

# Open *Doors*

MAGAZINE | September/October 2025

## The day Jemal lost everything

Help stop the violence  
and start the healing in  
sub-Saharan Africa

**ARISE AFRICA**  
CAMPAIGN SPECIAL



## ARISE AFRICA

### Unite in prayer with the church in Africa

WEDNESDAY 22 OCTOBER | 7.30-8.30PM

You're invited to a special online event to pray for our persecuted church family in sub-Saharan Africa, responding to their call to stop the violence and start the healing. Why not join with your small group or church?

Book today at [opendoorsuk.org/ariseafrica](https://opendoorsuk.org/ariseafrica)

## IDOP PRAYER VIGIL

Join us during a 12-hour prayer vigil at the Open Doors office in Witney to mark the International Day of Prayer for the Persecuted Church (IDOP). Come for as long as you choose – whether one hour or all 12. The final hour, focusing on Mission and Unity, will be streamed online (7-8pm).

Saturday 15 November | 8am-8pm | Witney, Oxfordshire

Find more information and book your free place at [opendoorsuk.org/idop](https://opendoorsuk.org/idop)



## LEAVE A LEGACY OF HOPE

You can give your persecuted family hope of a brighter future by including a gift to Open Doors in your Will. Your gift will mean a lifetime of support for those who suffer for following Jesus.

If you have not yet made a Will, you can make a Will for FREE using our partner Farewill.

To find out more, go to [opendoorsuk.org/legacy](https://opendoorsuk.org/legacy) or phone 01993 460015.



Did you know that October is free Wills month?

Open Doors is an international ministry serving persecuted Christians and churches worldwide.

Open Doors supplies Bibles, leadership training, literacy programmes, livelihood support and advocacy services. We also mobilise the church in the UK and Ireland to serve Christians living under religious persecution.

If you have any questions about the work of Open Doors, or would like to reprint any of the articles in this magazine, please do get in touch.

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**COVER:** In Ethiopia, Jemal\* and his family were forcibly displaced when Islamist extremists ransacked their home and burned down their business

\*Names changed for security reasons

#### LETTER FROM HENRIETTA

## Fullness of life

**"The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full."** JOHN 10:10

I have been reflecting recently on the link between poverty and persecution – a poorer church is a much more vulnerable church. We see this in countries across sub-Saharan Africa. As Christians abandon homes and livelihoods when extremists attack, they become even easier targets for further persecution.

We see it in individual cases too, like Jemal\* from Ethiopia (p6). After he and the Christians in his community were attacked, he lost everything. As the breadwinner in his family, losing his livelihood didn't just affect him physically. It was an assault on his self-worth, which in turn affected his wider family. I am touched by how unflinchingly honest he is about the effect this attack had on him.

But what I find remarkable is that, despite everything he's been through, his faith in God has been made stronger. When I think about Jemal, this verse from John 10 springs to mind. God reverses the enemy's intentions. The enemy comes to kill – Jesus brings life. And that's what Jemal's experiencing – thanks to your gifts and prayers which are helping strengthen him.

There are so many more believers like Jemal across sub-Saharan Africa who need our prayers and support. I am thrilled at the response so far to the *Arise Africa* campaign and how many people have responded by signing the petition – but we still have such a long way to go. I want to encourage you, if you haven't already, to share the petition with your church and your friends and family. Every signature, every voice counts as we continue to stand with our persecuted church family in Africa to help stop the violence and start the healing.

Every blessing,



Henrietta Blyth  
CEO, Open Doors UK&I



# WORLD WATCH LIST BULLETIN

## SUDAN

### Church demolished

Christians from a church in Sudan watched on as their 35-year-old building (BELOW) was demolished for allegedly not complying with regulations – and more churches could be targeted.

No legal notice was given for the demolition of the Pentecostal church in the capital, Khartoum. “They will target all churches in the outlying areas of the main cities and demolish them with a direct attack,” says Rafat Samir, chairman of the Evangelical Community Council for Sudan.

“People are extremely traumatised and this impacts our witness,” says Rafat, reflecting on the wider challenges facing Christians in Sudan amidst ongoing political upheaval. “It’s not just our buildings that have been broken down, but also our people.”

**PRAY** Against further church demolitions and closures, and for Christians to be strengthened in their faith.



## SYRIA

### 25 killed in suicide attack

Amid rising violence in Syria, Christians are in mourning and fear after a suicide bomb attack on a church in Damascus killed 25 people, followed just weeks later by the foiling of a potential attack on a separate church.

Hundreds had gathered for a service at the Greek Orthodox Saint Elias Church on Sunday 22 June, when a man opened fire before detonating himself.

Three weeks later, three people were arrested after being discovered with explosives and extremist literature close to a church in Al-Kharibat, near Tartus. The threat of further attacks has made the community very fearful.

**“These are impossibly hard days.”**

“We’re scared, truly scared,” said a church leader. “All we can do is wait here in our homes and pray... These are impossibly hard days. We just pray for our lives, for peace. We’re beyond tired.”

**PRAY** For protection of Christians in Syria, and for God’s perfect peace to drive out fear (1 John 4:18).



Other Christians stood guard as Danh was baptised

## VIETNAM

### Bathroom baptism

The dangers facing an undercover believer in Vietnam meant that Danh’s\* baptism happened in a bathroom with believers keeping guard.

Danh lives in a remote village and comes from the Hmong ethnic group. Like many local believers, and there are very few, he must practise his faith secretly. “There’s tight government monitoring and control,” says Doan\*, a local expert. “Authorities want to keep it ‘zero-Christian’, meaning they don’t want anyone to follow Jesus here, nor do they want Christianity to grow.”

“We had to be discreet, careful and watchful,” says Pastor Luca\* of the baptism. “But Danh was resolute – there was no turning back. It wasn’t the place that mattered, but Danh’s decision to follow Jesus no matter the cost.”

**PRAY** That Danh’s witness will lead others to Jesus.

## NORTH KOREA

### Will prisoners be released?

In a surprising move, North Korea has launched an internal investigation into its own harsh punishments, raising fragile hope that some prisoners could be released.

Whilst the government has not explained its motives, observers believe it could be aimed at appeasing public anger and improving its image prior to the 80th anniversary of the founding of the Workers’ Party on 10 October.

“The investigation may be limited,” says Simon Lee\*, Open Doors coordinator for North Korea ministries. “It may be a political gesture. But even so, if it results in just a few lives being spared or a few families being reunited, it’s worth praying for.”

Despite extreme danger, God is very much still on the move. “The underground church in North Korea is growing,” says Simon.

“A former prisoner who became a Christian while in a North Korean labour camp said, ‘Even in darkness, God finds us. Even in suffering, He is with us.’”

**PRAY** For the release of prisoners, and for the anniversary to be a turning point towards reform.

## MYANMAR

### A flow of Living Water

Water is flowing in more ways than one in a community in Myanmar, thanks to your support following the devastating earthquakes in March.

Whilst Pastor Than\* and his family were safe after the earthquake, their clean water supply was not, becoming increasingly polluted. They reached out to Open Doors partners, who helped reinforce the well with a shock-absorbing foundation and elevated the water tank.

**“We feel your care and love, flowing into our lives like living water – for our family.”**

“We can access clean drinking water,” says the pastor, adding that it’s serving other believers and the wider community. They’re amongst hundreds who’ve benefited from your incredible response to our emergency appeal, with

other support including food and medicine. “We feel your care and love, flowing into our lives like living water – for our family, our church and our community!” he says.

“Pastor Than’s words reminded me of the story of the Samaritan woman drawing water and meeting Jesus (John 4),” says Ko Lwin\*, a partner. “I pray that the people will not only draw water from the well, but also encounter Jesus, the Living Water.”

**PRAY** That people across Myanmar will meet Jesus through the love of His people.



Open Doors partners helped to repair the well

### MORE STORIES

- Surge in arrests of Christians in Iran
- Smuggling hope to believers from North Korea
- A transformative answer to prayer in Central Asia

Head to [opendoorsuk.org/news](https://opendoorsuk.org/news) or follow us @opendoorsuk for more news and updates





# "THEIR GOAL WAS TO ELIMINATE CHRISTIANITY"

- JEMAL, ETHIOPIA



LEFT Jemal shared this photo of the fire that destroyed his business

"In just one hour, they destroyed everything," says Jemal\*. "In a single day, they turned everything to ash."

Jemal will never forget the day that Islamist radicals attacked his village in Ethiopia. The day he lost his home, his livelihood and his safety. But though that day was a shocking escalation of violence, it wasn't the beginning of the persecution.

## "A VERY GOOD LIFE"

Jemal and his wife, Fatima\*, grew up as Muslims. When they were young parents, they encountered Jesus and made the life-changing decision to follow Him. Like most converts from Islam

in Ethiopia, they faced some opposition from their families and Muslim neighbours, but it wasn't severe. They had a strong faith community, and were thankful for their day-to-day stability and blessings.

"We had a very good life," says Jemal. "My whole family and I go to church and worship God." His woodworking and steel manufacturing businesses were flourishing, and his customers included both local Christians and Muslims. Life was peaceful.

That started to change when visiting Muslim clerics began sharing radical messages at the local mosques.

## ECONOMIC EXCLUSION

"The clerics began by isolating us," Jemal remembers. "They told the community not to talk to us. They made the community afraid by saying, 'Whoever talks to them or sits with them will not have a proper burial ceremony.'" This was a very serious threat, since your burial site is particularly significant in Islam.

For the first time, Muslims began to avoid Christian businesses. "They isolated the Christians from the Muslims," says Jemal. "They told Muslims in my town, 'Don't buy anything from them but let them buy from us. If you buy from them, they will become richer.'"



Economic exclusion is often used as a weapon to marginalise and impoverish Christians in parts of sub-Saharan Africa. The hope is to pressure Christians – particularly Christian men, who are most commonly the financial providers for their families – to either convert to Islam or leave the area. Last year, at least 7,100 shops or businesses belonging to Christians in sub-Saharan Africa were attacked, destroyed or forced to close.

This was hard enough. But the persecution was suddenly about to escalate.

#### **“NO CHRISTIAN HOME WAS SAFE”**

As tensions continued to grow between the Muslim and Christian communities,

Jemal and his wife, Fatima, lost their home, livelihood and possessions in the attack



the local authorities intervened – but, rather than bring peace back to the town, it had the opposite effect. The extremists were furious – and it provided the spark to light the fire that was to consume the whole community.

### **“IN A SINGLE DAY, THEY DESTROYED EVERYTHING I OWNED AND HAD BUILT UP OVER THE YEARS.”**

“They began the attack on Monday night,” Jemal says. “By Tuesday, they even tried to kill me.”

At first, Jemal wasn’t sure what to do. “My sister, also a Christian, begged me to leave my belongings behind,” he remembers. “I wanted to stay and protect my house and business, but we had to leave and we found refuge in a Muslim’s house. Because no Christian home was safe.”

The kindness of Jemal’s Muslim friend showed there was still friendship in the community, even though the radical Islamists tried to obscure it with their hatred and violence. It was a gesture Jemal would remember through the rest of the ordeal.

#### **HUNDREDS FORCED TO FLEE**

On the second day of the ambush, the arson began. “Mobs of people went from house to house, singling out Christian homes and businesses, destroying whatever they could find and setting it on fire,” says Jemal. “In a single day, they destroyed everything I owned and had built up over the years.”

At least 215 homes of Christian families were destroyed. Hundreds of people lost their means of livelihood, and at least 375 families were forced on the run. Jemal’s home was ransacked and his businesses were burned down. He had nothing left.

The attackers hoped that this financial ruin would

shame the Christian men into giving up their faith. “They believed that, after our property was destroyed, Christians would convert to Islam,” says Jemal. “They did not want Christians to remain in the town. Their goal was to eliminate Christianity.”

But they didn’t reckon on Jemal’s faith.

#### **OVERWHELMED**

Jemal knew he wouldn’t turn back from following Jesus – but, displaced and distraught, he was extremely anxious about the future for his family. His mind was racing with questions. “What work can we do in the future? Where can we live? How can I feed my children?”

He and his family were taken in at a church compound in a nearby town, alongside almost 30 other families. It was a safer environment, but the physical conditions were hard – he had to sleep on the floor in a small, bare room with 12 other men for two months, and his daughter had a newborn. Seeing his family in these conditions deeply impacted him, and he knew it couldn’t be a long-term solution. It didn’t answer the questions he couldn’t keep from his mind. “It was a tough moment for me,” he says. “I was overwhelmed and paralysed. It deeply affected us psychologically; we were very afraid and anxious.”

One of the things that hurt most was that the attackers



The whole family were displaced, along with at least 375 other families

were men Jemal had known for years. “We were born and raised in the same village,” he says with great sorrow. “We were family; we had shared meals and lived together. It truly made us feel heartbroken.”

#### **HOW VIOLENCE AFFECTS MEN**

This brutal incident isn’t unique to Jemal’s village. “The violence in East Africa is increasing,” says Fikiru\*, an Open Doors research expert for the area. “Christianity is growing fast in our region, and these adversaries feel that they are losing ground. So they want to stop Christianity by persecuting.” It’s why Open Doors’ *Arise Africa* campaign is so vital, to respond to this crisis.

Persecution impacts men and women in different ways, Fikiru explains: “Men know that whenever there is a persecution incident, they will be the first target. The attackers know that, if they attack men, they will deny the family the breadwinner. And

they will make an impact on the leadership, as well as the fellowship, of the church.”

He adds: “When I meet some of these persecuted believers, they are really emotionally impacted. If they are not able to defend their family, they feel as if they’re disappointing their friends, their colleagues.”

### **“IT SEEMS THE PERSECUTION OF CHRISTIANS IS FORGOTTEN.”**

#### **FORGOTTEN BY THE WORLD?**

Last year, Pastor Barnabas made a memorable clarion call that ‘nobody is talking about this’. Fikiru hears the same, time and again. “The world does not pay enough attention to East Africa. It seems the persecution of Christians is forgotten,” he says. “When we speak to them, they always say to us that the most painful situation is not the persecution



incident itself. Rather, it's the misunderstanding they face from the church.

"I met a pastor recently. He asked, 'Are we still in the hearts of minds of believers around the world, praying for us?'"

#### SUPPORTING JEMAL

With the gifts and prayers of Open Doors supporters, local partners in Ethiopia are able to show believers like Jemal that they have not been forgotten. When Open

Open Doors partners are standing by the family and helping Jemal restore his businesses

Doors partners heard about the violent attack on his community, they rushed to respond.

**"THIS MINISTRY HELPED US TO STAND ON OUR FEET."**

"Praise God, we didn't die from hunger and thirst," Jemal says. "The ministry responded promptly from the

outset of the tribulation by providing food supplies."

But it's clear from Jemal's experience that immediate aid – though vital – is not enough. Traumatized believers need spiritual and practical support for the long-term. When they saw the psychological toll the attack had on Jemal, local partners also invited him to receive Open Doors trauma care. It's helped him begin healing: "It has greatly benefited me," he says. "I had completely given up. But God can restore what is lost."

#### "I REALLY LOVE THIS MINISTRY"

Jemal also received new machinery and materials to restart his woodworking and steel manufacturing businesses. "We did not have any other means of surviving if the ministry had not bought us that equipment," he says. "This ministry helped us to stand on our feet. You helped us feed our children. I really love this ministry and I wish to express my profound gratitude. May God bless you all!"

Knowing that people are praying for him around the world is a source of great joy and encouragement. "It makes you happy," he says. "You say, 'Oh, I have people of my own! We have family through Christ. We are of the same Father.'"



## STOP THE VIOLENCE. START THE HEALING.

Despite the horrific persecution Jemal has experienced, he now has hope for the future. "Our God is the God of hope. He is a God who can do everything. Because of that, I am joyful," he says. "Through all of this, my faith has grown stronger."

Jemal needs long-term support and there are millions of vulnerable Christians in Ethiopia and the region clinging to Jesus who also, desperately, need our help. The *Arise Africa* campaign aims to stop the violence and start the healing for these courageous believers.

**"OUR GOD IS THE GOD OF HOPE. HE CAN DO EVERYTHING."**

"Let your aid stand by these people," Jemal implores. "It takes a day for them to be hungry or thirsty. One Christian can be medicine for another Christian."

Violent attacks in sub-Saharan Africa are increasing, leaving more and more of our brothers and sisters needing our support. Please don't look away while the church is burning. Your gift and prayers today can help hope arise from the ashes.

#### PLEASE PRAY

Jemal asks for your prayers:

- "My prayer request is for you to pray that God will change the area where I live. I have a strong desire for God to change that place."
- "For Christians to be economically resilient."
- "For us to have influence in our community, so we will be heard in various places. In every place I go, pray for God to give me boldness."

Please pray for all vulnerable Christians across sub-Saharan Africa, and for Open Doors local partners as they stand alongside our church family. You can find more prayer points for sub-Saharan Africa in your Prayer Diary.

#### PLEASE GIVE

- **Every £23** could help a Christian who has faced extreme persecution receive hope and healing through trauma care.
- **Every £40** could meet the basic needs of four believers in Africa for a month – this could include food, shelter and clothing.
- **Every £60** could enable a persecuted believer to set up a small business, such as carpentry, farming

or soap-making, giving them long-term financial security.



You can give to the *Arise Africa* campaign at [opendoorsuk.org/ariseafrica](https://opendoorsuk.org/ariseafrica)

#### SHARE THE ARISE AFRICA PETITION

You'll find the *Arise Africa* petition in your Magazine envelope. It invites us to stand with the African church in calling for protection, justice and restoration for persecuted Christians in sub-Saharan Africa.

If you've already signed, please encourage your church, family and friends to add their voices. You can help us reach the target of one million signatures from around the world. Together, we can stop the violence and start the healing.







## VIOLENT ATTACKS IN BENUE STATE, NIGERIA

Open Doors partners in Nigeria are requesting your urgent prayers in the wake of attacks in Benue State. In attacks on several different villages, Islamist militant Fulani have killed more than 200 people – mostly Christians – and left thousands displaced.

### FLEEING WITH NOTHING

Open Doors partners have supported communities in Benue State for many years and, thanks to your support for the *Arise Africa* campaign, were able to respond quickly. A team of local partners rushed to meet with some of the survivors, who were sheltering in abandoned buildings. Most had fled with nothing – no food, clothes or vital medicines.

“What can you tell these people at that point in time that will calm their

minds and make them feel God is there?” says Virtue\*, an Open Doors partner. “I had no words – what do you say?”

Virtue and her team spent time in heartfelt prayer with the survivors and were able to give some emergency relief immediately. But the ongoing need is huge, so our team are working with local believers to scale up our response so we can reach more families with long-term relief.

### PLEASE SIGN

You can use your voice powerfully to call for protection, justice and restoration for our persecuted church family in sub-Saharan Africa by signing the *Arise Africa* petition, enclosed with your magazine. If you’ve already signed, please do share with other believers who want to stand alongside our persecuted brothers and sisters.

### PLEASE PRAY

Most importantly, you can do the same thing as Virtue: pray.

- That these displaced Christians would know that God is with them and would find hope, and that God would bind up their wounds
- That God would touch the hearts of the attackers
- For local Open Doors partners as they assess the need and plan how to respond
- That those who are displaced and are grieving their martyred loved ones would know the peace of Jesus like never before.

Join us to pray for Nigeria on 22 October, and look out for further updates on the unfolding situation at [opendoorsuk.org](http://opendoorsuk.org)

PICTURED Children displaced by the attack in June seek shelter at abandoned market in Benue, Nigeria

## ARISE AFRICA

### Unite in prayer with the church in Africa

JOIN US FOR ARISE AFRICA ONLINE ON 22 OCTOBER



Christians in Africa are asking you to help them stop the violence and start the healing. Your prayers are a powerful way to stand with them, and you’re invited to join a special online event to pray for our persecuted church family in sub-Saharan Africa and find out more about the *Arise Africa* campaign.

Across the continent, 16.2 million Christians have been displaced by violence and persecution. One of them is Imma, from Benue State in Nigeria. Her village was attacked at night by Fulani militants, who have ties to so-called Islamic State. Some of her husband’s family were killed. But Imma managed to flee to a camp for IDPs (internally displaced people). “God showed mercy when He allowed us to survive this attack,” she says. “Let Him please convince other people to help us. So that we can take care of ourselves. Since we arrived here, not all of us found a place to sleep. And there’s not enough food.”

Simon’s village was also attacked by Fulani militants, and he arrived at the same IDP camp as Imma. “It is my

prayer that God continues to strengthen us and fellow Christians,” Simon says. “That He continues to help us to listen to His words and obey.”

Why not invite your small group to join this time of prayer? You may not be able to go to Benue and sit alongside Imma and Simon, but you and your small group can unite with them in prayer from thousands of miles away.

### YOUR PRAYERS REALLY DO MAKE A DIFFERENCE

Please join us in praying for believers like Simon and Imma. “I pray that God empowers fellow believers to help us,” Imma says, “to help us spiritually by praying for us, and also to help us with other needs.”

**Date:** Wednesday 22 October

**Time:** 7.30-8.30pm

Book your free place, and find more ways to pray for Christians in Africa at [opendoorsuk.org/ariseafrica](http://opendoorsuk.org/ariseafrica)



# "WE COULD NOT HAVE DONE THIS WITHOUT YOU"

A trip to meet Pastor Soré, Burkina Faso



Andy W. is part of Open Doors' Church Relations team. He recently travelled to Burkina Faso, meeting Pastor Soré. In this article, he shares about Pastor Soré's faithfulness, how his ministry is growing, and the impact your prayers and gifts are already having.



When I arrived at Pastor Soré's compound, with a group of church leaders from across the UK, it was the end of a long journey. We'd left one of Burkina Faso's major cities, driven down a 'main road' – though even that was little more than a dirt track. From here, we turned onto a road that barely felt like a road at all. Our minibus jolted over an uneven path, dust flung up either side. After half an hour, we were there.

The journey was hard, but the welcome was beautiful. I was very excited to meet Pastor Soré – and he was equally excited to meet us! Pastor Soré, his family and many young children were singing, dancing and delighting in our arrival. Pastor Soré shook my hand. "I welcome you to our town," he said, through the interpreter who had accompanied us.

## A GROWING COMMUNITY

You may have heard Pastor Soré's story when Open

Doors shared it during the *Arise Africa* campaign last year. He and his family were displaced by violent persecution, and are now living in the middle of nowhere with vulnerable children and adults who were also displaced and need their care. Since Open Doors first shared their story, the community of people Pastor Soré supports has grown from 17 to 44.

"God gave me a vision to receive the people who are persecuted and have lost their family," Pastor Soré said to me. "Many of the children are orphans, so we take care of them. I receive children who are not Christian, and they come to know Christ."

He added: "We are sure the presence of God is with us. God is increasing our town and lots of people are coming here."

They've recently expanded their church to fit more

people in – a clay brick building with a tin roof, with a few wooden benches outside in the shade. The family have so little, but they gave us the best seats – they were so keen to honour our visit.

## MOVED AND ENCOURAGED

I wanted to let Pastor Soré know how much his story has meant to people, and that countless people in the UK and Ireland are praying for him and his community. There are some words he says in the video that many have been particularly struck by: "We are displaced, but Jesus is not and will never be displaced from our lives."

## "We are sure the presence of God is with us."

As soon as I told him, his face lit up. He looked amazed, and he started to cry. "We're just doing our little bit here," he told me. "We didn't think it would have any impact on anyone else." I'm so glad we could share how much he inspires people in their faith. You could tell he was really moved by that, and hugely encouraged.

## GRATEFUL FOR SUPPORT

The prayers and giving of Open Doors supporters are aiding Pastor Soré abundantly in his mission. I could see the evidence all around me – the chickens, goats and cows that they've been able to buy, along with seeds to get them started in self-reliance.



Pastor Soré and his family are touched and thankful for your ongoing prayers and support

It's clear how the help of Open Doors supporters is uplifting these courageous brothers and sisters. Pastor Soré shared his thankfulness with me over and over again: "We could not have done this without you," he said. "We are so grateful for all you've done – your prayer, your support. Thank you."

## EXTRAORDINARY HOPE

My main takeaway from meeting Pastor Soré is his extraordinary hope. Other displaced believers we met – understandably – have heavy, heavy hearts. They are in survival mode. But Pastor Soré is driven by God's purpose in his life.

"If God wants me to stay here, I'll stay," he told me. "My vision is to create some opportunity for the children, and educate them. The seed we sow in them is important. God is really helping us move forward. Despite the challenges, we are still strong and bold to keep the vision."

Pastor Soré is an amazing man and I was so grateful for the opportunity to meet him, and to pass on the prayers and care of Open Doors

supporters. Please do keep praying for him and his community.

## PASTOR SORÉ'S PRAYER REQUESTS

- That God will increase their faith, and the children will remain in the faith
- For land of their own and a place to build a church
- For employment for people, where they can grow in their work
- For continued access to food and water
- For the nation of Burkina Faso – that peace will come.

Share the *Arise Africa* petition, calling for protection, justice and restoration, with your church or small group at [opendoorsuk.org/ariseafrica](https://opendoorsuk.org/ariseafrica)



# WHY SHOULD YOU DO CHURCH ON THE RUN?



Millions of Christians in sub-Saharan Africa are fleeing violence and conflict. *Church on the Run* is a fundraising activity that invites your church to run, cycle, swim or move in any way you can to support them.

A group that has done just that are Just Love Oxford, which seeks to equip students and graduates to pursue justice in the way of Jesus. We caught up with one of them, Izzi Bailey, to find what inspired them – and why you should join them.

## WHAT INSPIRED YOU TO GET ON THE MOVE FOR YOUR PERSECUTED FAMILY?

The levels of persecution and suffering that our global family experience daily has always been heartbreaking to many of us at Just Love. The way they continue to live out their faith, despite the consequences, is such an encouragement, and a testimony to how God draws near to those facing injustice and uses them.

**“The challenge is super accessible.”**

Having heard their stories, it's so clear that God's Spirit rests on those who are deeply suffering and turns their weakness into power – a power that He uses for good and for change. We decided to do *Church on the Run* to pray, encourage and financially support our persecuted family – just as their testimonies encourage us!

## WHAT DOES YOUR CHALLENGE INVOLVE?

We set a goal of collectively moving 1,620km over June and July. However, when we invited people to sign up, we rapidly surpassed that goal, which was super exciting! We're doing a mixture of walking, running, swimming and cycling.

## HOW HAS IT HELPED DEEPEN YOUR RELATIONSHIP WITH YOUR PERSECUTED FAMILY?

It's been such an eye-opening experience. Many of us aren't regular athletes, so this has mostly been a challenge and not a casual side-quest! But that has helped us to fix our gaze on who we're running for – deepening our love for them and our desire to pray for them.

It has helped us to think more deeply about our persecuted family, being encouraged by their testimonies and challenged by their unwavering faith.

## HOW HAVE PEOPLE RESPONDED TO YOUR CHALLENGE?

Most of the people who signed up pledged to do 162km over the two months, reflecting the 16.2 million Christians fleeing violence and conflict in sub-Saharan Africa.



Cycling is one of several activities the group from Oxford did for the challenge

**“It has helped us to think more deeply about our persecuted family.”**

Others pledged to do 42km (a marathon) and even 240km! A friend and I decided to cycle 162km in one day, which was a massive challenge, but also a beautiful time of prayer and petitioning for our persecuted family.

## WHAT WOULD YOU SAY TO ENCOURAGE OTHERS TO DO CHURCH ON THE RUN?

Every step you run or mile you cycle is more than just exercise – it's an act of

solidarity with our persecuted family and a declaration that we will not forget those who suffer for their faith.

What's been great is that the challenge is super accessible – it can be whatever you make it, whether you use your casual daily runs or do a massive challenge. It creates opportunity to look beyond our culture and contexts and focus on our wider Christian family, and pray for the persecuted church – all whilst getting some exercise in! Why wouldn't you do *Church on the Run*?!

**“We have been starving, but any time it becomes critical, you assist us. If not for the help of your ministry, I don't think it would be easy for us to live.”**

– Pastor Barnabas, a displaced Christian in northern Nigeria



The group from Just Love Oxford getting on the move for our persecuted family in Africa

## WHAT ARE OTHERS DOING?

On land and in the water, Welcome Church in Witney, Oxfordshire, have been getting on the move in more ways than one – running, walking, wild swimming and canoeing! Together, they've raised more than £2,700.

Paul from Stirling got creative with the numbers for his challenge. To highlight the campaign, he took to the swimming pool on 16 occasions in July, each time swimming 1,620 metres to reach a total of just under 16.2 miles! A sterling effort.

In the summer, 40 people from New Hope Christian Centre in Norwich got on the move in various different ways, reaching a collective goal of 1,620 miles!

## WHAT COULD YOU DO?

*Church on the Run* is a unique challenge that's brimming with opportunity – a chance to set your own creative and challenging task, a way to deepen relationships with people in your church and, above all, a platform to raise money, prayer and awareness for our persecuted family in sub-Saharan Africa. To find out more and get on the move, head to [opendoorsuk.org/churchontherun](https://opendoorsuk.org/churchontherun)



Paul has so far raised more than £1,000 after swimming 16.2 miles!



# Rifkatu

## FROM NIGERIA

It was four weeks to the day after her wedding that Rifkatu\* was kidnapped.

She had married Zamai\*, a pastor in their small village in Nigeria. Threats from Islamist Fulani militants meant that they were forced to live away from home, but they had to return to work on their farm. And it was as she was returning from the farm that Rifkatu and her sister-in-law were taken.

"All of us in my village are Christians," says Rifkatu. "We were on our way home from the farm when Fulani militants caught us."

The two women were taken first to an abandoned house, and then to the militants' camp in the bush. Over three days they were repeatedly

sexually assaulted. To the militants, they were nothing more than objects to be used how they wished.

"They said we are their mattresses now," says Rifkatu. "When we cried, they said that mattresses don't cry."

Throughout the terrible ordeal, Rifkatu continued to pray. "I didn't lose hope," she says. "In my heart, I prayed, 'You are the God that saved Shadrach and Meshach. If you are the same God who has not changed, I know I will go home.'"

Eventually, her prayers were answered. As a consequence of the abuse, Rifkatu started to bleed. The Fulani – who mixed their version of Islam with superstitious beliefs –

thought she had had a miscarriage, and saw her blood as a bad omen. So Rifkatu and her sister were freed.

### 'I FELT SCARED'

"When my wife came back, I was so happy because God heard my prayer," says Pastor Zamai. But physical freedom is one thing; the emotional and psychological effects are harder to escape.

"I didn't want any man to come close to me," she explains. "I felt scared... But Zamai never gave up."

A year later, a baby daughter was born to the couple. It was then that the gossip started.

**"I have forgiven them in my heart. And may Almighty God help them to repent."**

"They felt that my wife came back with bad spirits," says Zamai. "People started spreading rumours that our daughter is the baby of the Fulani militants who kidnapped her. They started thinking that our baby was an evil child."

"Nobody wanted to come close to me," Rifkatu says. "Even my family and friends."

Her ordeal had not ended. It seemed like it never would.

## EYEWITNESS

### TAKING OUR PAINS TO THE CROSS

It was at this point that partners from the Open Doors trauma centre became involved. Through their patient, loving care, Rifkatu was helped towards healing and hope.

"My heart was so heavy, terrified and filled with fear," she says. "Hearing the stories of others, it helped me so much."

One moment during the process was particularly significant. "Something I will never forget is taking our pains to the cross," she says. "Everyone wrote their pains on a piece of paper. We sang songs and burned our pieces of paper at the cross. They told us that, as the ashes go up, our pains are going up to God."

"I used to say, 'These Fulani militants, I will never forgive them till eternity,'" she says. "But I have forgiven them in my heart. And may Almighty God help them to repent."

Rebuilding their lives has not been easy. But now Rifkatu, Zamai and their little daughter, Maryam, have hope. They have discovered that it is possible to take even the most terrible pains to the cross.

In the face of unimaginable suffering, they have discovered inexhaustible love.



Trauma care is helping Rifkatu heal from the persecution she has endured

### Word

"But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you." (Matthew 5:44)

### Wait

Rifkatu says she has forgiven her persecutors in her heart. What is it that enables her to make this amazing statement?

### Witness

Asebe\* is a trauma caregiver who worked with Rifkatu at the trauma centre. "We want the world to pray for Christian women," she says. "We want our voices to be heard. I want this violence against Christian women in Africa to stop." What can you do to speak out against the growing violence against Christian women in sub-Saharan Africa?

### Pray

Rifkatu still suffers from nightmares, so please pray that they will be taken away. Pray that Zamai and Rifkati, and little baby Maryam will feel loved and supported.

### Respond

You can sign the global *Arise Africa* petition to call for protection, justice and restoration for persecuted Christians in sub-Saharan Africa. Find out more at [opendoorsuk.org/ariseafrica](https://opendoorsuk.org/ariseafrica)





# THE CHURCH IS BURNING.

## HELP HOPE ARISE FROM THE ASHES.

Jemal shared this photo of the fire that destroyed his business



**“They started burning everything,” says Jemal\* in Ethiopia (PICTURED). “No Christian home was safe. Their goal was to eliminate Christianity.”**

Jemal and his family were forced to flee their community when Islamist militants attacked. Christian homes and livelihoods were destroyed, and 375 families were displaced.

And that’s just one ambush on one village. Violent attacks like this are escalating across sub-Saharan Africa. Millions of Christians like Jemal are left without homes, without work and without protection.

Today, will you make a gift to help stop the violence and start the healing for our church family in sub-Saharan Africa?

### STOP THE VIOLENCE. START THE HEALING.

**Every £23** could help a Christian who has faced extreme persecution receive hope and healing through trauma care.

**Every £40** could meet the basic needs of four believers in Africa for a month – this could include food, shelter and clothing.

Visit [opendoorsuk.org/ariseafrica](https://opendoorsuk.org/ariseafrica) or phone **01993 460015** to make your gift today. Thank you.

\*Name changed for security reasons