



THE

# VOICE

OF THE MARTYRS

APRIL 2025



## SRI LANKA **RADIANT AND UNASHAMED**

THE BUDDHA TREE  
THE HOLY GHOST HOUSE



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

**“I don’t want to go to the temple, because I belong to Jesus.”**

—Rinujen, age 7



## When His Light Is Considered Darkness

I hope you pause in astonishment when you read our Lord’s statement, *“Ye are the light of the world”* (Matthew 5:14). The fact that He has chosen to use us to reach the world with His truth and love must always lead us to humility and action. It leads us to humility as we confess, *Lord, I cannot do this on my own. The Holy Spirit will need to empower me!* And it leads us to action as we say, *I must go forth! I cannot expect the world to be reached in another way.*

We understand that we are not the source of light, but only its means of distribution. We are only a reflection of His radiance, as the moon is to the sun. So the fallen world never sees His light of truth and love perfectly through us, and even when it sees that truth and love clearly, the world does not rejoice. As if Christ’s call for us to be the light of the world were not sobering enough, we also learn that His light shining through us in the darkness of the fallen world will be misunderstood, slandered and opposed.

When the prophet Isaiah says, *“Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness,”* (Isaiah 5:20), he is addressing a situation that is not only common but normal. In our fallen state, the unsaved are “Having the understanding darkened” (Ephesians 4:18) by the ultimate persecutor, our spiritual enemy, identifying the goodness of God’s light as something that must be attacked and destroyed.

The normal response of the fallen world is to oppose the light of Christ as if it were dark wickedness. As you read the true testimonies of faith in this magazine, please consider how nearly 1,000 Buddhists thought they were doing *good* as they violently stormed a church, beat the congregants and installed an idolatrous Buddhist shrine. Darkened in their understanding through the hardness of their hearts, they considered the light and truth of Christ to be something so shameful and harmful that it required elimination.

We cannot serve God well if we imagine that the fallen world will value us as His followers, celebrate us, or cheer us on. Too many Christians genuinely think, “If we show forth the love of Christ, we will be admired and they will want what we have.” As Christ’s witnesses — collectively “the light of the world” — we must understand that the radiance of His glory shining through us will be opposed and rejected. But we can praise God because He uses such opposition and the result of our suffering to accomplish His purposes. Christ suffered to show us His love, and we are called to be Christlike, to take up our cross to show His love to others. As we do so in faith, we can identify the violent opposition as “a great opportunity.”

*Ashley*

**About the cover:** Once shunned by their neighbours and considered cursed, Dinesh and his family now joyfully tell others how God transformed their lives.



# Under the Shadow OF THE BUDDHA TREE

*A Sri Lankan couple endures two decades of persecution to plant churches in a Buddhist stronghold.*

**W**ith a bare pantry and no money to buy food, Chaminda and Janani took a walk to a nearby beach one afternoon, praying as they walked. No sooner had they finished praying than they saw a large fish flopping on the shore. After chasing their excited dog away, they gratefully retrieved their 7-pound dinner. Today, they recall that incident as an example of God's provision through 19 years of opposition and persecution.

Entering Christian ministry in a part of Sri Lanka dominated by radical, nationalistic Buddhists is a bold act of faith, especially when complicated by a lack of adequate financial support. But as a young married couple committed to proclaiming the Gospel, Chaminda and Janani trusted in God and took the challenges in stride.

The island nation of Sri Lanka, off the southeast coast of India, has strong churches and theological training programmes that serve the 10% Christian minority. Still, 70% of the population is Buddhist, and there are areas in the south where the overwhelming Buddhist majority is fiercely opposed to Christianity; a pastor was martyred there in 1988 for trying to introduce the Gospel. It was into this region that Chaminda and Janani felt called to plant churches.

## Swept Away

In 2004, Chaminda and Janani were leading a small church in their home. Since getting married and beginning ministry work three years earlier, they had already been evicted several times by landlords yielding to pressure from Buddhist monks who taught that Christians brought shame to the community. But Chaminda and Janani had managed to find a place not too far from the beach, near the city of Galle, and a group of 20 to 30 Christians had begun gathering with them there for prayer and worship.

The church decided not to meet on Sunday, 26 December, 2004, because they had held a Christmas service the previous day. So Chaminda and Janani took the opportunity to celebrate Christmas with Chaminda's family, who lived farther inland.

That Sunday morning, a massive earthquake in the Indian Ocean triggered the largest tsunami in recorded history. A 12-metre wave

◀ Buddhist radicals planted this bodhi tree as a way of laying spiritual claim to land intended for a church. Buddhists consider bodhi trees sacred.

crashed into the southern Sri Lankan coast, killing more than 35,000 people and devastating entire communities, including the one where Chaminda and Janani lived.

When the couple returned home, they immediately focused on helping their community recover. Chaminda's family sent them food and water, which they shared with their neighbours as much as possible.

Soon, an international Christian relief team arrived to work alongside them. Deeply moved by Chaminda's commitment to stay and serve in an area that had been so inhospitable to the Gospel, a leader of the relief organisation asked him, "What do you need?"

Still focused on serving his neighbours, Chaminda pointed out the overwhelming needs of the community. So the man clarified his question. "No, I asked you what *you* need," he said. "Chaminda, we want to bless you. What do you need?"

Chaminda told the relief worker that what he really wanted was to build a church in the area, which still had almost no Christian witness. Before the team left, they helped Chaminda purchase a piece of land with an old house on it. A new church would eventually be built on the land, but not before a wave of opposition threatened to take away the house.

### Staking a Claim

Chaminda, Janani and some friends were working on renovations in the house shortly after the land purchase, when a mob of almost 1,000 people marched up the narrow, unpaved street toward their property. Buddhist monks had called on area residents to eliminate the shame of having Christians in their community.

As the mob gathered, they began to tear down a perimeter wall and gate. Once they had breached the wall, they poured into the property. They beat 10 church members with iron bars and their fists, and three of the Christians, including Chaminda, had to be hospitalized.

"I just tried to escape," Chaminda recalled. "I was able to close the door, but they broke the door and came inside and caught us. They started beating and dragging us toward a Buddha statue over at the corner of the street. I was swollen, the whole body from head to toe."

The crowd damaged walls, doors and windows in the house as well as the Christians' vehicles parked on the property. When a fight broke out between some of the attackers over money they had stolen, Chaminda, Janani and the other church members escaped.

While the Christians waited for the situation to calm down, one of the Buddhist monks entered the property to set up a Buddhist shrine and plant a bodhi tree, which is sacred in Buddhist culture and is not supposed to be cut or uprooted. Planting the tree was the Buddhists' way of claiming spiritual authority over the land.

As a result of legal proceedings related to the attack on their property, Chaminda and Janani were temporarily prohibited from returning to the land or house. They also learned that they were

forbidden from moving away, meaning they couldn't leave for better jobs or family needs for the duration of the legal proceedings. In the meantime, homeless people with drug addictions and criminal backgrounds took up residence in the house.

"The court case went five years," Janani said. "But we did our ministry. We were praying, and we were having classes and prayer meetings and Sunday services at our rented house." The harassment continued, however, even at their house. "It was a continuous thing," Janani said. "When we were there, every night ... they would throw stones, hit the vehicle and destroy flower pots around the house. It was normal."

Tired of the derelict property and the activities of those living there, neighbourhood leaders complained frequently to authorities. Ultimately, those who had attacked the Christians asked to settle the case. Chaminda agreed, surprising his Buddhist opponents by waiving his right to restitution for the damage they caused.

"This was a great opportunity," Chaminda said. "These people in the community, they didn't want us to even enter the house. But now they are saying, 'Come and stay here.' So we took that opportunity." He said he believes it was God's plan for the aggressors to see the love of Christ in the circumstances.

Chaminda and Janani moved into the house 20 days after settling the case, but they continued to hold worship services in their rented house to avoid antagonizing their neighbours.

While their efforts brought temporary peace, two years later, in 2012, a group of Buddhist monks again began

▼ The population of Sri Lanka is 70% Buddhist, and some areas in the south are fiercely opposed to Christianity.



protesting their presence. The church stopped meeting as a large group, instead dividing into five groups that met at different times and places. At one point, a group of 40 monks, including one carrying a handgun, burst into the house and assaulted Chaminda. They tried to file false charges against him, but the police rejected their accusations.

Then, one evening, a group of five young men forced their gate open and confronted Chaminda and two church leaders in the yard. They had devised a plan to frame Chaminda for the assault of another young man earlier that day. Chaminda was again badly beaten and required medical care at a local hospital.

Less than a week later, he received a summons to appear at the police station. On the day before his scheduled appearance, a monk went through the community with a loudspeaker, crying, "The pastor is a devil! Gather to chase him out from our village!" More than a thousand people responded to his cry and gathered around the police station, ready to lynch Chaminda.

But a high-ranking police officer had called Chaminda and told him not to come to the station. And a few hours later, the charges against him were dropped.

### Growing Family, Growing Church

Later in 2012, Janani gave birth to a baby boy. The child, named Oshan, wasn't hitting milestones or making sounds that would be expected in a baby his age. And doctors soon determined that he had neurological differences, which they attributed to the long-term stress Janani suffered as a result of the recurring attacks.

Chaminda and Janani's concerns grew as doctors and specialists failed to find therapies that helped Oshan, and the doctors finally recommended that the family go abroad for help. But Chaminda was torn.

"I am a father, same as I am a minister," Chaminda said. "I know that God is calling me to this town, but sometimes I am struggling with what to do, because my son is like this and I only have one son. If I die, he doesn't have a brother to take care of him."

When a Front-Line Worker learned of Oshan's medical needs, he helped Chaminda and Janani find therapies that greatly improved Oshan's condition. And just as Oshan has grown and begun to reach important milestones, so has the church.

"Even though it was difficult, now the church has grown to 300 people," Chaminda said. The congregation built a church building on the once-disputed property, and in 2024 they planted three new churches in the area.

"Everyone in the town knows the church," Chaminda said with a laugh, "because we have been famous from the persecution. Persecution is not an obstacle. It created a platform for us to bring Jesus to more people."

Anti-Christian sentiment still exists in the community. For example, the city has refused to pave their road, and local Buddhists still throw stones at their house. But Chaminda's good reputation has led to an unexpected invitation; he has

been asked to serve as a representative on a local committee.

Although the family home and beautiful church sit in the shade of the bodhi tree that has grown on the property since the first attack, the spiritual ownership is clear: This is a family and plot of land dedicated to the worship and proclamation of Jesus Christ. ■

▼ Chaminda, Janani and their son, Oshan, share a meal at home. The house was severely damaged during an attack in 2005 that hospitalized Chaminda and two other Christians.





# The HOLY GHOST House

*Shunned by Hindu neighbours for living in a “cursed” house, a Sri Lankan family finds hope in leading a growing church and passionately proclaiming the Gospel.*

The small red-brick house looked like any of the other buildings scattered for kilometres along a dusty rural road in north-central Sri Lanka. With exposed timber beams protruding from beneath its corrugated metal roof, the house was surrounded by a bare, open yard in the dappled shade of a few palm trees. The pleasant exterior was complemented by a sparsely furnished but tidy interior.

And yet many locals avoided both the house and its inhabitants. Villagers called it the Ghost House.

Dinesh and Chandra were daily wage workers when they started their family life in the little house. Their first child, Tenusha, was followed by a second daughter, who died of unknown causes when she was 18 months old. Their son, Rinujen, was born a few years later.

By then, Chandra was experiencing inexplicable pain, weakness and heart palpitations. After she suffered what seemed to be a heart attack, doctors told her there was nothing wrong with her heart or any other part of her body. She visited different hospitals but always got the same answer.

As members of a majority-Hindu Tamil community, Chandra and her family turned to the Hindu gods to identify the cause of her illness and cure her “bad karma,” as both local Hindus and Buddhists viewed such ailments. They went to

35 priests and swamis, paying for multiple rituals, but nothing helped. When their desperation became widely known, some healers even sought *them* out, promising cures in exchange for cash.

In addition to her physical pain, which eventually prevented her from walking, Chandra was plagued by nightmarish visions. Once, she tried to end her own life, suggesting that her family should do likewise. Convinced that the family and their home were cursed, the neighbours kept their distance.

“Our relatives and our neighbours had abandoned us,” Dinesh said. “We were in a very tough situation, and many people took advantage of us or never responded to us.” Heartbroken, Dinesh moved his family out of the house and into a hut close to the village so he could more easily take Chandra to the Hindu temple or to doctors.

“All my trust and faith was in my idols and the priests,” Dinesh said. Chandra often became unresponsive and rigid for minutes or hours at a time, and Dinesh grew desperate. “My sister told me about a church in another village,” he said. “She was not a Christian, but she heard that people were getting healed when they went to church.”

His daughter, Tenusha, urged him to visit the church. “We have tried everything,” she reminded him.



◀ Chandra tearfully recalled the time when her family was considered cursed.

***“Just look at Jesus!”***

### **A Radiant Vision**

On July 23, 2021, the family visited the church and explained their situation. When church members prayed for Chandra, she sensed a battle taking place inside of her. “I felt like I wanted to run away from the church,” she recalled. “I started crying out to God, saying, ‘I have bowed before every god that I know, but none of those gods could help me. So please help me. Please heal me!’ I was crying out ... because of so much pain, and I lost all my strength and fainted.”

Chandra said that while she was unconscious, she saw a vision in which demons tried to strangle her until Jesus Christ stomped on them. She said she could feel the pain and sickness leave her body as the demons were defeated.

Then, she said, the Jesus in her vision recited Psalm 34:5, *“They looked unto Him, and were lightened: and their faces were not ashamed.”* She heard Him tell her that she would become radiant in this life if she would look at Him and trust Him.

Meanwhile, Dinesh and his children knew only that Chandra was unconscious and struggling. So they cried out in prayer, too.

“We had never heard the name of Jesus before,” Dinesh said. “We just called out to the God of the universe.” Accustomed to offering sacrifices to the Hindu gods, Dinesh thought he should probably try negotiating with this new, unknown God. “I said, ‘God, if you will heal my wife, I will dedicate my daughter for your service.’”

When Chandra revived, she realized she had been released from a great oppression. The church members who had been praying for her rejoiced, and her family was overawed. “We could only acknowledge the fact that Jesus is Lord,” Dinesh said.

A week later, they moved back into the house they had abandoned. And then they returned to the church to publicly confess their faith in Jesus Christ.

### **Dedication to Service**

Dinesh knew from the beginning of their new life in Christ that Tenusha wasn’t the only family member who would be dedicated to the Lord’s service. “We said that, as a family, we are going to serve people who have gone through things like Chandra did,” Dinesh said.

When sharing her testimony with others, Chandra emphasizes the spiritual nature of her illness and how she overcame the sin of idolatry through faith in Christ. “We go to people who are sick and in difficult situations,” she said. “We tell them, ‘Jesus is everything! Just believe in Him and He can do anything for you. Don’t look at people, don’t look at the world, don’t worry about what the world thinks. Just look at Jesus!’”

Dinesh and Chandra know how the world views their faith in Christ. When Chandra was ill, their neighbours avoided them, considering them cursed. And now that they have become Christians, they are shunned and opposed for a different reason. “As soon as we became Believers, that is when the opposition started,” Chandra said.

No one would hire them for a job, and local vendors either refused to do business with them or charged them higher prices. Some people have even run them off for praying in Jesus’ name. “You can take everything away from us,” Chandra has told them, “but you cannot take Jesus from us. We believe that Jesus will touch you one day.”

The opposition hasn't stopped them from travelling throughout the area to share the Gospel and pray for people in need. "Every week, we spend time in prayer for the salvation of the village," Dinesh said. "Before we go to preach at a new village, we spend a day in fasting and prayer." He said that seeking the Lord's guidance gives them the strength to endure rejection.

"When we go to preach the Gospel, some people will give us water to drink," Chandra said. Offering water is a sign of hospitality that Chandra and Dinesh see as an opening to share about Jesus Christ. "Some people will reject us, so we move on to the next house."

Dinesh and his family have seen people healed and have helped lead many to Christ. Their church includes people who have been freed from addiction, people who have been released from demonic oppression, and people who have been excluded from their families or communities for various reasons. Even a former officer with the Tamil Tigers, a Tamil-minority insurgent group that fought a 25-year civil war with the Sri Lankan government, is part of their congregation.

### A Faith of Their Own

Dinesh and Chandra's children have made their own serious commitment to following Christ. Seven-year-old Rinujen has refused to join his second grade class on its weekly visit to a Hindu temple for religious instruction. "I don't want to go to the temple, because I belong to Jesus," he explained. Moved by Rinujen's courage and the knowledge of his mother's miraculous healing, some of the teachers asked him to pray for them, even kneeling so he could place his hands on their heads.

Likewise, Tenusha refused to complete her Hindu religious studies even though it was required for high-school graduation. When she petitioned for an alternate course of study, a teacher asked why she didn't want to take the class. Tenusha then took the opportunity to tell her whole class how her mother had been healed of demonic oppression, explaining that Jesus Christ can forgive sinners and give them new life. "I believe that one day that teacher will truly come to know the Lord," she said. "I am the only Christian in my school, so they would not talk to me. But I am so confident that Jesus is with me, so I am not afraid."

Sharing the Gospel in front of her class was just the first step on a path of bold faith. Tenusha began to read the Bible aloud to her parents, who cannot read. And as she read and studied Scripture, she also began to exhort and encourage her family from God's Word. Now, at age 19, she routinely teaches from the Bible when they meet for Sunday worship, and she dreams of pursuing formal studies in Christian ministry. "When I think about the way that Jesus loves me, ... I need to live for Him," Tenusha said. "Because He gave His life for me, the least that I can do is to serve Him."

Tenusha shared her favourite worship song to describe the family's experience of walking by faith. "The Lord who never leaves me, the Lord who walks with me, the Lord who protects me — You are my Lord," she sang. "Even before I say my needs, You provide for me. And even beyond my imagination, You have blessed me."



*Top:* Tenusha's joy in the Lord compelled her to share the Gospel with her whole class, even though she is the only Christian in her school.

*Bottom:* Hinduism is the primary religion in Tamil-majority areas of Sri Lanka.





“  
**I am so confident that Jesus is with me, so I am not afraid.**  
”

### A House of Hope

With help from the global body of Christ, Dinesh and Chandra acquired 11 head of dairy cows, a number that has almost doubled in a little over a year. They sell the milk to a dairy, and part of the profit is reinvested in the cattle while part is used to support their ministry.

“We go everywhere and talk about Jesus,” Chandra said. “By His grace, He has given people to our church. We believe that the whole village is going to follow Jesus.”

A house-church that started with just the four of them has grown to 46 members. In 2022, they decided to build a chapel onto the house to accommodate the growing congregation. When a local mason refused to build a “Jesus place,” they built the chapel themselves.

Tenusha said she views the transformation of their house in light of a favourite Bible passage from Isaiah: *“Also the sons of the stranger, that join themselves to the LORD, to serve Him, and to love the name of the LORD, to be his servants, every one that keepeth the sabbath from polluting it, and taketh hold of my covenant; Even them will I bring to my holy mountain, and make them joyful in my house of prayer: their burnt offerings and their sacrifices shall be accepted upon mine altar; for mine house shall be called an house of prayer for all people.”* (Isaiah 56:6-7).

“This house was known as the Ghost House,” Chandra said, “because I was filled with demons so that I didn’t know who I was. But now I know who I am as God’s child, and my neighbours know who I am, because God has changed my identity.” ■



Top: Dinesh takes care of the church’s cattle. Selling milk has enabled the family to continue their evangelism and discipleship efforts.

Centre: The family travels weekly to share the Gospel in area villages.

Bottom: A chapel was built onto the family’s house in 2022 to accommodate the growth of their congregation.

# Encourage and Equip

## Persecuted Christians in India



### **Our Christian brothers and sisters in India**

*face increasing opposition from Hindu extremist groups and local governments. We invite you to stand with them as they faithfully proclaim the Gospel at great cost. You can support Front-Line Workers, including persecuted pastors and their families, and provide Bibles and other practical help to Christians in India who live under constant threat of violence and imprisonment.*

[www.persecutionsa.org/donate](http://www.persecutionsa.org/donate)

Click here to access our website



# Prayer Diary

April 2025

T	1. BRUNEI	Pray that Bruneians will have more opportunities to hear the Gospel.
W	2. MALI	Pray for the boldness of churches in the north as they share the Gospel in an Islamic stronghold.
T	3. BENIN	Pray that Christians who have been attacked by voodooists will be encouraged and stand firm in their faith.
F	4. NIGER	Pray for the safety of Front-Line Workers who use motorcycles to reach people in remote desert areas with the Gospel.
S	5. ALGERIA	Pray that Christians in Algeria will hold fast to "the faith which was once delivered unto the saints." (Jude 1:3).
S	6. TURKMENISTAN	Authorities often search Believers' homes for Christian literature. Pray for the freedom to study God's Word.
M	7. SYRIA	Pray that Christian converts who lose family relationships will find comfort and fellowship in the body of Christ.
T	8. MOZAMBIQUE	Pray for the encouragement of pastors working in areas where Islamist groups regularly attack Christians.
W	9. TANZANIA	Pray that Tanzanian missionaries will share the Gospel with unreached people groups on the Swahili Coast.
T	10. YEMEN	Pray that Bibles stolen in an attack on a church will touch the hearts of those who do not yet know Christ.
F	11. INDONESIA	Pray that persecuted Christians in rural areas will find ways to fellowship with other Christians.
S	12. CAR*	Pray that Christians who suffered persecution will heal from their trauma.
S	13. RUSSIA**	Pray that Christians will have a vision to reach the lost.
M	14. BURKINA FASO	Pastor Hamadou was shot and killed by Islamists opposed to his bold witness. Pray that God will comfort his family.
T	15. PAKISTAN	Pray for the encouragement of the roughly 4 million Pakistani Christians, using Joshua 1:9 as a guide.
W	16. EGYPT	Praise God that Egypt has developed into a regional base for Gospel work.
T	17. CAMEROON	Pray for the safety of Bible distributors working in dangerous regions.
F	18. KENYA	Praise God for Pastor Galgalo's continued witness after being ostracised and having his church attacked by Islamists.
S	19. NEPAL	Pray for Bindu and her three daughters. Bindu's husband abandoned them after they placed their faith in Christ.
S	20. SAUDI ARABIA	Pray that those who must worship in secret will have opportunities for fellowship with other Christians.
M	21. VIETNAM	Pray for the continued faith and courage of Christians suffering in prison.
T	22. OMAN	Pray that Christians will find ways to share the Gospel secretly and disciple others in this restricted nation.
W	23. QATAR	Qataris who own and distribute Bibles are at great risk. Pray for their protection.
T	24. ISRAEL	Pray for Pauline Ayyad, who has ministered to widows like herself since her husband was killed by Islamists in 2007.
F	25. LIBYA	Pray that Christians who are in prison for their faith will experience God's presence and peace.
S	26. VENEZUELA	Pray that youth will be drawn to the love demonstrated by the body of Christ rather than to the ideals of Marxism.
S	27. NORTH KOREA	Pray for the bold Christians who are working to bring God's Word to the North Korean people.
M	28. SUDAN	Bibles are scarce because of ongoing efforts to Islamize the country. Pray for increased access to God's Word.
T	29. MALAYSIA	Pray for Christian converts who are tortured in re-education camps in attempts to force them to return to Islam.
W	30. CHINA	Pray that children and young people, especially in remote villages, will have access to God's Word.

\*CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC

\*\*RUSSIA AND AREAS UNDER ITS CONTROL



## PRAY

Pray for Christians like Divine. Pray that they will remain firm in faith as they recover from trauma and injuries and that they will be comforted as they help comfort others who have suffered great loss. Pray also that their faithful witness to Christ will lead their persecutors to repent and come to know the Lord.



## HELP PERSECUTED CHRISTIANS

When Christians face persecution because of their faith, the global body of Christ provides encouragement and support, assuring them that they are not alone. Your gift may be used to provide medical care, furnish temporary shelter, supply food, meet other unique needs and equip our brothers and sisters to be bold witnesses.



## WHERE NEEDED MOST

The Voice of the Martyrs has served our persecuted Christian family in the most difficult and dangerous parts of the world for more than 55 years. Your gift to "Where Needed Most" will be used to help Christians in hostile areas and restricted nations and to draw other members of the body of Christ into fellowship with them.

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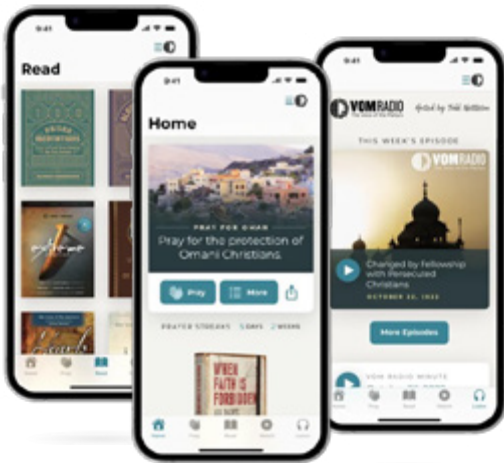
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