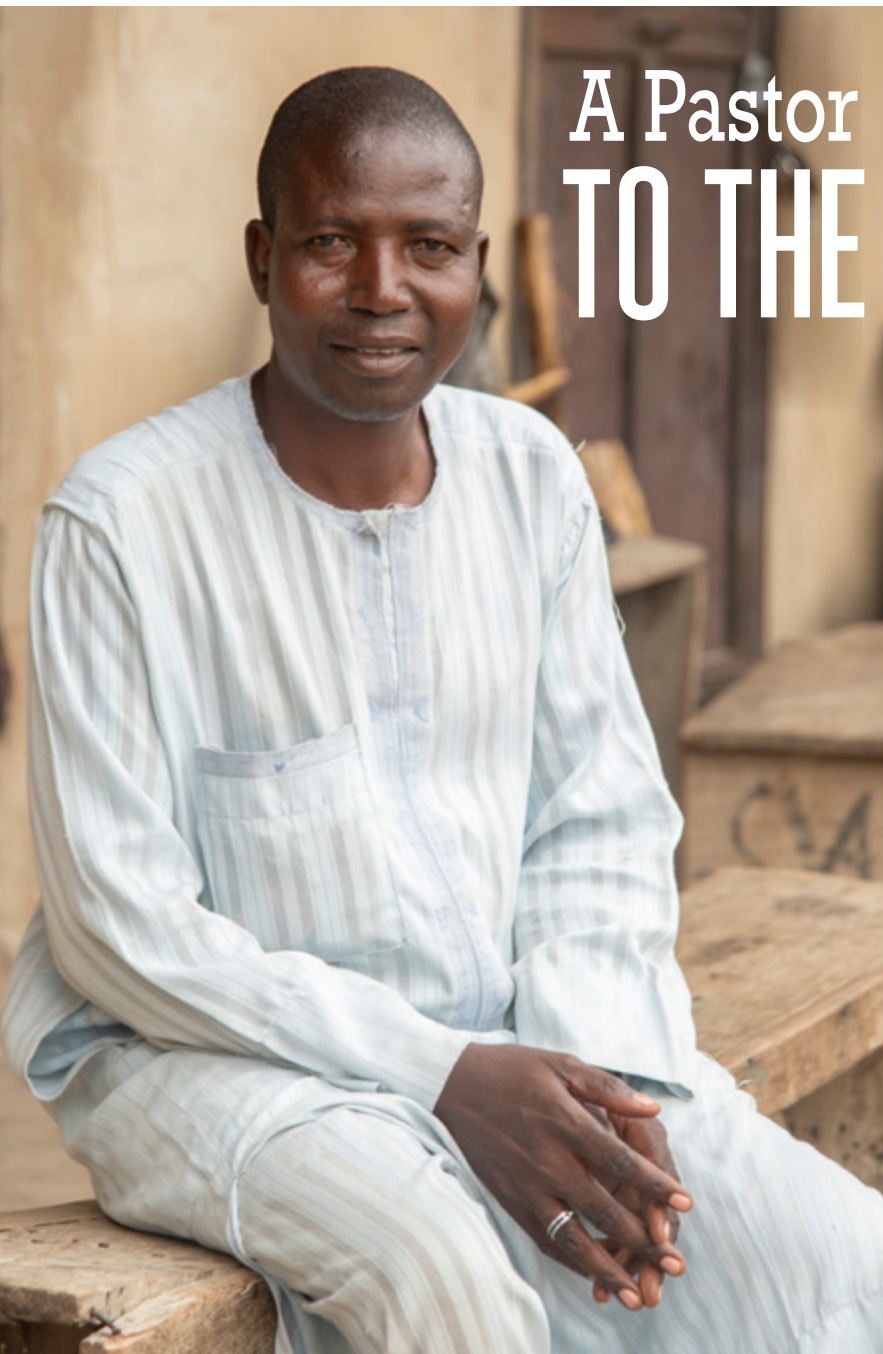
"I am so thankful to God for all His blessings upon me and my children, even at the time of my distress," said Christina Imtias, a mother of three whose husband died in the bombing. "God is enabling me to nurture my children as well as to build my house and get a job. Besides that, my daughter had some spiritual, physical and psychological problems, but God healed her, too. I am overwhelmed in saying that God is so good and is helping me a lot." □

While some have experienced great healing since the bombing, others are still struggling. When Samantha Azeem lost her husband, she and her child had to move in with other family members, and she has had a difficult time finding stable housing. "I am not saying that God is not helping me, ... but I sometimes complain," she said. "It is so hard to live alone and nurture a child in the difficult situation, as a single woman in this male-dominated society. I have faced a lot of troubles and challenges during these 10 years. I pray to God to help me and my child." □

▼ **Below:** Anwar Masih was hospitalized for six months after the bombing.

Top right: By studying what God's Word teaches about persecution, survivors of the bombing have grown stronger in their faith since the attack. **Bottom right:** Mahek Imtias (in blue scarf) was severely injured and still struggles emotionally.





A Pastor TO THE PERSECUTED

A Nigerian pastor's passion to help displaced Christians, draws him to a region traumatized by recurring Islamist attacks.

In north-eastern Nigeria, where Pastor Ishaku Manawa serves, death is never far away.

"There are many people I know that Boko Haram has killed or kidnapped," he said. "I cannot count the number of people I know that Boko Haram has killed."

In 2014, the Islamic extremist group took control of parts of Nigeria, including the two largest cities in Adamawa state, where Ishaku works. Boko Haram militants have killed thousands of people and displaced millions of others in the region. The pastor said that in just one congregation, 37 members have been killed in Islamist attacks.

Today, the notorious extremist group operates mostly in remote, undeveloped areas. But its members continue to launch murderous attacks, and the region remains especially perilous for pastors like Ishaku.

"I cannot say that there is one thing I am most afraid of," he said. "I know that even if they kill me, I will inherit the kingdom." Although Ishaku has moved his family to an area where attacks are less frequent, he continues to minister to people fleeing Boko Haram attacks and often travels into potentially dangerous areas.

"My prayer is that if God still has work for me to do, He should keep me alive to do it," he said. "God has always protected me from them, though I see people connected to Boko Haram every day."

Ishaku has buried many Christians who were killed by Boko Haram, including two fathers and a pastor.

One of the men had pursued the extremists after learning that his daughter had been kidnapped. "He chose to go after them," Ishaku said, "but the terrorists laid ambush. They shot him and murdered him."

The other father who was killed, a man named Ishaya, was kidnapped along with his young daughter. The Islamists ordered him to deny Christ, and when he refused, they killed him and then released his daughter.

"We as pastors need prayers. May God remove hatred for Muslims from the hearts of pastors, because you cannot pray for someone you hate."

The pastor they killed, known affectionately as Baba John, served in Borno state. "They attacked his community about four times and tried killing him," Ishaku said, "but they failed." However, the extremists never gave up trying. "One day, they came and told him that if he agreed to convert to Islam, they would spare his life," Ishaku continued. "He said he would rather die; he would be happier if they killed him for the sake of Christ. His wife was there with him. They forced her to be a witness as they slaughtered him."

Ishaku said that Boko Haram acts out of a sense of *jihād* (struggle), or holy war against the enemies of Islam, and many Islamists believe anyone who is not a Muslim should be killed.

For some jihadis, killing followers of Christ isn't enough. They routinely mock the Christians they don't kill. "The terrorists say things like, 'Why are you running? Didn't your Bible say you will be killed for the sake of Christ?'" Ishaku said. "They say these things, and we hear them all the time."

Despite continual threats and the all-too-common killings, Ishaku carries on. He is committed to planting churches

in this region because he sees God at work; he knows that fellowship among Believers encourages those suffering from the ongoing attacks.

One way he encourages struggling congregations is by providing practical help. "We raised some money and built a shed ... for the people to have a place of worship," he said.

Those fleeing Boko Haram's violent attacks often have nothing more than the clothes on their backs. "The people have been traumatized," Ishaku said, "and so they have many problems. While I am solving one issue, another arises. The people need trauma healing. I do not have time to rest because there are so many problems to solve. The people do not even have food to eat."

Ishaku's passion is to go where people are persecuted, even though he knows his life is in danger. "I enjoy working in areas of persecution," he said. "I enjoy working with people who are suffering for the sake of Christ. I am not happy if I am enjoying my life and they are suffering."

Grateful for the work God has given him of caring for those who have been driven from their homes, Ishaku asks for prayer, especially for other pastors

serving in the region. "Pray that God will use persecution as a reason for us to do His work much more than before," he said. "Pray that God will protect us."

His church is caring for 200 pastors who are struggling to recover from trauma caused by severe persecution. "We as pastors need prayers," Ishaku said. "May God remove hatred for Muslims from the hearts of pastors, because you cannot pray for someone you hate. The extremists are people like us, and God can use anyone."

Pastor Ishaku's wife supports his work to serve those who have suffered at the hands of Islamists, even though he spends weeks at a time in the bush. She tells him to go, and she and other members of the family pray for him while he is away.

Ishaku doesn't own a motorcycle, and taxi-cycles won't go where he wants to travel, so he walks. "What excites me is going into interior communities to preach the Word of God, areas where Christians are not many," he said. "Whenever I must walk many kilometers into the bush, to where I can find people with whom I can share the Gospel, I am happy." ■

▼ Pastor Ishaku sometimes spends weeks at a time in remote villages, helping to plant churches and preaching the Gospel to those who have fled Islamist attacks.



Prayer Diary[®]

January/February 2024

JANUARY 2024

S	14	KAZAKHSTAN	Pray that government observers monitoring unregistered churches will hear the Gospel and turn to Christ.
M	15	EGYPT	Pray that Christian converts from Islam like Duhra will see how God provides all their needs.
T	16	MYNAMAR	Pray for Aung Hte and his family who were driven from their land and home after placing their faith in Christ.
W	17	DRC*	Pray that Christians will be protected from violent attacks by militant Islamic groups.
T	18	MAURITANIA	Pray that Christian missionaries will return to the country.
F	19	DJIBOUTI	Pray that God's Word will permeate the country, despite the risk of harassment and persecution for owning a Bible.
S	20	AZERBAIJAN	Pray that workers will find ways to import Bibles, which are difficult to obtain and cannot be printed legally.
S	21	KENYA	Pray for Christians living in Muslim-majority areas of northeastern Kenya.
M	22	BAHRAIN	Praise God for a new season of openness to the Gospel! Pray that it continues.
T	23	MALDIVES	There are very few known Christians in the Maldives. Pray that more Maldivians will come to know the Lord.
W	24	UAE**	Pray for foreign missionaries who are illegally sharing the Gospel with Muslims.
T	25	IRAQ	Pray for Nader, a Muslim teenager who asked for a Bible after having dreams about Christ.
F	26	LAOS	Laos has more than 200 ethnic subgroups. Pray for loving unity in the church amid this diversity.
S	27	SOMALIA	Pray for Christian converts from Islam who are accused of rejecting both their religion and their nationality.
S	28	KUWAIT	Pray for wisdom for the few indigenous Kuwaiti Believers who practice their faith at great risk.
M	29	OMAN	Bibles can be sold only to foreigners. Pray that many will also reach Omanis.
T	30	BENIN	Pray for the salvation of Edosa's brothers and sisters.
W	31	QATAR	While it's not illegal to own a Bible, Qataris who own or distribute them are at great risk. Pray for their protection.

FEBRUARY 2024

T	1	SYRIA	Pray that Syrian refugees in other countries will hear the Gospel and come to faith in Christ.
F	2	ALGERIA	Praise God for the church growth in this nation! Pray that growth will continue.
S	3	TURKMENISTAN	Pray for Silas, a Turkmen Christian who is sharing the Gospel through broadcast media.
S	4	UZBEKISTAN	Biblical Christianity is viewed as extremism. Pray that Christians' gentleness and love will change this perception.
M	5	ETHIOPIA	Pray for Christians like Makda, whose husband and family rejected her because of her newfound faith.
T	6	CAMEROON	Pray for effective evangelism efforts among members of the terrorist group Boko Haram.
W	7	JORDAN	Pray that Christian converts from Islam will be able to worship openly without persecution by family members.
T	8	TANZANIA	Pray that Bibles will reach people living in remote Muslim-dominated areas.
F	9	COMOROS	Pray that the imprisonment of Christians for sharing the Gospel will serve only to embolden their witness.
S	10	VIETNAM	Pray for Anh, a Vietnamese teenager who was attacked with a machete because of her Christian witness.
S	11	SRI LANKA	Pray that local authorities will grant favour to Christians seeking permission to construct church buildings.
M	12	SAUDI ARABIA	Pray for those who face imprisonment or death for following Jesus Christ.
T	13	MALAYSIA	Pray for Susanna, whose husband, Raymond, was abducted on this day in 2017 and is still missing.
W	14	MALI	Pray for Jacques, who helps distribute Bibles to pastors in Mali, where God's Word is in great demand.
T	15	KYRGYZSTAN	Pray that the church will be a supportive, loving community for those rejected because of their faith in Christ.
F	16	SUDAN	Pray for a pastor who was arrested for disturbing the peace after Muslim extremists attacked his church.
S	17	BHUTAN	Pray for a Gospel breakthrough in this strongly Buddhist nation.

*Democratic Republic of Congo

**United Arab Emirates

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