



August 2022

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2022 PHOTO ISSUE
**FOLLOWING CHRIST
IN PAKISTAN**



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



FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

A Land of No Opportunity for Christians

Scripture teaches that our work is sacred. We are meant to work hard, as unto the Lord Himself (Colossians 3:23), using the strength, skill, intellect and other abilities that He has given us. Since our labours are an offering unto the Lord and are meant to honour Him in this world, He will hold accountable those who mistreat workers. James 5:4 is a chilling indictment against those who defraud their workers. The stolen wages are described as “crying out” as a witness against the oppressors, and the apostle assures us that “the cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord of hosts.”

When I read the first six verses of James’s epistle, I think of Pakistan and weep for our Christian family members who live there. The passage is a perfect description of the injustice and abuse experienced by most of Pakistan’s 4 million Christians. With nearly 230 million people, Pakistan is the world’s fifth most populous nation. It has an officially Islamic system of government, and 98% of Pakistanis are Muslim. Though it is accurate to describe Christians as “second-class citizens” under Pakistan’s Islamic law, that phrase may understate the severity of the oppression.

Most Christians in Pakistan are born into economic systems in which, unless they renounce Christ, their only employment opportunities will be undesirable, labour-intensive jobs such as cleaning sewage pipes or making bricks by hand. Even worse, many are forced from birth to perform these tasks within financial schemes that keep them in permanent bondage to their Muslim employers. Christian women, in particular, suffer under employers’ back-breaking quotas,

and some Christian young women face the threat of being forced into a Muslim marriage.

We treasure our land of opportunity in which we are able to honour God and receive just reward for our labours. And rightly so. But what about the millions of our Christian brothers and sisters in Pakistan who will never experience that kind of opportunity in this world? It is important for me to glorify God and encourage you by sharing that even in the darkness of this oppression, our brothers and sisters experience the joy and peace of the Lord. God is that great and that good. That truth should encourage us all as we face our own trials.

We must love Pakistani Christians — our dear brothers and sisters for eternity — as much as we love ourselves. This love should then lead us to remember them in prayer and consider acts of service that will bless and encourage them. I pray that this special photo issue will serve to encourage and inform your prayers for our Christian family members in Pakistan.

In Christ’s service,

Ashley

About the cover: Brick-kiln workers, like this man, are often burdened with tremendous debts that are impossible to repay, effectively rendering them indentured servants for generations. Christians remain caught in this cycle of debt and poverty at the lowest levels of Pakistani society.



In Pakistan, Christian converts from Islam are often beaten and threatened by family members and neighbours. Jameela fled from her husband after he threatened to kill her and the children because Jameela had placed her trust in Christ. She arrived at a safe house with her two young children the day this photo was taken. Many Christian converts need short-term refuge from hostile family members, followed by training and tools to help them set up small businesses so they can support themselves.



Islamists frequently target Christian women at work. Samina Bibi's supervisor locked her in a room at the factory where she worked after he overheard her praying on her lunch break. A co-worker helped her escape, but Samina could not continue working at the factory, and she was the primary provider for her family. Samina received training at one of two sewing centres where persecuted Christian women learn tailoring skills and are mentored by other Christians. At the end of the training, graduates receive a sewing machine and assistance in starting a tailoring business.





Roughly 4 million Christians live in Pakistan, but they compose less than 2% of the country's population. Pakistani Christians face daily oppression, discrimination and persecution from radical Muslims. Trapped in a cycle of limited educational opportunities and poverty, many remain at the lowest levels of society throughout their lives, performing labour-intensive, menial work as brick-kiln workers, sewer cleaners or street sweepers.

To meet some of our persecuted Christian family members in Pakistan, watch the video *Fassal: Pakistan* at vom.org/fassal.



Some Christians in Pakistan are born into indentured servitude and enslaved at one of the country's many brick kilns. That was the situation for Hamza, who inherited his parents' debt to a brick-kiln owner. After Hamza took a Muslim co-worker to church with him, his employer began beating and harassing him, and the treatment continued even after Hamza was sold to another employer. Last year, Hamza received the funds necessary to pay his debt to the kiln owners and was freed from indentured servitude. He and his family can now support themselves through a rickshaw taxi and transport business.

Christians in Pakistan live under continual pressure, enduring frequent threats and the ever-present possibility of attack. A few months ago, a church leader was killed when he and another leader were ambushed while leaving worship services at the All Saints Church in Peshawar. The second church leader was also shot but survived his wound. Peshawar is the same city where in 2013 suicide bombers detonated their explosives at a church service, killing more than 120 people and injuring 250 others. Thirty-four Christian children who were affected by the bombing are receiving continued support. Some lost parents or other family members, while others were injured. Throughout Pakistan, Front-Line Workers serve tirelessly to equip, encourage and educate Christian youth.





Bold Christians travel long distances to proclaim the Gospel and distribute God's Word to radicalized Muslims, some of whom are members of extremist groups like the Taliban. Though street evangelism is legal under Pakistani law, evangelists take great risks to witness to Muslims, baptize converts and welcome them into their churches. Christian workers, like those above, who distribute Bibles and other Christian literature in this dangerous environment, attend training and fellowship gatherings for encouragement. A Front-Line Worker recently requested prayer for a former Muslim named Shakeel, who placed his faith in Christ and received baptism after studying the Bible with him. The worker had given Shakeel an Urdu Bible, which he was able to read with the assistance of his teenage son.



Because of Pakistan's blasphemy laws, Christians are sometimes falsely charged with blaspheming Islam, the Quran or Muhammad. Convictions can result in harsh prison sentences and even the death penalty. When a Muslim co-worker asked two sisters, Mehwish and Sehrish, about their Christian faith, other co-workers at the factory reported the sisters for evangelism. Their boss then sent them to another factory, where they were confronted by a Muslim religious leader who tried to force them to convert to Islam. The two sisters were beaten when they refused to renounce Christ. But after overpowering their guard, they were able to leave the factory. Today, the women remain in the country as faithful witnesses to Christ while studying for new careers.

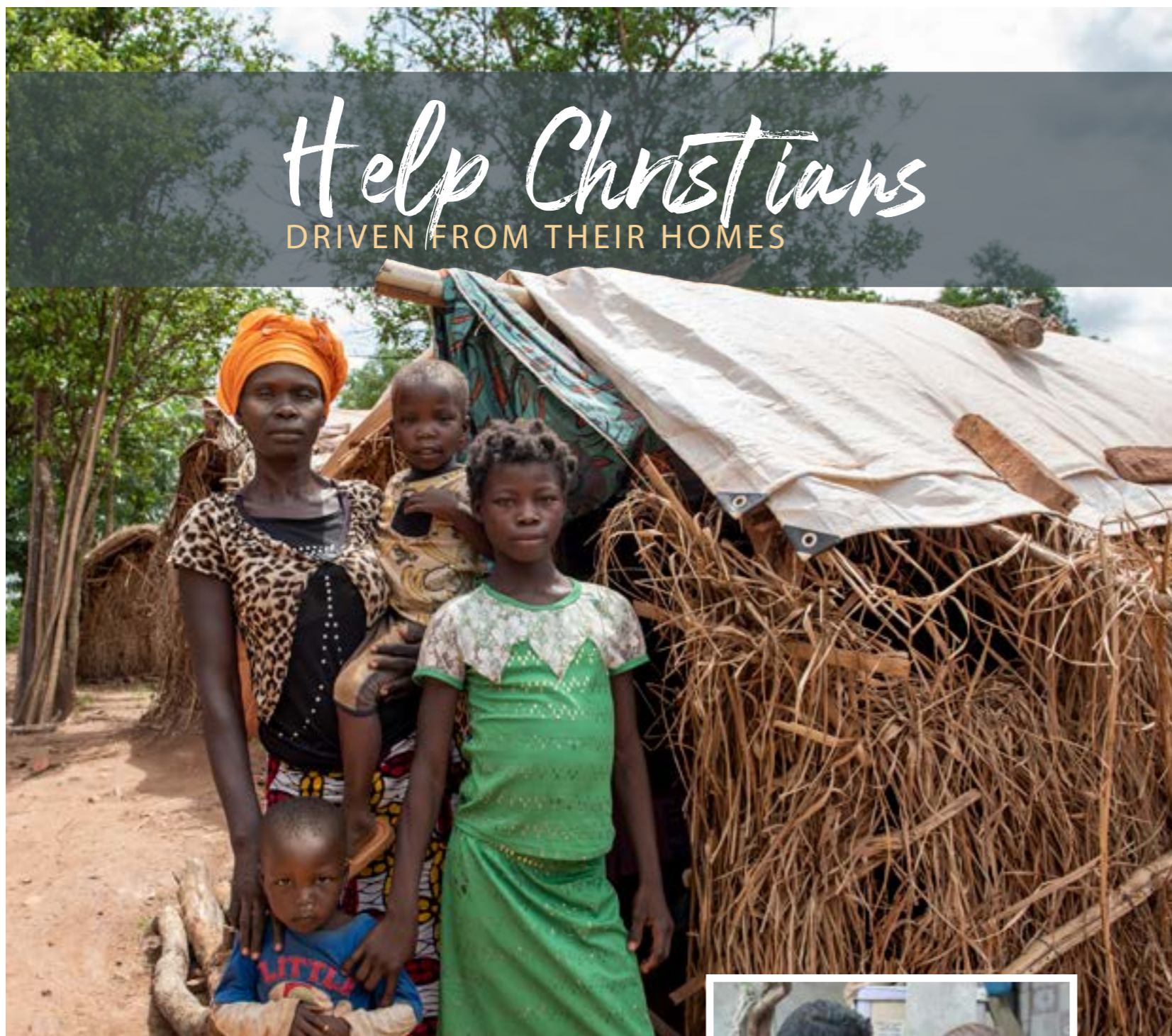
While Islamist groups oppose the Bible, printing and distributing Bibles is legal in Pakistan. Still, those living in rural, tribal and mountainous areas have little access to God's Word. Front-Line Workers are therefore distributing Urdu study Bibles, audio Bibles and New Testaments in the Urdu, Pashto and Sindhi languages. In addition, the workers bring children's Bibles, Sunday school curricula and booklets about the life of Christ for children.

Christians in Pakistan lead difficult lives, whether they were born into Christian families or converted from another religion. At the very least, they are marginalized and oppressed in the dominant Muslim culture, and at worst they may be beaten, kidnapped or killed. Nonetheless, many refuse to abandon their faith, and some faithfully and courageously proclaim the Gospel to their persecutors under difficult and dangerous circumstances.



Help Christians

DRIVEN FROM THEIR HOMES



When our brothers and sisters are displaced because of their faith in Christ, we can support them by praying for them and providing help during their time of need. Your gift towards our FAMILIES OF THE PERSECUTED fund will be used to provide basic necessities like blankets, soap, medical supplies, food, shelter and Bibles. Please use YOUR NAME and FOP as reference for your gift/donation.



HELP NOW

www.persecutionsa.org/donate

Prayer Diary

August/September 2022

AUGUST

- S 14 LAOS **Pray that village leaders will follow the law that allows people the right to become Christians.**
- M 15 EGYPT Pray for Ali, whose father tried to kill him when he became a Believer through a satellite TV program.
- T 16 OMAN Pray that Muslim seekers will come to Christ after reading distributed Bibles and Scripture portions.
- W 17 BHUTAN Pray for an increase in youth engagement with the Gospel.
- T 18 KUWAIT Pray for the protection of Kuwaiti Believers who are meeting in increasing numbers.
- F 19 TURKMENISTAN Pray that new church leaders will replace pastors who fled the country.
- S 20 SYRIA **Pray that the many Christian converts from Islam will grow in knowledge and faith.**
- S 21 UAE* **Pray for a woman and her children hiding from family because of the woman's faith in Christ.**
- M 22 SOMALIA Pray for the families of Somali believers who have been killed for their faith.
- T 23 INDONESIA Pray for pastors facing financial crises, especially those who rent worship space.
- W 24 UGANDA Pray for the courage and safety of Christian converts from Islam who are now sharing the Gospel.
- T 25 IRAN Pray that Iranians who have dreams and visions will come to faith in Jesus Christ.
- F 26 MALI Pray for those proclaiming the Gospel in the north, a stronghold for Islamist activity.
- S 27 NORTH KOREA **Pray for South Korean missionaries who are imprisoned in North Korea for their Gospel work.**
- S 28 MOROCCO **Pray for the wisdom of Believers caught by secret police.**
- M 29 YEMEN Pray that the faith of persecuted Christians who leave the country will not be shaken.
- T 30 ETHIOPIA Pray for Believers who face severe persecution from both Muslims and traditional Christians.
- W 31 BURKINA FASO Pray that widows will be able to overcome the trauma of seeing their husbands killed.

SEPTEMBER

- T 1 KENYA Pray for Front-Line Workers in northern Kenya who are under continual threat of attack.
- F 2 MALDIVES Pray that new Believers will have a good support network and grow in faith.
- S 3 YEMEN **Pray for the boldness, wisdom and protection of underground churches.**
- S 4 TAJIKISTAN **Pray for Pastor Kholmatov, released from prison in December 2019, and his family.**
- M 5 ERITREA Pray that the Lord will raise up strong leaders for Eritrean churches.
- T 6 CAR** Pray for martyred Pastor Jean-Paul Sankagui's son, who has taken over his father's work.
- W 7 MYANMAR Pray for Front-Line Worker John and his family.
- T 8 JORDAN Pray for the wisdom of churches embracing those from a Muslim background.
- F 9 KAZAKHSTAN Pray for President Kasym-Zhomart Tokayev and the government.
- S 10 MAURITANIA **Pray that Christians will have access to God's Word, despite government restrictions on Bibles.**
- S 11 NORTH KOREA **Pray for a Christian worker who distributes audio Bibles inside the country.**
- M 12 INDONESIA Pray for Kandhi, who, along with her daughter, Meice, witnessed her husband's murder by Muslim terrorists.
- T 13 CHINA Pray that church leaders will know the best way for their congregations to meet.
- W 14 INDIA Pray for Pastor Maruti, in Belagavi, who ministers to temple prostitutes and their children.
- T 15 DJIBOUTI Pray that Somali and Eritrean refugees will have the opportunity to hear the Gospel.
- F 16 LEBANON Pray for churches, pastors and all Christians amid economic and civil disorder.
- S 17 BHUTAN **Pray that God will mobilize more Bhutanese Christians to share the Gospel with the unreached.**

*UNITED ARAB EMIRATES

**CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC