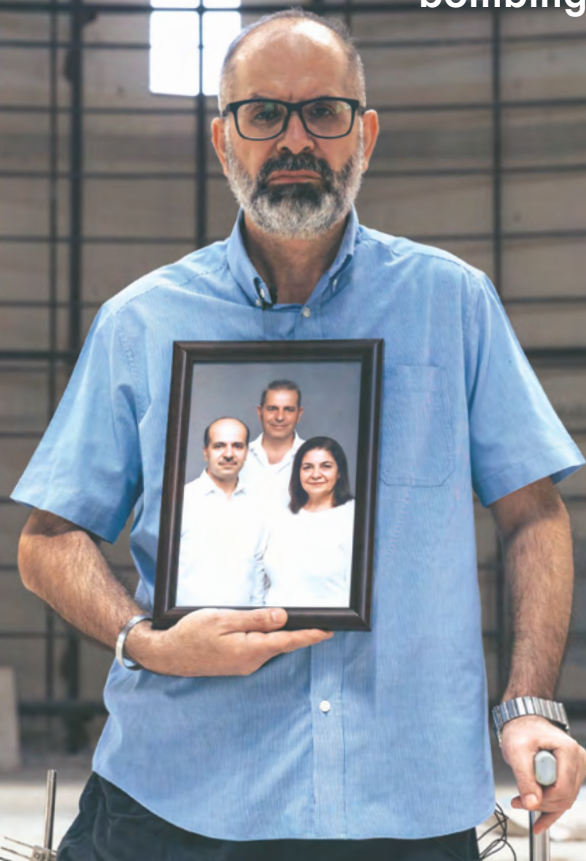


Open *Doors*

MAGAZINE | May/June 2026

**Faith in the
face of fear**

Life after a church
bombing in Syria





Could you volunteer with Open Doors?

Do you want to use your talents to raise awareness, prayer and support for your persecuted church family?

There are lots of ways that you can volunteer with Open Doors – from running a prayer group to running a marathon! If you could be a volunteer speaker, we'd particularly love to hear from you. Get involved at opendoorsuk.org/volunteer

ARISE AFRICA

500,000 SIGNATURES!

Open Doors supporters like you around the world have ensured that we're halfway to our global target of 1,000,000 signatures on the *Arise Africa* petition. That's 1,000,000 voices calling for peace, justice and restoration for our family in sub-Saharan Africa.

Let's get all the way to a million! Do keep sharing the *Arise Africa* petition with your church, family and friends. Find out more at opendoorsuk.org/ariseafrica or by scanning the QR code.



FREE CHILDREN'S RESOURCES

Looking for activities to entertain children this summer holiday? Hoping to gently introduce them to their persecuted church family?

Order your free resources for children, grandchildren, godchildren or children in your church! You'll find a wide range of thought-provoking and enjoyable ways to help them learn, pray and engage with their brothers and sisters around the world.

Order today at opendoorsuk.org/children



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: Elias stands in the remains of Mar Elias Church, where a suicide bomber killed his brothers, sister and 19 other believers in June 2025

*Names changed for security reasons

LETTER FROM HENRIETTA

Strengthen what remains

“You will be hated by everyone because of me, but the one who stands firm to the end will be saved.” MATTHEW 10:22

Syrian Christians have been through so much in the past 15 years. It's hard to get your head around the catalogue of crises: so-called Islamic State, civil war, regime change, pandemic, earthquake. Believers have been in a terrible cycle of tragedy, temporary respite, tragedy again – and, each time, our brothers and sisters are among the most vulnerable in the country.

In the past year, Syria has leapt to number six on the World Watch List. In the wake of regime change, Islamist extremists are taking advantage of a security vacuum to attack Christians – most notably on 22 June 2025, when Mar Elias Church was attacked by a suicide bomber. It left 22 believers dead.

Elias and Hanan were there. Seven of their relatives were killed – including Elias's brothers who, along with another congregant, tackled the terrorist to the ground and prevented a much higher death toll. What an incredible legacy. As I read the family's story (p6), I am deeply convicted by their resilience. Many believers are understandably afraid of returning to church, but Elias and Hanan are determined to keep worshipping there.

Jesus warned His followers that they would be hated. He also promised that God has the ultimate victory. He called Christians to stand firm in the face of hatred and opposition, and we can lift up our brothers and sisters like Elias and Hanan as they do exactly that.

Today, our prayers and support are vital in providing the trauma care, persecution survival training and practical help that are so crucial in Syria, Iran and across the Middle East in these turbulent times. In the words of Revelation 3:2 that inspired Brother Andrew to found Open Doors 70 years ago – let's keep joining together to 'strengthen what remains'.

Every blessing,



Henrietta

Henrietta Blyth
CEO, Open Doors UK&I

WORLD WATCH LIST BULLETIN

PAKISTAN

Two nurses acquitted of blasphemy

In a 'landmark ruling' in Pakistan, two Christian nurses accused under the blasphemy laws have been acquitted due to a lack of evidence. The laws are often used to target believers.

Mariam Lal and Newosh Arooj were arrested in 2020 when a senior doctor at the Civic Hospital in Faisalabad accused them of 'defiling the Quran'. They were cleaning the walls of a ward and removed a sticker bearing a verse from it. As often happens, word of the allegations spread rapidly, prompting a mob to gather at the hospital calling for their execution.

"It's an answer to persistent prayers."

"The acquittal reflects unusual judicial courage," says a local partner. "It is undoubtedly seen as an answer to persistent prayers for truth, fairness and mercy. It strengthens the belief within the Christian community that justice, though delayed, can still prevail."

PRAISE GOD for this ruling and pray that it will set a powerful precedent.



MYANMAR

Earthquake opens doors

People in Myanmar have been 'amazed at the love shown by Christians' following last year's devastating earthquakes – and your support has played a pivotal role.

As a teacher of persecution survival training, Pastor Joshua was equipped to help those affected by last March's disaster. With funds from the emergency appeal, which many of you generously gave towards, his church was further resourced to provide support including food, tents and medicine.

"After the earthquake, the doors for evangelism opened," says the pastor. "They wondered how Christians, despite being

of a different religion, were able to love others, even when they themselves are not loved in the same way. This prepared them to open their minds to the gospel.

"After the earthquake, the doors for evangelism opened."

"When you came with your smiling faces, warm handshakes and embraces, you helped them release their trauma and reminded them to smile again. Many believers have grown in faith and strength."

PRAISE GOD for this openness to the gospel, and pray for new believers to grow in faith.



UK

Press-up for every martyr

A fundraiser in Northern Ireland spent Lent doing 4,849 press-ups in memory of each believer who died for their faith last year.

"At church, we're journeying through Revelation, where we are confronted with the reality of persecution but comforted with the promise of victory in Jesus," explains Stu Armstrong, pastor of Craigavon Parish Church.

"As I challenged my church to pray daily through the World Watch List, I wanted to challenge myself to stand in solidarity with the persecuted church. They are truly living out 2 Corinthians 4:8-9 ('hard pressed on every side, but not crushed')."

The 4,849 figure is from the latest World Watch List and Stu's aim is to raise £484.90. At the time of writing, he's raised £340! You can sponsor Stu at [justgiving.com/page/hardpressednotabandoned](https://www.justgiving.com/page/hardpressednotabandoned)

Has Stu got you thinking about doing your own challenge? Go to [opendoorsuk.org/fundraising](https://www.opendoorsuk.org/fundraising) to get started.

YEMEN

'Walking Bible' arrested

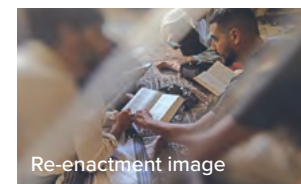
A believer in Yemen who wants to be a 'walking Bible', even in prison, is amongst the Christians detained in the recent crackdown in the country.

"I know it's coming," Majed* told Open Doors local partners towards the end of last year when the spate of arrests began. It was the last contact made with him. "In the meantime, I'm trying to memorise as many Bible passages and verses as possible. I want to be a walking Bible, so that wherever I'm taken, I can share about Jesus.

"I'm trying to memorise as many Bible passages and verses as possible."

"May God use me. Just like He was with Paul and Silas in prison in Philippi, I know that He will be with me. And if He is with me, who can be against me?"

"PRAY that Yemenis will realise that there are Christians in Yemen who believe in Jesus," asks Majed. "May our struggles push them to believe in Him.



Re-enactment image

ETHIOPIA

20 killed in attacks

Twenty Orthodox Christians and a Muslim guard were killed in two attacks by Islamist extremists on a community in Ethiopia's Oromia Region.

On 26 February, extremists entered a church and shot at those inside, before setting fire to homes and crops. Two days later, attackers killed seven people inside a church.

"This violence exploits a significant weakness – the lack of effective law enforcement in the region. With state protection minimal, these Orthodox communities become severely vulnerable," explains Fikiru Mehari*, an Open Doors expert on persecution in the region.

PRAY that God will comfort and heal those affected.

More stories

- Taliban tightens grip in Afghanistan
- Fear and faith among Iran's youth
- Why is persecution increasing in Syria?

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



FAITH, FEAR AND STRENGTHENING WHAT REMAINS

Please be aware that this article contains details that you may find particularly distressing.

Sunday 22 June 2025 started out as an ordinary day in Mar Elias Church, Damascus. The only difference was the number of people in the church. More than 300 people were gathered for the one-week memorial for a much-loved member of the congregation, including her nephew, Elias, and his wife, Hanan. With so many people present, it was the most devastating imaginable day for a suicide bomber to burst into the service.

GUNFIRE AND CHAOS

First, the church members heard gunfire. “The gunshots grew more intense from the front door,” says Elias. “The door was thrown open, and we were assaulted by a terrorist shooting right and left. People were shouting. The church had turned red.”

Everyone desperately tried to take cover. There was noise and panic everywhere. Hanan crouched between two seats, and Elias heard his brother, Geryes, shouting for people to “Get down.”

Geryes rushed to the bomber, along with his other brother, Boutros, and

another man called Milad. Together, they tackled the bomber to the ground. After a short fight, the bomber detonated his backpack. The blast killed all four men instantly.

“Everybody witnessed their courage and martyrdom,” says Elias. “If they hadn’t acted, there would have been more casualties.” The bomber’s backpack had been filled with screws, meant to maximise the number of people killed in the explosion. In less than a minute, at least 22 Christians died in the attack – but the number could have been far higher if Geryes, Boutros and Milad hadn’t acted so quickly and so selflessly. Three further



Elias and his family sit in the remains of Mar Elias Church, where Elias's brothers and sisters were among those killed in an attack

bodies, including the attacker's, have never been identified.

“PLEASE, JUST ONE MORE CHILD”

In the aftermath of the attack, Hanan had only one thing on her mind: her children. All five – Elen, Sarah, Taqla, Ibrahim and Christina – had been at the service. She started frantically searching for them among the chaos.

“The whole church was destroyed,” she remembers. “I failed to see any of my children. I didn’t know where to search.”

First, she found five-year-old Taqla. After that, she prayed the most desperate prayer of her life: “Lord, please, let me find one more child. I’ll be content to find just one more.”

“People were shouting. The church had turned red.”

At that point, Ibrahim came running toward her. “I held him and told him, ‘We have to exit quickly.’” The scene is still vivid in her mind: “As we headed to the door, we walked by bodies on the ground.”

Outside, a girl covered in blood kept following her. Hanan didn’t know why – until she looked down, and recognised the shoes. It was her 12-year-old daughter,



The attack devastated the church and killed at least 22 believers

Sarah. “I didn’t recognise her face,” says Hanan, the pain of the memory evident in her voice. “Her face was swollen and her hair was burned. She wasn’t able to see anything and was just following my voice.”

Miraculously, all five of Hanan and Elias’s children survived the attack. Elias was hit by two shards in his thigh, one in the femoral artery. He and Sarah were rushed to hospital – it was only in the days after the attack that he was strong enough to be told that his brothers, sister and four other relatives had been killed. “I broke down,” he remembers. “My brothers were like fathers to my children. They would spend more time with our children than we did. After we came home, there was emptiness.”

Elias’s and Sarah’s injuries still affect them today, and

beyond the physical wounds is the trauma that all the survivors are still healing from – particularly the youngest among them. “The children still fear the smallest sounds,” says Hanan. “If they hear fireworks, they think they’re being attacked.”

ESCALATING VIOLENCE

The attack on Mar Elias is particularly harrowing, but it isn’t an isolated incident. In Syria, and across the Middle East, Christians have endured many years of persecution and oppression. The legacy of extremist Islamist ideology still persists, and Christians are often targets of religiously motivated violence and opposition. Even when a crisis isn’t related to faith, such as the earthquake in 2023, believers can face discrimination in the distribution of support and often see their existing

vulnerabilities compounded. Syrian believers like Elias and Hanan have endured years and years of ordeals.

Now, in the wake of the fall of Assad’s regime, Syria has risen sharply up the World Watch List. It is the sixth most dangerous place in the world to follow Jesus, jumping 12 places in a year. While it still isn’t clear exactly what the new regime will mean for religious freedom in the long-term, the authorities’ early promises of protecting all citizens’ rights have apparently come to little. Islamist extremists are exploiting the current political disorder to target Christians and other vulnerable minorities – largely with impunity. They frequently patrol Christian

neighbourhoods, demanding believers convert or face terrible consequences.

Tens of thousands of Christians have left Syria and neighbouring countries over the past decade or so, looking for safety in other countries. Some faithfully remain, keen to preserve the church in a land which has had a Christian presence since the birth of the early church. But it is a terribly difficult choice.

“For the sake of our children, we are considering not remaining here,” says Elias. “If it’s God’s will, we will stay. If not, His will be done.”

FAITH OVER FEAR

For now, the family wants to stay. More than that, they

are determined to keep worshipping at the site of the tragedy – because it is still their cherished church, gradually being restored. Many believers are understandably too afraid to come back to Mar Elias but, despite the cost to themselves, Elias and Hanan won’t be deterred.

“We have experienced faith and fear here.”

“We go to church, but fear still exists,” shares Hanan. “Yet even if we are afraid, we will still go.”

Elias agrees. Walking through Mar Elias Church, he picks up a picture of Jesus as the Good Shepherd. It’s

BELOW LEFT Elias still suffers from injuries sustained in the attack; RIGHT He and his family are determined to return to the church, despite the dangers



Watch the family's story at opendoorsuk.org/ videos



Elias and his family want to continue worshipping in the church and see hope for the future

still marked with dried blood. He reads the text on it: “I am the Good Shepherd, and the Good Shepherd lays down His life for His sheep.” It’s a truth that means all the more to him now.

“We have no ambition but to remain faithful.”

Then he pulls out a stack of handwritten Bible verses. In the months after the attack, Elias sought hope and strength from Scripture more than ever before. “Studying the Bible made my faith deeper,” he says. “We live day by day. We have no ambition but to remain faithful.”

Looking around the church, Elias puts it simply. “We experienced faith and fear here,” he says. “We can’t deny it.” But despite all the

family has faced, it is the faith that remains stronger. “I knew the Lord wouldn’t forsake us,” Elias says with conviction. “We thank Him for everything. We are grounded in our faith. We will go on. Jesus said, ‘On this rock, I will build my church.’ Our faith is built on rocks, not bubbles of soap.”

STRENGTHEN WHAT REMAINS

When Brother Andrew founded Open Doors, he was inspired by the words of Revelation 3:2 – “Strengthen what remains.” It led him to seek and support faithful, vulnerable Christian communities in Communist Eastern Europe who felt they had been forgotten by the wider world. Today, believers in the Middle East need to know they, too, aren’t forgotten.

Open Doors partners in Syria are supporting the persecuted church through trauma counselling, and through counselling schools that train believers to support others. More than 60 graduates are now equipped as trauma counsellors, strengthening the church as they bring professional support to traumatised people like Elias, Hanan and their children (see box). Local partners are also providing vital economic aid, Bibles and prayer support to our brothers and sisters.

This is just the start. Across the Middle East, in the face of persecution, our church family need your support so they can heal from their trauma, be equipped for future risks and keep growing and flourishing. This is not a dying church – this is the body of Christ standing firm

and faithful in the face of fear. Today, will you help strengthen what remains?

PLEASE PRAY

- Hanan asks: “Never forget these innocent children. Keep praying for us, so that we really live in peace. Pray for us to feel safe, to see our children growing up, and to be happy here. We need to live a beautiful life, not a life of fear.”
- Elias asks: “We ask you to pray that we can

resist every enemy, seen or unseen, and every thought that keeps us from glorifying God. Ask God to chase away this cloud of darkness.”

You can find more ways to pray in your Prayer Diary.

PLEASE GIVE

- **Every £19** could help prepare a believer with persecution survival training, so they can persevere through any opposition.

- **Every £30** could help give vital trauma care to a Christian who has faced extreme persecution, so they can receive hope and healing.

- **Every £40** could give a Christian and their family vital support in time of crisis or extreme persecution.

You can give to strengthen what remains at opendoorsuk.org/whatremains

HOW TRAUMA COUNSELLING BRINGS HEALING

Raneen* is a psychologist who partners with Open Doors’ local team to run trauma counselling sessions for Syrian believers, both adults and children. She explains what the team provide:

RANEEN: “We offer Christians different psychosocial, spiritual and counselling support to overcome the impact of trauma and other crises they have faced. It’s a safe space where they can process and heal from psychological trauma. We pray with them and give faith-based counselling to address the deep wounds caused by trauma.

“Participants can choose group or individual counselling sessions. The length of the course depends on the person –

how ready he or she is to receive help. What is their experience, what are their abilities and how is the community around them?”

“Our goal is to bring wholeness through the transformative power of Jesus.”

“Our primary goal is to bring emotional, mental and spiritual wholeness through the transformative power of Jesus Christ, with the belief that true healing is found in Him. We integrate psychological approaches with spiritual healing practices to address trauma holistically. This allows participants in the sessions to experience healing not only on a

mental and emotional level but also in their spiritual lives.

“The therapists here help people connect with God’s promises of hope, strength and renewal. Even in the darkest moments, God can bring healing and growth. We want to bring people back to God.”



THE CRY OF IRAN'S PEOPLE

Christians in Iran have been caught in the crossfires of war and persecution, yet the church continues to hope for a better future. Simin*, an Iranian Christian woman living outside the country, shares her experiences and her prayers.



Re-enactment images

Since the start of 2026, the daily life of Iranians has been deeply shaken – forever changed by mass protests, thousands of lives lost and traumatising conflict. Iran's future seems obscured by clouds of smoke and dust from repeated bombings since the start of the war. In the face of such insecurity, many believers are fearful for what changes may, or may not, take place.

And yet, believers are holding on, meeting together and sharing with those in need. Simin had to leave Iran for her faith

– and every day she prays in hope for her people.

SIMIN'S STORY

Simin knows how hard it is to be an Iranian believer. She faced arrest and persecution because of her faith. Though she and her family were able to flee the country and are now physically safe, the pressures on their lives have not ended.

Simin closely follows the news of protests, violence and the impact of war, while at the same time struggling with long periods of silence when communication is cut

off. "Days without news from your family is very painful," she says. "When the internet is cut off, you don't know what is happening to them."

Once the conflict escalated, communication was again blocked. "When the war started, again there was no internet," she explains. "No connection, no way to hear from my loved ones."

A SPIRITUAL WAR

When Simin was eventually able to speak with believers inside the country, what they shared deeply affected her. "They told me how boldly

they joined the protests," she says. "Many Christians were helping injured people and trying to support others, but emotionally and mentally they were under huge pressure as well."

For Simin, the crisis in Iran is not just political. "This is not only a physical war," she says. "It is also a spiritual war."

While watching events unfold from outside the country is painful, the persecution her family faces began long before the current conflict. "Persecution did not end with my case; it later affected different members of my family as well," Simin remembers. Many of her relatives have faced harsh fines and imprisonment. Because they had also converted from Islam, the dangers they face are even greater. And this is the case for most of Iran's believers.

"THIS IS NOT ONLY A PHYSICAL WAR, IT IS ALSO A SPIRITUAL WAR."

However, whilst some of Simin's relatives had to flee, others have chosen to stay. "The government keeps threatening them," Simin shares, "yet they are sure of their calling to not only stay but to continue serving."

HARDSHIPS AND HOPES

Despite the difficulties caused by the conflict, many Christians are seeking to care for the needs of others. One family heard that another's home had

been almost destroyed by a nearby explosion. Though they bore their own financial burdens, they opened their home to the family in need and now meet every evening to pray, read the Bible and encourage each other. Amid deep loss, fellowship and unity are shining with a light made brighter by hardship.

"YOUR PRAYERS HAVE SUPPORTED US THROUGH MANY DARK DAYS."

"Our vision has always been to empower the church in Iran so that they can support one another with what they have, stand independently and experience God's work among them," shares an Open Doors partner. "Even though the situation in the country remains very difficult and unstable, I praise the Lord to see that the vision we have prayed for is becoming a reality."

Simin continues to carry deep concern for the people of Iran as shortages and instability grow worse. "There is no internet, and people don't have access to food or basic needs," she says.

Yet Simin refuses to lose hope. "I believe that after all these years of oppression, God is at work in Iran. These days are very difficult, but there is hope that something positive can happen, something that brings justice and freedom for everyone," she says. "Thank you for your prayers. Your prayers have supported us through many dark days."

PRAY

- For protection and strength for Simin's family members in Iran who continue to face persecution and pressure
- For healing across Iran for those who have experienced trauma, violence and the loss of loved ones
- That God's justice would cover Iran and the entire Middle East, bringing justice, freedom and hope for the future.



SPEAK OUT FOR SIMIN

Want to stand with believers like Simin today? You can write to your MP and ask them to ensure the UK government includes freedom of religion or belief in future human rights and democracy reports.

It's an easy step for us – but public reporting can raise international pressure and give real protection to converts like Simin who face prison and exile for their faith in Jesus.

Write today at opendoorsuk.org/advocacy

"I GROW IN FAITH AND IT GIVES ME JOY"

The Arise Africa campaign aims to start the healing for our persecuted family – and that's exactly what's happening to a group of women in Cameroon.



Ruth and her children started crying. Having lost her husband to one attack by Islamist militant group Boko Haram, the family faced another. "They will come to kill as they did to my children's father," Ruth feared. Thankfully, they managed to flee, but had nowhere to stay and no way to survive. "I didn't know what to do."

Ruth's story is not unusual. She's amongst thousands of Christian women in northern Cameroon whose lives have been shattered by rising Islamist violence. Having lost loved ones, homes and livelihoods, many had almost given up on life.

TAILOR-MADE IMPACT

But hope is emerging through a flourishing network of self-help groups in the

region that you support, giving women, like Ruth, the tools to provide for their families. There are currently 351 groups, reaching over 6,000 women.

"I have seen the effectiveness of prayer."

Ruth got involved with a group in the city of Mokolo and was lent a sewing machine. "Then people

in the neighbourhood realised I was a tailor," she says. "They came with their clothes. Even without owning a machine, I earn enough money to get by."

Deborah, who helps facilitate the group in Mokolo, explains how the group helps women financially: "If someone is in difficulty in our group, we collect contributions to help her. Then she works with the credit she has been given and brings it back to us with a little



interest, so that someone else can also come and use it."

STRENGTH IN SISTERHOOD

The groups provide far more than just practical support. "I have been encouraged to read the Bible again, to sing and pray with my children," says Ruth. "My faith, that was cooled, is increasing. My faith is being strengthened. I am really happy, because I have seen the effectiveness of prayer.

"Together with the other women, I grow in faith and it gives me joy. It's with impatience that I await the prayer meeting, even if it is every day! I've never felt abandoned by the group. They've taken care of me even in sickness. We are together like sisters."

Pauline, another who lost her husband, has also benefitted hugely from the group. "Before, I was angry with Boko Haram. But we were taught to forgive and pray for our enemies. That teaching helped me find stability. They took everything, I was left with nothing, yet I prayed for them, asking God to forgive them."

"When Boko Haram came, they came to separate us," shares Rakou, a widow and mother of six. "I was alone. Coming to the group with others, gives me strength. We farm, and when I go back, I have something to pay with."

"My husband is alive, but we're struggling because we had to flee and now we have to care for all our children,"



OPPOSITE BELOW Deborah (right) with Rakou (left) and Ruth (centre) ABOVE The group in Mokolo have become close friends as they've journeyed together

shares Marie. "This group has encouraged us to do small business activities. They taught us to save money and to keep God's Word. They also told us that we will become disciples of Jesus. And truly we are today. I believe God has sent this group to us. Today, I've let go of everything. I'm at peace now, and even death no longer frightens me."

Given the profound loss and trauma they've experienced,

the transformation in Ruth, Pauline, Rakou and Marie – and so many others from the self-help groups – is astonishing. Through your faithful and generous support for Arise Africa, they're experiencing God's healing, and such stories are replicated elsewhere across sub-Saharan Africa. Thank you! Many more need that help, of course, so please do keep praying for and supporting our brothers and sisters.

SIGN AND SHARE THE PETITION

The Arise Africa petition – which calls for justice, protection and restoration for the millions of Christians facing violence and conflict in the region – has reached 500,000 signatures globally! That's halfway towards our target of one million. Can you help us reach this

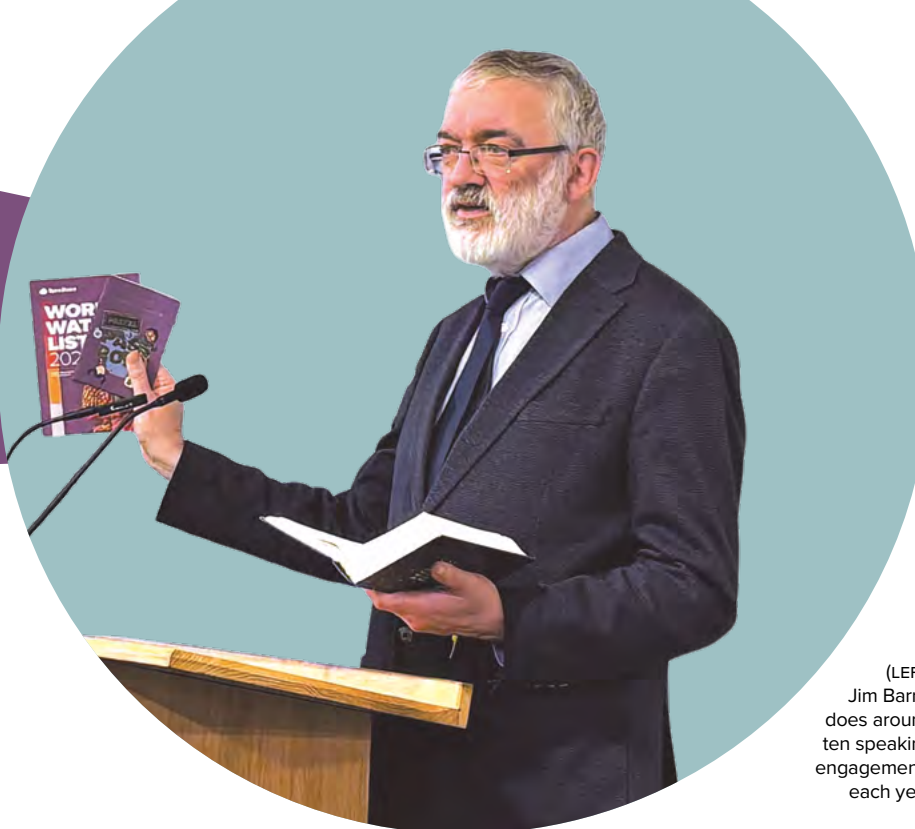
goal? If you've yet to already, please add your voice at opendoorsuk.org/ariseafrica, and please share with others. The aim is to present it to the United Nations, European Union and local governments worldwide in the autumn. Thank you!



MY LIFE AS A VOLUNTEER SPEAKER

WANT TO BE ONE TOO?

As a volunteer speaker for Open Doors, **Jim Barrie** from Rawtenstall, Lancashire, is using his speaking gift to tell others about the persecuted church. We chatted to him to find out more about what he does and why you should consider joining him.



(LEFT) Jim Barrie does around ten speaking engagements each year

Tell us about your journey with Open Doors.

Jim: I read *God's Smuggler* in my teens, and my wife and I have been prayer supporters of Open Doors since the 1970s.

The fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of the Iron Curtain was quite an event for us – the seven years of prayer that preceded it is still the biggest answer to prayer I've seen in my lifetime.

We had the opportunity in the 1980s to write to Christians in the Soviet Union, whom we were later able to meet. We went on a couple of trips with Open Doors to Russia and the Baltics in 1990, and then to Central Asia in 1991.

When I retired from the NHS in 2019, I was able to start speaking for Open Doors, which I really wanted to do. I regularly preach at my church and elsewhere, so I'm used to public speaking.

How many talks do you do yearly and how are these arranged?

Jim: I do about ten meetings each year. Around 40% are arranged by Open Doors, and the rest are usually follow-ups from previous visits.

Some meetings have come from more complicated links. I spoke at a men's curry night and other customers were listening in, which was interesting! One of those present got back to me and said, "I'm the minister of

a church in another town. Could you come and speak in our church?" I went there and then he said, "Would you like to speak at our local Churches Together group?" It's led to more invitations.

How do you prepare for a talk?

Jim: Typically, I'll work from the message that Open Doors has put together for the year. I also ask churches if they have interests that they want covered. Sometimes they'll have mission partners in a particular country, or there's a country that they're praying for. Occasionally, churches will ask me to speak from a passage in the lectionary, or from a passage that's part of a series they're doing.

is the persecution in parts of India – people had no idea. The other is violence in Nigeria – you can see people taken aback by it.

People often come up to me and say they've got to give something, and there are others who say they used to support Open Doors and ask how they can get back in touch.

How else has the role had an impact?

Jim: I spend a lot of time reading and watching stories from the persecuted church. The ones that have struck me most are from Iraq and Syria, and how Centres of Hope are seeing people find hope and come to faith. I've used them in a lot of circumstances, including ordinary sermons in my own church, trying to get across to people that God's actually working in their world – just

as He was through the early church in the New Testament.

What do you enjoy most about it?

Jim: Above all, it's a privilege to represent our persecuted brothers and sisters – that's a reason why people should consider speaking. Perhaps God has given you a gift to speak, and maybe this is a way you can develop that.

It's also a tremendous honour to worship with Christians in different places. Some have become friends. There's a couple of churches I've been to every year since I started. Their leaders send me prayer requests. It's great to be able to feel part of what God is doing with them.

And it's more preaching – I'm a preacher and I love preaching!

How have you seen people impacted by your talks?

Jim: A couple of things have really shocked people. One



STIRRED TO SPEAK?

Jim is one of 75 volunteer speakers for Open Doors, but we need more to tell yet more people about our persecuted family. Help is particularly needed in Inverness, Newcastle, Cumbria, Cambridgeshire, West Sussex, Wiltshire, Dorset and Cornwall. But wherever you're based, if you feel stirred to speak on behalf of the persecuted church, we'd love to hear from you! Get in touch at opendoorsuk.org/volunteer



The first time Zaid (on the right) met another believer was the day of his baptism

WWL 03 YEMEN

Zaid's* journey to faith took him down every avenue – atheism, agnosticism, drugs. Every option only expanded the emptiness he felt, until he encountered Jesus in a dream.

SEARCHING AND SCARED

From the warmth of his home, Zaid tumbled out into the harsh evening cold. Above him stretched an expanse of deep blue, the stars glimmering faintly. He didn't think his life could change so rapidly, but it had.

Moments ago, his parents had been shouting at him. Their words rang in his ears: "When you return to a sane mind, come back. What a disgrace." Then they threw him out.

Despite losing everything, Zaid's mind was set.

He had decided to follow Jesus.

DUTY-BOUND

Zaid grew up in a Muslim home in Yemen, his days structured around religious duties. "I witnessed my family pray and worship since I was young," he remembers. "Prayer was an important obligation. If you don't pray, Allah will not love you. I followed all the teachings and rituals, trying to 'please' Allah so that I could guarantee life after death. Deep down, I wasn't very convinced myself."

Slowly, he began to realise that there was no guarantee of Allah's approval. The more he dug into his religion,

the more flaws he saw. His zeal for duties waned. Eventually, Zaid realised that he had left Islam. "Although I felt like a heavy rock was lifted off my chest, the confusion remained."

"I WAS COMPLETELY LOST"

Zaid began to search online. "I needed to find answers," he recalls, "something that could fill this growing void."

To numb the confusion, Zaid turned to drugs. Then his best friend, who had encouraged him to use drugs, died in Yemen's civil war. "I was completely lost. When I knew he was gone, I was devastated," he says. "I was empty."

But, in that deep emptiness, Jesus found Zaid.

THE GOOD SHEPHERD

Before, Zaid viewed Christians as infidels. But when he met them online, he was stunned by their love. He began to read more about their God. "The idea that God loved us and He sent His Son to die for us were all new thoughts for me," he remembers.

"If I had stopped leaning on God's Word, I would have died."

Then, he decided to pray to this God. "One night, I asked Him, 'God, if you exist, tell me: where are you?'"

That night and for many after, Zaid dreamed the same dream: he was in a garden and a light was shining. "A voice said, 'I left the 99 and came for you.' I woke up, startled."

He went online and immediately found a picture of Jesus in a garden, surrounded by sheep. "Written on that photo were the same words I heard. In that moment, I felt like the world stopped. I felt a joy unspeakable," Zaid smiles. "I discovered God!"

TRANSFORMATION

In Yemen, Christians are extremely rare. Zaid was thirsty to know more about God, and he longed to meet other believers and

be baptised. Through a local Open Doors partner, he was baptised in a public pool.

"The man asked me two simple questions about my faith, then he baptised me. I didn't see him after that," Zaid says. "That was the first time I met a believer."

More and more, Zaid was transformed. He stopped taking drugs and he became more mature. However, repercussions soon followed. When Zaid's father heard about his new faith, he began to abuse him. Then, he was kicked out of the home.

Nevertheless, Zaid held on. "If I had stopped leaning on God's Word, I would have died," he says.

A BOLD VISION

Zaid began serving at a new church in another town and has since established a discipleship house. Though others have fled Yemen to practise their faith in safety, Zaid desires to see his people encounter the gospel.

"My vision is to have 40,000 active churches, one for every 1,000 Yemenis. We are very encouraged when we know that we have brothers and sisters who are praying for us. The strongest thing we own is our prayers."

LISTEN

"Let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven." (Matthew 5:16)

LINGER

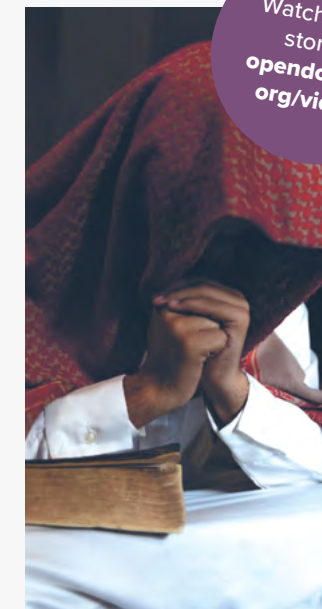
What about the gospel excites you that you would love to share with others?

LIVE

In what situations is God calling you, like Zaid, to shine with the hope of the gospel to those around you?

PRAY

Zaid asks, "Pray for peace. We want Jesus to reign over Yemen. May God open the eyes of the people to see Him."



ABOVE Zaid prays earnestly for the people of Yemen

Watch Zaid's story at opendoorsuk.org/videos



STRENGTHEN WHAT REMAINS

REVELATION 3:2

Support faith standing firm in the face of fear.

Elias's sister and brothers were among 22 believers killed in a church attack in Damascus, Syria. Will you help Christians like Elias and his family heal from their trauma and keep flourishing in their faith?

**Name changed for security reasons*

Every **£30** could help give vital trauma care to a Christian who has faced extreme persecution.

Visit **opendoorsuk.org**, phone **01993 460015** or use the enclosed envelope to make your gift today.

Thank you.

 **OpenDoors**