

# CONVERSATION GUIDE:

## TALKING WITH CHILDREN ABOUT PERSECUTED CHRISTIANS

### INTRODUCTION

The primary environment for discipleship of children to occur is within the family (Deuteronomy 6:6–7; Proverbs 22:6; Ephesians 6:4). Children are capable of participating in age-appropriate conversations about spiritual principles. This guide demonstrates how leaders within a family unit can engage both older and younger children in foundational conversations about fellowship within the global body of Christ and about the opposition that our Christian brothers and sisters face. Children as young as 4 or 5 can have beginning conversations that plant the seeds of God's truth in their hearts and minds and build upon that foundational truth with more in-depth conversations and Scripture reading.

# INDIA:

## TEENS IMPRISONED FOR ATTENDING YOUTH CAMP

After traveling to a large city in India to study God's Word for several days, a group of young Christians returned to their predominantly Muslim village, emboldened in their Christian faith.

Members of the group, all of whom were related as either siblings or cousins, had come to know Jesus Christ through the witness of older relatives. After studying God's Word — an impossible task for many of their parents who cannot read — they experienced firsthand the cost of following Christ in their Muslim community. But when everything seemed hopeless, the Holy Spirit led them and others to boldly stand for Jesus.

### FALSE ACCUSATIONS

While the group was away for Bible training, neighbours questioned their parents about where the children had gone. Soon, various rumors began to spread throughout the community, including allegations of neglect that made their way to the ears of Islamists. As a small minority in the area, Christians worship quietly in homes. Believers often hide their Bibles, understanding that their discovery by Muslim neighbors could result in violence. "We know people from this community who have had their house burned down, been beaten, been kicked out of their home and kicked out of their family," said Aarav, a Front-Line Worker.

When the group returned to the village, local Islamists interrogated them, following up on villagers' accusations that they had been taken to the city for immoral purposes.[1] The entire community shunned the girls in the group, and their parents grew concerned. One girl's father, a known follower of Christ, feared that the girls might be taken from them permanently or even killed.

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[1] **Note for Parents:** The rumor that circulated about the girls accused them of engaging in sexually deviant behavior, and we edited this reference to the more general phrase "immoral purposes." When explaining the concept of "immoral purposes" to children, please do so in an age-appropriate way. The word "immoral" could simply be explained as doing bad things that go against teaching on how we should behave according to God's Word.

When pressured by the Islamists, the Christian father, Ali, grabbed a micro-SD card that contained a Bible and Christian study materials and handed it to one of the Islamists. "This is what it is all about," Ali said. "This is why they left."

The Islamist took the SD card and reviewed it, expecting to find immoral content. Instead, he heard the Gospel. "This isn't so bad," another Islamist said. "It's about Isa [Jesus]." Encouraged by their reaction, Ali felt emboldened to preach to the radicals. In that moment, he felt the Spirit's nudge to proclaim Christ. "Repent! Come out of the darkness!" he told the radicals and village elders who had gathered.

Realizing the message on the SD card was talking about Jesus Christ of the Bible, the Islamists grew angry. Determined to reconvert all of the Christian youth to Islam, they took them to a boarding school on their compound. While some were released or went into hiding, several girls were detained at the school for more than a month.

"[Jesus] told us this would happen," a father of two of the girls said, referring to Matthew 10. "He told us he is sending us out like sheep among wolves. This persecution will happen, and he will be with us."

## SPIRIT-LED BOLDNESS

Since the girls had not been allowed to gather extra clothing or other daily necessities before being taken to the Islamic boarding school, they had no toothbrushes, toothpaste, hairbrushes or hygiene products for several weeks. And they had no extra blankets to protect them from the chilly evening air. Eventually, the Islamists let the girls leave briefly to obtain basic necessities with money their parents had sent them.

Everyone at the school, from students to teachers, called the girls "Christians" as a derogatory term to mean "infidels" rather than "followers of Christ." But they were prepared. They had learned during discipleship training that persecution is part of following Christ.

The oldest girl told a Front-Line Worker that when she was with the other girls, sharing

a windowless room at the school, she didn't cry. Instead, she tried to display strength to the younger girls, and they prayed together to overcome their shared fear and sadness. Then they were separated.

When the girls were split up, they were again interrogated by teachers at the school. Although the teachers tried to catch them in a lie, the girls — led by the Holy Spirit — always had the same responses to their questions. The teachers were surprised by the girls' consistency and boldness, and the girls were equally surprised by what they heard themselves saying. They often responded to the teachers' questions with questions of their own, much as Jesus responded to his accusers.

## PERSECUTION NOW NORMAL

One of the Christian girls had a severe lung condition, and her parents feared she would die without her medicine. Aware of the girl's condition, a villager took the girl's medical papers to the boarding school and demanded that all of the girls be released. Otherwise, the villager argued, they would have a death on their hands that would draw negative attention. Finally, 42 days after being taken from their families, the girls were sent home.

The girls' faith grew immensely after seeing how God had provided for them and sustained them throughout their abduction, interrogations and lack of basic necessities as well as their fear and grief from being taken from their families.

"They are proud to follow Jesus, and they are confident," a Front-Line Worker said. "There is not a struggle to be like everyone else. They know they want to follow Jesus even if that means they are different and not going to be accepted by their community."

The girls were still ostracized by their community after they returned, and they have been barred from attending their former schools. But they still participate in discipleship training, both in person and weekly over the phone. "We want them to know what the Word says," the Front-Line Worker said, "that this is going to be normal for them."

The Apostle Paul wrote, "You are members of God's family" (Ephesians 2:19, NLT). Christians who live in other places around the world, like these teenage girls and their

families in India, are our family members because we are brothers and sisters in Christ. We are brothers and sisters with people we haven't even met yet!

# DISCUSSING THIS STORY WITH CHILDREN

### LIFE IN INDIA VS. LIFE HERE

- In what ways do you think these teenage girls' lives in India are different from your life here?
- Is there anything about their lives that is similar to yours? Have you ever been to youth camp with your church? What was your camp like?
- Everyone knew that these girls and their families were Christians. Why do you think everyone knew they were Christians? How could that be a good thing?

### OBEY GOD AT ANY COST

**Read Acts 5:27–32 together.**

- What did the religious leaders command the apostles to do?
- What was the apostles' response? (See Acts 5:29.)
- Do you think it was easy for the apostles to obey God rather than the religious leaders? Why or why not?
- What are some ways these girls in India obeyed God rather than the leaders of their community?

### LIVING BOLDLY FOR JESUS

- What do you think "opposition" means?
- How can you tell if someone is opposing you?
- Who or what was trying to stop these teenage girls from following Jesus?
- Why do you think the community leaders were opposed to people following Jesus?
- Read 2 Timothy 3:12. Do you think these teenage girls knew they would be persecuted for standing firm in their faith?

- What might happen to each of us if we stand firm in our faith?

## WHAT IS PERSECUTION?

Persecution happens when Christians are treated badly for believing in Jesus by those who want them to stop talking about Jesus. Persecution may take many different forms. Christians are sometimes told by their neighbours or government authorities to stop worshiping God. They sometimes lose their jobs, or they may not be able to get a good job. Christians are sometimes kicked out of the place they live. Their Bibles might be taken away or destroyed. Christians can be beaten and arrested.

- What kinds of persecution did these teenage girls in India face? How do you think they felt when they were kept from their families for such a long time?
- How does it make you feel knowing some Christians (who are our brothers and sisters in Christ) go through persecution for their faith?

## LEARNING FROM THE TEENAGERS IN INDIA

- Who is someone you look up to?
- What makes them special?
- What part of the story about the teenage girls in India do you think is special? How might you look up to them?

## CARING AND PRAYING FOR OTHERS

- How do you feel when someone says they are praying for you?
- Do you pray for the people you love? How do you pray for them?
- How do you think you can pray for these teenage girls in India? Take a moment to pray together.
- Who is someone you can tell about the teenage girls in India?
- Would you like to share it with them so they can also pray?