



# The Voice of the Martyrs Canada

## Pakistan

Providing Hope and Advocacy in a  
Country Where Indentured Slavery and  
Spiritual Oppression are Prevalent





# WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO FOLLOW CHRIST IN PAKISTAN?

By Floyd A. Brobbel, CEO for The Voice of the Martyrs Canada

**“Your words were found, and I ate them, and Your words became to me a joy and the delight of my heart, for I am called by Your name, O Lord, God of hosts.”**  
~ Jeremiah 15:16 ESV

Pakistani Christians encounter varying degrees of persecution because of their religious identity and witness. They take significant risks when sharing the Gospel with their Muslim family members and neighbours. And though the threats exist, converts from Islam face an even graver danger when they are baptized and become members of a new faith community.

All dedicated followers of Christ in Pakistan face constant societal pressure, and the threat of being falsely accused of trumped-up blasphemy allegations is an all-too-frightening reality. Over the years, the country’s blasphemy laws have resulted in several arrests and severe convictions, such as long-term imprisonment and life-threatening sentences. However, these charges often stem from interpersonal conflicts which have little to do with religion. Haroon Shahzad, for example, was accused of blasphemy for merely posting a Scripture passage on his Facebook page. Haroon was detained and released

on bail but taken into “protective custody” the next day. It is believed that the charges against Haroon were primarily based on a personal grudge harboured against him by the complainant, Imran Ullah.

While many Christians have banded together in closed neighbourhoods known as colonies, several large-scale attacks have been perpetrated against these communities over recent years. The most recent incident took place on August 16<sup>th</sup>, 2023, in the city of Jaranwala. More than 20 churches were burned and utterly ruined during the attack, which included the destruction of Bibles, hymnals and crosses. The mob also targeted the homes of Christians who helplessly watched as everything they owned went up in flames, and so did their security and livelihood. This attack was not a random act of violence but a clear strategy to destroy the church and the lives of the many Christians residing in the area.



The destruction in Jaranwala was overwhelming.

Photo: VOM Canada

## The Voice of the Martyrs Canada

P.O. Box 608

Streetsville, ON L5M 2C1

Tel: 905-670-9721

Toll Free: 1-888-298-6423

Email: [thevoice@vomcanada.org](mailto:thevoice@vomcanada.org)Internet: [www.vomcanada.com](http://www.vomcanada.com)

Founders: Klaas and Nellie Brobbel  
with Pastor Richard Wurmbbrand  
Chief Executive Officer: Floyd A. Brobbel  
Editor-in-Chief: Karyn Marianne  
Editorial Assistant: Sarah Gabrielle  
Communications Intern: Sarah Yvonne  
Magazine Design & Layout: Ampersand

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Calendar and "Table Talk" pages:  
Vanessa Brobbel, Manager of Special Projects,  
and her creative team.

“Hilfsaktion Märtyrerkirche” (translated “Martyrs Church Relief Campaign”), a sister mission to VOMC, was informed by a witness of the attack that mosque leaders in the area instigated the violence through their broadcasts to local Muslims prior to the outbreak: “They started the announcements in the mosques to prepare an attack on the Christian residents of Jaranwala, Punjab province. When they began to entice our Muslim neighbours to leave their homes and defend the esteem and honour of the Quran, we knew something bad was coming. It was a severe trauma to see so many lives destroyed in front of us, and the attack seemed to go on and on. When we returned to our home, everything was gone and burned to ashes. We lost everything. Our lives are burnt. Our tears are dried.”



Photo: VOM Canada

When such large-scale aggression and devastation transpire, those caught in the middle are left shocked and perplexed. The Old Testament prophet Jeremiah would be able to relate to our Pakistani brothers and sisters in Christ. His people hated him for speaking God’s truth to a rebellious nation. Jeremiah was candid with the Lord about his deep frustration as he endured great suffering and persecution due to his obedience. Yet, despite his difficulties, Jeremiah found comfort and joy in God’s Word and, as such, he had a reason to rejoice.

Christians in Pakistan continue to trust in the Lord and, while living out their faith in a land of turmoil, they faithfully declare His praises. Their sweet ‘song of salvation’ counterattacks the evil schemes of those who oppose the Sovereign God and His ways. It is also a testimony of God’s goodness and mercy, which are available to all who earnestly seek Him. As the great reformer Martin Luther rightly stated: “The God whom we worship is not a weak and incompetent God. He is able to beat back gigantic waves of opposition and bring low prodigious mountains of evil. The ringing testimony of the Christian faith is that God is able.”

So, we pray, not as those who are without hope, but rather with confidence that God is hearing our petitions for Christians in Pakistan. May His glorious purposes be accomplished in their lives and, throughout the process, may the many promises in His infallible Word provide them unending peace, comfort and joy!

Grace and peace,



### The goals of VOMC are expressed in our “Ministry Purposes” as follows:

1. To encourage and empower persecuted Christians to fulfill the Great Commission (Matthew 28:19-20).
2. To give practical relief and spiritual support to the families of Christian martyrs (Matthew 25:36).
3. To equip persecuted Christians to love and win to Christ those opposed to the Gospel (Romans 12:14).
4. To help believers rebuild their lives and Christian witness in countries where they have formerly suffered oppression (Nehemiah 1:3; 2:5).
5. To promote the fellowship of all believers by informing the world of the faith and courage of persecuted Christians, thereby inspiring believers to a deeper level of commitment to Christ and involvement in His Great Commission (Hebrews 13:3; Galatians 6:2).

Spending of funds is confined to board-approved programs and projects. Each restricted contribution designated towards a board-approved program or project will be used as designated with the understanding that when the need for such a program or project has been met, or cannot be completed for any reason determined by the board, the remaining restricted contributions designated for such program or project will be used where needed most. Gifts from individual donors of \$10 and more are acknowledged and receipted with an official receipt for income tax purposes.



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# PARTNER UP:

## *You Can't Do This Alone!*

By Vanessa Brobbel, Manager of Special Projects  
for The Voice of the Martyrs Canada

“If you want to go fast,  
go alone.... If you want to  
go far, go together.”

~ African Proverb

It was a teeny bathroom. The single sink, toilet and tiny tub serviced our family of five giants; or rather, four giants, plus one. Anyone who knows our family would readily confirm that our children got their “tall” gene from their Dad. Our sons surpassed Floyd’s height by a smidge, landing at around six-feet, seven-inches tall, with our eldest claiming an extra “quarter” of an inch further still over his younger brother. Even our daughter is close to six feet tall – and that’s without any high-heeled shoes!

It sounds glamorous until these giants try to function in rooms designed for those living *below* the beanstalk. This was the case for our main family bathroom, where I had set about a construction project in my efforts to raise the height of the shower ceiling, so the boys didn’t have to re-enact scenes from *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* every morning.

Things were going well, and the task was almost finished. It was at this time, while repairing the drywall access panel behind the door, that I ran into a snag... *literally!* The doorknobs in our house were decorative spirals – handles that were shaped with not just a hint of curvature, but a true full spiral. Somehow, as I squeezed behind the door, the straps of my jean overalls got caught within the spiral. The more I tried to set myself free, the tighter the straps became entangled in the knob, until finally I was pinned with my back to the door. The straps were pulled so tight, I couldn’t even adjust them to solve my predicament.

Exhausted from the squirming battle – and bursting into fits of uncontrollable laughter at the absurdity of it all – I realized that I was going to have to humble myself and call for help. Try to picture this from the perspective of my family members, who were downstairs when they heard: banging, stomping...pause...then hysterical laughter...pause. All this was followed by a small voice timidly calling out, “Um...can somebody help me?”

Sometimes we find ourselves in circumstances that we simply cannot get through alone. The more we twist and turn without a clear perspective, the more knotted our situations can become. That’s when we need another person’s point of view. We need their help. We need to *partner up* with them. Olympic-level coaches, for example, know that “partnering up” is key to training successful athletes. Learning happens most naturally when an effective technique is modelled. An athlete training alone will not push nearly as hard as they would when trying to keep up with another athlete.

The opening chord of Scripture is deeply relational, and it flows through every nuance expressed by God. The words “one another” appear repeatedly in the New Testament. Jesus did not intend for His followers to be isolated from one another, and the Apostle Paul clearly presents this need for unified spiritual growth as a corporate concept.

“...from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.”

~ Ephesians 4:16 ESV

Here is the caveat: corporate growth is dependent on individual growth. It is the proverbial chicken and egg; you cannot have one without the other. If we want to grow spiritually, we need to do this *for* and *with* each other. Equipping the church to *become* all that Christ has called it to be globally is highly valued by our VOM Canada team. One of the ministry’s main purposes is to promote the fellowship of all believers by informing the world of the faith and courage of persecuted Christians, thereby inspiring followers of Christ to a deeper level of commitment to Him and

involvement in His Great Commission (Hebrews 13:3; Galatians 6:2). Put simply: the call is for us all to *partner up!*

There are many ways to answer this call. Each month, in the centrefold of this magazine, a prayer calendar offers specific yet simple prayer requests from around the world. You can *partner up* by offering prayers daily, asking our Heavenly Father to draw near to His persecuted children and give them the courage to endure.

Another way to respond is by using our newly launched resource, *Table Talks*, which features a specific persecuted country each month, to train and educate the next generation. These activity pages are designed to be a helpful tool for parents, Sunday school teachers, group leaders, grandparents, and anyone with a heart to generate conversations and “learning moments” while gathered around a table together.

A play on the word “Way” invites participants – young and old alike – to learn about the featured nation’s specific cultural details, beginning with a fun activity designed to tutor through brain games. You’ll discover a colouring page accompanied by a “heart healthy” Biblical passage that highlights *His Way* of discipling us.

Culturally significant facts and relevant global issues are paired with thought-provoking questions to encourage those around the table to *Weigh In*.

Especially pay close attention to the *One Way* piece. As many people think all religions are the same, or at least provide different paths to heaven, this section will be examining the dominant religion relating to the specific country of focus, comparing how each world religion is similar to the Gospel and how it’s vastly different.

Finally, there is a *Way Out* section that delivers alternative ways to *partner up* by tangibly responding through the mission’s various International Ministry project funds. Specific projects are highlighted in this section and, occasionally, there will also be creative ideas for raising a voice and providing assistance – helping readers to push through what they may feel is *Way Out* of their comfort zone. Remember, we aren’t called to compare ourselves with each other. We are simply called to stand for Christ within the circumstances in which we have individually and uniquely been placed.

On day one of our bathroom renovations, the skills, time and resources were mine to offer. Yet, along the way, I needed my “giants” to set me free. A healthy partnership involves a give-and-take relationship; it’s never one-sided. This requires being present and committed, ready to help one another. After all, none of us can do it alone. To effectively accomplish God’s Kingdom work globally, we need His empowerment as we *partner up* with Him – and with each other! 🌍

# ART GALLERY SHOWING

THEME: **HEART HEALTH** Matthew 5:8 & Proverbs 4:23

BEST IN SHOW: YOUTH (13-18 YRS) \$250

BEST IN SHOW: ADULTS (19+) \$250

Please send your original artwork submission depicting the theme “**HEART HEALTH**” by 5 PM (EST) on June 10<sup>th</sup>, 2024. Find more Art Gallery details at: [www.vomcanada.com/ArtGalleryShowing](http://www.vomcanada.com/ArtGalleryShowing).





# VOM AROUND THE WORLD

## PAKISTAN: Training Centre Serves as a ‘Beacon of Hope’

*“Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord...since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving.” – Colossians 3:23-24 NIVUK*

VOMC is blessed to partner with the Zinda Umeed Sewing Centre, a ministry that continues to faithfully equip individuals with vital sewing skills and, as a result, empower them to attain self-reliance. Through this project partnership, the Lord is making a way for many women and girls in Pakistan to pursue a path that leads to financial independence and self-sufficiency by learning the fine art of sewing.

From a young age, Ms. Shakeela, who grew up as an only child, was given the responsibility of financially supporting her family, since her father was unable to work. In addition to equipping this Christian woman with essential practical skills, the ministry she received at the sewing centre also provided her greatly needed hope and support. Ms. Shakeela is grateful for all that she learned at the centre, which has not only made it possible to provide for the practical needs of her otherwise impoverished family, but it has also fostered her own personal development and sense of self-worth.

The same applies to Ms. Sarai. The tangible skills she acquired at the sewing centre were a tremendous source of empowerment to her as well. Ms. Sarai came to view this training opportunity as a ‘beacon of hope’ – a symbol of the promising future God has in store for her life (and for the lives of her loved ones), as well as the fulfillment of her divinely-appointed destiny. Most important of all, this training experience has increased her faith in our compassionate and caring God, to whom she expresses gratitude and praise for His wonderful provision.

Another seamstress-in-training, Ms. Shahida, struggled greatly when she first arrived at the sewing centre, due to impaired vision issues that made it difficult for her to even thread a needle. Self-doubt and lack of support from her family were also great challenges. Yet, this woman’s unwavering dedication and persistence eventually led the way to a remarkable transformation. Although becoming a proficient seamstress has been a challenging journey for this once reluctant trainee, it is one that she has overcome with perseverance, passion, and a relentless pursuit of excellence.

While developing and refining her tailoring skills, Ms. Shahida discovered that sewing is far more than just a craft; it fuels her passion for creativity – serving as an outlet for artistic self-expression! Having witnessed this tremendous development, her loved ones are now her greatest sources of encouragement. They stand by her with loving support as she pursues this new vocational dream.

Another student, Samina, says that the skills-training program marked the beginning of a “big change” in her life, as learning how to sew opened the door to many new opportunities. Not only was she able to support her family, but the ministry received at the sewing centre also instilled a sense of purpose, self-worth and confidence. In fact, it changed the way she now faces all of life’s challenges.

Rimsha is a 16-year-old girl who lives in a town where work for women is often limited to meagre-paying, labour-intensive tasks. Her parents toil arduously as brick kiln workers in order to barely meet their most basic daily needs. Now, with the new opportunities made available through the centre’s skills-training program, this teen has become a bright ‘beacon of hope’ herself and a source of support to her once impoverished family. Rishma expresses gratitude to the Lord for making it possible to receive this invaluable vocational training, and she is now committed to using her newly acquired knowledge and skills to make a difference in the lives of those around her.

Praise God for extending His compassionate provision and goodness to our Pakistani sisters in Christ, who are finding greatly needed hope and purpose through their new livelihoods. Please pray for our dedicated ministry partners at the Zinda Umeed Sewing Centre as they continue to faithfully serve persecuted Christian women and girls (and their families) by ensuring they receive this necessary practical assistance. As a result, may our persecuted family in Christ be further empowered, encouraged and equipped to shine God’s glorious ‘light of hope’ throughout Pakistan. 🌍

# Table Talk PAKISTAN

	1	2	3	4	5
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C					
D					
E					

## Picture This!

### How to Play:











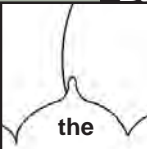












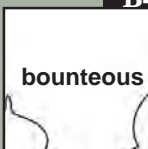
Using the letter-number coordinates above the squares at the bottom of this page, carefully copy both the picture and word shown within each square into the correct position on the grid. Assemble the grid to reveal the entire picture, as well as the lyrics from Pakistan's national anthem. Pencils are recommended. Printables are available at: [vomcanada.com/TableTalkPakistan](http://vomcanada.com/TableTalkPakistan)

← Colour me once completed!

Phrase (of National Anthem): \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
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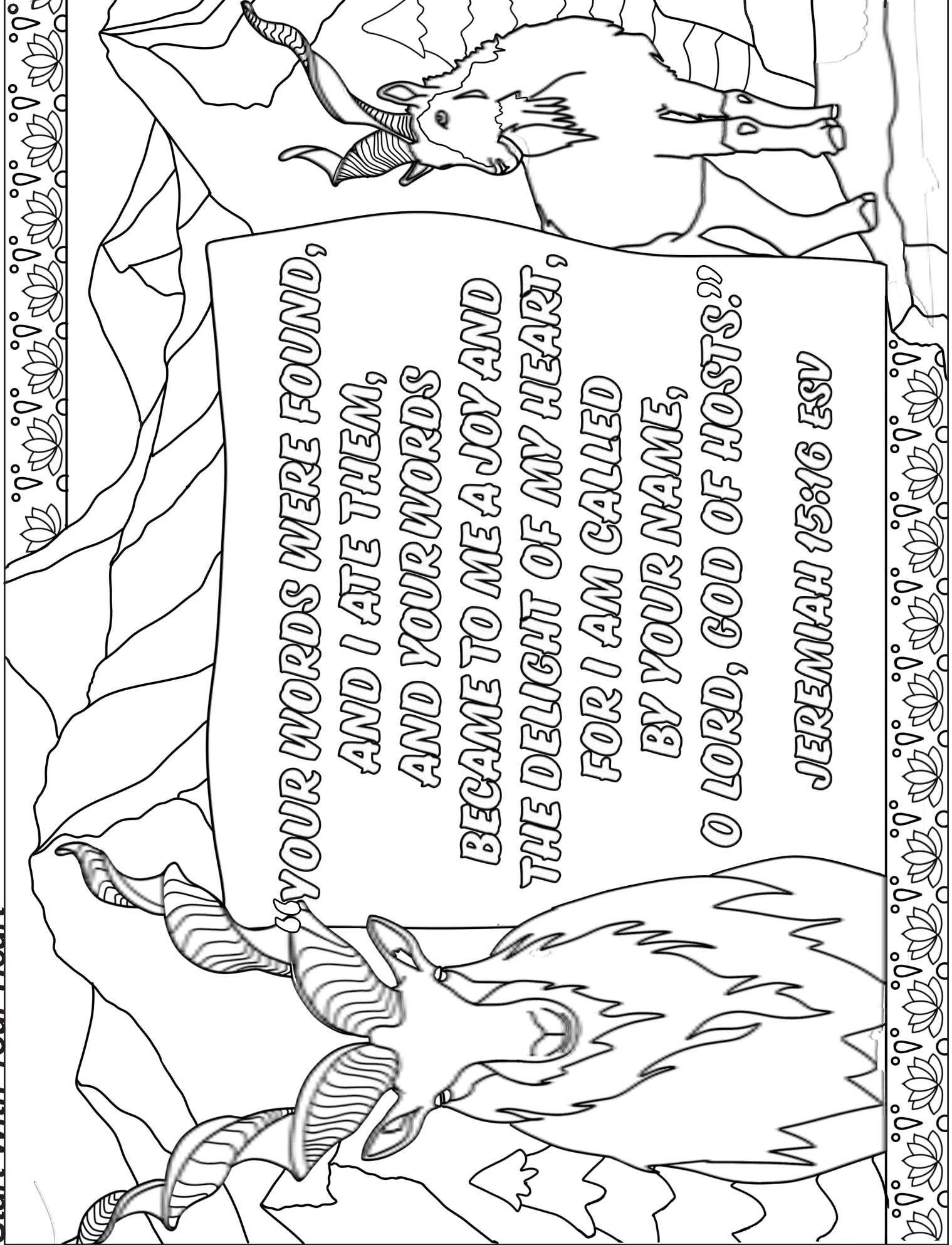


Shutterstock/89studio

<b>D2</b> land 	<b>B1</b> happy 	<b>A2</b> be 	<b>D3</b> of 	<b>D1</b> O 	<b>E5</b> faith. 	<b>A4</b> sacred 	<b>D5</b> Blessed 
<b>E2</b> the 	<b>E1</b> be 	<b>B3</b> the 	<b>D4</b> Pakistan! 	<b>C2</b> symbol 	<b>B2</b> be 	<b>B5</b> realm, 	<b>C1</b> thou 
<b>A5</b> land, 	<b>C5</b> resolve 	<b>A1</b> Blessed 	<b>C4</b> high 	<b>C3</b> of 	<b>E3</b> citadel 	<b>E4</b> of 	<b>B4</b> bounteous 

**“YOUR WORDS WERE FOUND,  
AND I ATE THEM,  
AND YOUR WORDS  
BECAME TO ME A JOY AND  
THE DELIGHT OF MY HEART,  
FOR I AM CALLED  
BY YOUR NAME,  
O LORD, GOD OF HOSTS.”**

**JEREMIAH 15:16 ESV**





# January 2024

**His Way** “Your words were found, and I ate them, and Your words became to me a joy and the delight of my heart, for I am called by Your name, O Lord, God of hosts.” Jeremiah 15:16 ESV

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
<b>7</b> <b>AFGHANISTAN</b> Pray that God will protect followers of Christ who are being pursued by the Taliban.	<b>1</b> <b>PHILIPPINES</b> Pray for Christians who were driven from their homes by Islamic militants, as well as all those affected by the earthquake.	<b>2</b> <b>NEPAL</b> Pray for faithful believers like Binita who boldly share the Gospel with their neighbours despite hardships.	<b>3</b> <b>MOROCCO</b> Pray that more Moroccans will hear the Gospel through evangelistic outreaches using digital media.	<b>4</b> <b>ISRAEL</b> Pray for the numerous victims of war in all areas of Israel, including Christians who also endure persecution in the West Bank and Gaza for their faith.	<b>5</b> <b>LEBANON</b> Pray for the more than one million Syrian refugees who have entered Lebanon since 2012 as church leaders minister to them.	<b>6</b> <b>IRAN</b> Pray that Christians in Iran will continue to share the Gospel and disciple new believers despite civil unrest.
<b>14</b> <b>KAZAKHSTAN</b> Pray that governmental workers who are monitoring unregistered churches will hear the Gospel and turn to faith in Christ.	<b>8</b> <b>CHINA</b> Pray that the study Bibles being distributed to Christian leaders will enable them to teach and train their flocks well.	<b>9</b> <b>CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC</b> Pray for believers who have been beaten by militants, asking the Lord to minister physical, emotional and spiritual healing.	<b>10</b> <b>MOZAMBIQUE</b> Pray that Christians who have lost everything in recent Islamic attacks will have their every need met.	<b>11</b> <b>BANGLADESH</b> Pray that Christian media programs will effectively reach millions of people with the “Good News” of the Gospel.	<b>12</b> <b>TUNISIA</b> Pray that Tunisian church members will continue to have the freedom to gather for worship.	<b>13</b> <b>BURKINA FASO</b> Pray for the grieving families of Christians who have been killed in targeted attacks by Islamic militants.
<b>21</b> <b>KENYA</b> Pray for Christians living in Muslim-majority areas of northeastern Kenya.	<b>15</b> <b>EGYPT</b> Pray that Christian converts from Islam, like Duhra, will see how wonderfully God provides for all their needs.	<b>16</b> <b>MYANMAR (BURMA)</b> Pray for Aung Hte and his family, who were driven from their home, and surrounding land, after placing their faith in Christ.	<b>17</b> <b>DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO</b> Pray that Christians will be protected from violent attacks by militant Islamic groups.	<b>18</b> <b>MAURITANIA</b> Pray that Christian missionaries will return to the country so needed ministry can be provided.	<b>19</b> <b>DJIBOUTI</b> Pray that God’s Word will permeate the country, despite the risks of harassment and persecution for owning a Bible.	<b>20</b> <b>AZERBAIJAN</b> Pray that ministry workers will find ways to import Bibles, which are difficult to obtain as copies cannot be printed legally.
<b>28</b> <b>KUWAIT</b> Pray for wisdom on behalf of the few indigenous Kuwaiti believers who practise their faith at great risk.	<b>22</b> <b>BAHRAIN</b> Praise God for more openness to the Gospel! Pray that the message of Jesus will spread throughout this nation.	<b>23</b> <b>MALDIVES</b> There are very few known Christians in the Maldives. Pray that more Maldivians will come to know the Lord.	<b>24</b> <b>UNITED ARAB EMIRATES</b> Pray for wisdom, protection and courage on behalf of foreign missionaries who are illegally sharing the Gospel with Muslims.	<b>25</b> <b>IRAQ</b> Pray for Nader, a Muslim teenager who asked for a Bible after having dreams about the living Christ.	<b>26</b> <b>LAOS</b> Laos has more than 200 ethnic subgroups. Pray for loving unity to take place among Laotian believers despite the diversity.	<b>27</b> <b>SOMALIA</b> Pray for Christian converts from Islam who have been accused of rejecting both their religion and their nationality.



Scan to access  
Digital Calendar



# A Peek Into PAKISTAN



## Weigh In

1. The Indus River is a large river in Pakistan measuring 3,610 kilometres in length. The areas surrounding this great river are the most populous in the country. Throughout history, many civilizations built their empires around the Indus River.

2. There are over 80 languages spoken in Pakistan, including those that are unique to each specific region. The country's official languages are Urdu and English. However, only seven percent of the population can speak Urdu, and even less than that know English.

3. "Bonded labour" occurs when a person borrows money, but can't pay it back. As a result, the debtor becomes a long-term slave. Often, people spend their entire lives attempting to repay this debt, which is then passed down to their children.

4. The blasphemy law states that anyone who insults the Islamic prophet Muhammad or the Quran must be severely punished. This infamous law commonly results in lifetime imprisonment or the death penalty. Extremists often use it to falsely accuse innocent people.

1. The Indus River has been vital for the survival of human life for thousands of years. This river provides many resources that make it ideal for settlement – water being chief among them. Why do you think numerous civilizations, both modern and ancient, have settled in regions surrounding rivers?

2. With Pakistan's many languages, it can be difficult for citizens to communicate with those of other regions, especially if they speak only one language. What are some of the advantages and disadvantages when a country is rigidly divided by languages? Would this have any impact on potential Bible translation work?

3. People in the poorest communities, being predominantly Christian, are most at risk of becoming "bonded labourers." Imagine your family being stuck in the bonded labour system. How would this impact your hopes, dreams, goals and perception of life?

4. Recently, two Christians in Pakistan were falsely accused of blasphemy. This accusation was the impetus for massive destruction in their community. Should blasphemy laws silence the witness of Pakistani Christians? What does the Bible teach about civil decrees that directly conflict with God's Word?



## One Way

### Islamic Conduct with Neighbours

The Quran is clear that a servant's faith journey is all about conformity. Being a follower of Allah requires being a friend of *his* friends and an enemy of *his* enemies. There are many Quranic verses emphasizing mercy and kindness, but they contain conditions that apply only to like-minded Muslims, and thus they remain within defined limits.

### Biblical Conduct with Neighbours

Jesus states in Matthew 5:43-48 that we are to love our neighbours *and* our enemies. We are to bless those who curse us and do good to those who hate us. We are to pray for those who persecute us. Romans 12:17-21 says, "Repay no one evil for evil... If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. '...if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink....' Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good."

## Way Out

Many Christian women are evicted from their homes due to their newfound faith in Christ. Often, they lack the necessary skills to make a livable income. To help these persecuted sisters in Christ, VOMC partners with a sewing centre project in Pakistan that's designed to teach Christian women of all ages how to sew. These women are also provided sewing machines, so they can generate incomes to support their families. Additionally, ministry workers at the centre disciple the women using God's Word, so they will remain strong in their faith amid a hostile environment. For more about VOMC's international projects, or to donate to our *Women's Ministry Fund*, please visit [vomcanada.com](http://vomcanada.com).

### Recommended Reads

*The Despicable Missionary* by Annie Bradley and Julie Dass (Teen)  
*Hearts of Fire* by The Voice of the Martyrs (Adult)

### Sources:

<https://labour.punjab.gov.pk/bonded-labour>  
<https://operationworld.org/locations/pakistan/>  
<https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/pakistan/>  
*Understanding the Times – A Survey of Competing Worldviews* by Dr. Jeff Myers and Dr. David A. Noebel.



Picture This! Answer Phrase (of National Anthem): "Blessed be the sacred land, happy be the bounteous realm, thou symbol of high resolve, O land of Pakistan! Blessed be the citadel of faith."



# Advocating for Real Change

By Greg Musselman, Minister-at-Large  
The Voice of the Martyrs Canada



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In what has been described as a landmark case, a sessions court in Islamabad recently handed down a 25-year prison sentence to a Muslim man for murdering a Christian woman over three years ago after she turned down his marriage proposal. Judge Azam Khan convicted Muhammad “Shani” Shahzad for the murder of 24-year-old Sonia Allah Rakha.

I recently invited Asher John of Kross Konnection, a digital media platform focussing on human rights advocacy in Pakistan, to join me for a podcast interview to discuss Sonia’s case. In the recorded interview, Asher explains how Shani’s determination to marry Sonia eventually led to her demise: “He hounded her for some time after he apparently fell in love with her and pushed her to get married. However, Sonia was a devoted Christian and refused to give up her faith in Jesus.” Shani even sent his mother to try to convince Sonia and her family to allow the marriage. But because he was a Muslim, and she was a follower of Jesus, they declined the proposal.



Sonia

Eventually, Shani became so angry that he decided to tragically end Sonia’s life. On November 30<sup>th</sup>, 2020, while the young Christian woman was heading to her job at a beauty salon in Islamabad, she was fatally attacked by Shani. “He shot her, killing her on the spot,” Asher grievously reports.

Sadly, this case was not the first of its kind in Pakistan. Amid the ongoing epidemic of forced conversions and marriages, minority women and girls are especially vulnerable to violent attacks. For example, according to Asher, “In 2022, another Christian girl was being pushed for marriage by a Muslim man; and when she refused, he threw acid on her.” Forced marriages of underaged Christian girls, who are often kidnapped or deceived by much older Muslim men, are seldom prosecuted. As a result, many abducted Christian girls are not returned to their distraught families; instead, they are forced to live in terrifying situations.

Sonia’s family members, who continue to grieve her tragic death, are grateful for the judge’s decision to justly sentence the man who murdered her. “They are relieved to have come to the end of this three-year pursuit of justice,” Asher further explains. “It wasn’t easy for them, especially when they had to pay for lawyers and travel expenses. Then they

had to deal with threats from the accused party. They were under a lot of pressure. This happens all the time, since there is no witness protection program, and the police do little to protect them.”

While urging government officials and church leaders in Pakistan to do more to justly stand against the kidnapping, abuse and persecution of the country’s Christians, Asher acknowledges that the situation facing believers in this South Asian nation is disheartening. “How long are we going to just report these incidents, and what are we going to do about it? Are we taking the right steps to stop these atrocities? The state takes us lightly,” he asserts. “These incidents keep happening, and there is no change, absolutely no change. It’s very demoralizing.”

Asher states that Christians in Pakistan live in constant fear. Despite the challenges, Asher has no intention of leaving Pakistan. He believes that God wants him to remain in his country to bring attention and awareness to the plight of Christians, and thus be an advocate for real change.

*“I wait for the Lord, my soul waits,  
and in His Word I hope....”*  
Psalm 130:5 ESV

The verdict for Sonia’s murder, which Asher is hopeful will stand under appeal, unfortunately happens to be a rare victory for justice. Even so, he recognizes that it’s a positive development nonetheless. Asher concludes by saying that he will continue to press for change in spite of what seems to be an unwinnable battle. “My faith in Christ keeps me moving,” he declares. “Such incidents bring us (the church in Pakistan) together. We try to support each other. God is helping us face these situations.” 🙏

*To view Greg Musselman’s most recently recorded interview with Asher John, which is featured on the “Closer to the Fire” podcast, go to [www.vomcanada.com/video/verdict](http://www.vomcanada.com/video/verdict). To order Greg’s book of the same title, visit the ministry’s online store at [www.vomcanada.com/store](http://www.vomcanada.com/store). (Incidentally, the “Closer to the Fire” book was translated to Urdu, one of the primary languages used in several South Asian countries – and the official language of Pakistan – for the purpose of encouraging the persecuted believers of these nations to persevere in their faith.)*

# Ministering as Representatives of Jesus

*“The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy.  
I [Jesus] came that they may have life and have it abundantly.”*

~ John 10:10 ESV



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

Article photos: VOM International



Militant Islamists frequently target Christian women in the workplace. Samina Bibi’s supervisor locked her in a room at the factory where she worked after he overheard her praying during a lunch break. Although a coworker helped her to eventually escape, Samina could not continue working at the factory due to the circumstances. This posed increased financial challenges for her family, as she was their primary provider. Thankfully, through VOMC, Samina received training at one of the ministry’s sponsored sewing centres where persecuted Christian women learn tailoring skills and receive mentoring from other believers. At the end of the training, each graduate is provided with a sewing machine and further assistance in starting their own tailoring business.



Roughly four million Christians live in Pakistan, but they compose less than two percent of the country's population. These believers 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.



Some of these Christians in Pakistan, who have been born into indentured servitude, are enslaved at one of the country's many brick kilns. That was the situation for Hamza (whose photo is also featured on the front cover of this January issue). This dedicated Christian man inherited his parents' debt to a brick-kiln owner. After Hamza took a Muslim coworker to church, his employer began beating and harassing him, and the treatment continued even when he was sold to another employer. In 2021, Hamza received the funds necessary to pay his debt to the kiln owner and was finally freed from indentured servitude. Thanks to VOM's intervention, he and his family are now able to support themselves through their rickshaw taxi and transport business.





Christians in Pakistan live under continual pressure, enduring frequent threats and the ever-present possibility of violent attacks. In 2022, 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 happens to be the same city where suicide bombers detonated their explosives at a church service in 2013, killing more than 120 people and injuring 250 others. Today, 34 Christian children, who were severely affected by the bombing, are continuing to receive support from The Voice of the Martyrs ministry. Some of these children also tragically lost their parents or other family members in the attack. Throughout Pakistan, VOM's ministry workers serve tirelessly to equip, encourage and educate Christian youth.



Courageous Christians travel lengthy 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 when witnessing to Muslims, baptizing converts and welcoming them into their churches. Christian workers, like those pictured here, who distribute Bibles and other Christian literature in this dangerous environment, attend VOM-supported training and fellowship gatherings for encouragement. A ministry 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 the illiterate new believer 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 coworker asked two biological sisters, Mehwish and Sehrish, about their Christian faith, other coworkers at the factory reported the sisters for conducting 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. When they refused to renounce Christ, the two sisters were beaten. Yet, after overpowering the guard who was on duty, they were able to escape from the factory. Today, these women remain in the country serving as faithful witnesses of Christ while studying for their new vocations.



While printing and distributing Bibles are legal activities in Pakistan, militant Islamic groups oppose any furtherance of Christianity. In addition, citizens living in rural, tribal and mountainous areas of the country have little or no access to God's Word. VOM's ministry workers are thereby distributing study Bibles, audio Bibles and New Testaments in the Urdu, Pashto and Sindhi languages. In addition, these workers are providing children's Bibles, Sunday school curricula and booklets about the life of Christ for the young members of Pakistan's multi-generational communities.

Due to the severity of persecution, Christians in Pakistan lead difficult lives, whether they were born into Christian families or have converted from another religion. At the very least, they are marginalized and oppressed in the dominant Muslim culture; in worst-case scenarios, they are subjected to beatings, kidnappings or threats to their lives. Nonetheless, many devoted believers refuse to abandon their faith, and some will even faithfully and courageously proclaim the Gospel to their persecutors in the midst of difficult and dangerous circumstances.



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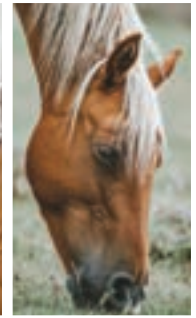
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