

# Open *Doors*

MAGAZINE

JULY | AUGUST 2023

**Young believers in  
the Middle East**

**A future  
of despair...  
or hope?**

STRENGTHENING CHRISTIANS WHERE FAITH COSTS THE MOST

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## GARY'S TAKE

Dear Friend,

Walking through the Christian quarter of Cairo with its impressive historic churches, one can find it hard to fathom that now, the number of Christians in Egypt represents only nine percent of the country's population. Today, Christians are a small minority and they are far too often the targets of discrimination and victims of freedom of religion violations.

Incidents vary from Christian women being harassed while walking in the street, to a mob of angry Muslims forcing a whole community of Christians to move out, leaving their houses and belongings to be confiscated. These sort of incidents take place mostly in Upper Egypt, where Salafist movements are active in the rural communities. The Islamic Salafi al-Nour party continues to exist and operate legally, although the Constitution prohibits religious parties. Their influence is considerable in rural societies where there is a high percentage of illiteracy and poverty.

Young Christians, especially those from a Muslim background, find it a challenge to live out their faith and be hopeful for the future. They face enormous pressure from family to return to the religion of their birth, and the state makes it impossible for them to get any official recognition of their conversion. Because of their faith, they are denied access to employment opportunities and promotions. This is why it is so important that we stand with them and remind them that as Christians, we are never without hope.

As you read through the pages of this magazine, may your heart be stirred to pray for our Egyptian family members and others in the region who suffer such injustices. May you also be encouraged by how your faithful support is helping to keep hope alive in the lives of these family members.

Grace & Peace,

Pastor Gary Stagg  
Executive Director





# A FUTURE OF DESOLATION

# OR HOPE?

**Young Christians in Egypt are being worn down by relentless persecution. Rejected, despised and limited. Their faith – and the future of the church – is under threat.**

“I hated myself and I hated God. I blamed God. Why did He choose me to go through agony?”

Baher’s words are full of bitterness. His fury and venom towards God is alarming. But this is what grinding, relentless persecution can do to someone’s faith.

All his life, this young Egyptian struggled against oppression, and his faith was chipped away year after year – until it reached breaking point.

The tragedy is, it’s not only Baher turning his back on God. Across Upper Egypt, young believers endure constant discrimination, humiliation and rejection. Girls are harassed in the street, children are bullied in school, and employment options are so limited that Christians are driven into the most dangerous, low paying occupations. The devastating economic crisis gripping Egypt only compounds the misery and hardship.

The picture is reflected across most of the Middle East too, where persecution is robbing young people of hope and purpose. The

faith of a generation is at risk of being crushed by persecution – and if that happens, the future of the church in the region looks desolate.

## LIFE-CHANGING INJURY

Baher’s story begins when he was just 13. He left school to find work because the family was desperately poor. Like so many other Christians, discrimination meant he was forced to take on a hazardous job in one of Upper Egypt’s limestone quarries. There’s no legal protection for workers’ rights, and no health insurance.

Baher would never have chosen to work in the quarry, were it not for persecution. “We operate machinery with blades that can shred a body to pieces,” he said. “It’s common for quarry workers to lose a limb. That’s in addition to the huge danger of electrical shocks due to exposed power cords, and the dust particles which cause lung damage and eye disease.”

Within a week, Baher’s arm was severed in a horrible accident.

“I blamed God because I did not do anything wrong, I just wanted to help my family!” cried Baher. “Whenever I looked at my one arm, I was depressed.”

Then, tragically, Baher’s brother died in the job too, thought to have

choked to death on dust from the stone-cutting machines. Baher has tears in his eyes as he remembers, “When my brother died, my heart was torn apart and I lost all hope in life.”

### SHAKEN FAITH

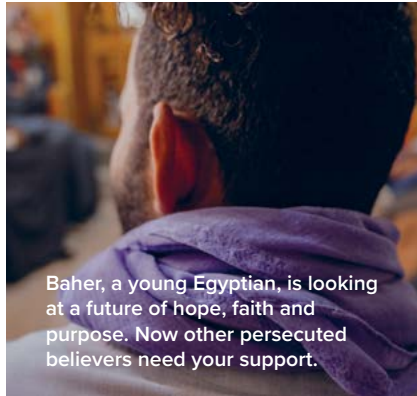
Persecution not only robbed Baher of life and hope, it shook his faith to the core. Alongside his trauma, Baher saw the homes of Christian families in his village looted and burned. He knew Christian parents who were afraid to let their daughters out for fear they’d be kidnapped by radical Muslims. He was rejected as he sought other work.

“Where is God in my life?” Baher raged. “Why has He forsaken me? Why has He chosen me to suffer such pain and become disabled?”

### REWRITE FUTURES

Baher’s future appeared desolate – but he also had another future, one of hope and purpose. It just needed someone like you to take him there.

Thanks to your support, Baher is among hundreds of quarry workers who have received vital help from Open Doors’ partners. Start-up funds helped Baher launch a new sheep-breeding business, and he enrolled in a discipleship program to rebuild his faith.



Baher, a young Egyptian, is looking at a future of hope, faith and purpose. Now other persecuted believers need your support.

“I was blaming God for the traumas my family had been through, but you supported us and helped us get over it,” said Baher. “Now we are thankful. If you had not backed me, I would not have changed. You lifted my morale and restored my relationship with God.”

At Open Doors, we’re driven by the words of Revelation 3:2, “Strengthen what remains and is about to die.” Your support is urgently needed to encourage the faith of other persecuted Christians like Baher, still working in perilous conditions in the stone quarries. You can help provide them with practical support to remain in their homeland and keep the church alive.

Because when you give and pray, you rewrite the future for young Christians. You strengthen what remains. As Baher puts it, “We stopped blaming God, and we worship Him instead.”

## Will you rewrite the future for persecuted young Christians in Egypt?

### PLEASE PRAY

- For Baher as he looks forward to a future of hope, faith and purpose.
- For persecuted young believers in Egypt and especially vulnerable quarry workers.
- For the church in Egypt and the Middle East that it can withstand relentless persecution.

### PLEASE GIVE

Every \$42 could provide a month of medical care and support to three persecuted Christians.

Every \$74 could train and disciple vulnerable young quarry workers to strengthen their faith.

Every \$108 could give financial security to a persecuted Christian family by providing funds to start a small business.





# Your global impact

More than 360 million Christians suffer high levels of persecution and discrimination for their faith. That's one in seven Christians in the world. But the faithful support and prayers of the worldwide church makes a difference.

When our brothers and sisters are brutally attacked, discriminated against, affected by societal unrest, natural disasters or war – your support means Open Doors is there to respond to their needs.

Thank you for standing with your persecuted brothers and sisters. Thank you for your gifts and prayers, which help them know they are not alone. Thank you for strengthening faith and bringing hope.

## YOUR IMPACT IN 2022



**786,599**  
people received  
advocacy support



**3,269,362**  
people received  
biblical training



**1,695,244**  
people received Bibles  
and Christian literature



**597,733**  
people helped with  
socio-economic  
development



**726,666**  
people supported through  
presence ministry and  
persecution research



## Your signature made an impact!



Thank you for your support of our Petition for Nigerian Captives. We are so thankful to all who signed it, shared it with others, and committed to prayer.

We collected 1,336 signatures! On October 11, 2022, we were able to deliver the petition to Member of Parliament, Hon. John McKay.

We are pleased to report now that on April 27, the petition was presented by the Hon. John McKay to our parliamentarians at the House of Commons.

We are thankful to the Canadian government for listening to our call for action for captives in Nigeria. We've asked them to encourage Nigerian officials to ask after these captives and keep their families informed as to the status of the situation.

Thank you once again for using your voice to advocate for Nigerian captives! You are making an impact!

# You're making hope last: Thank you!

For seven years, you supported Hope for the Middle East, a global Open Doors campaign. Today, your gifts and prayers are healing and restoring thousands of persecuted believers.

A group of men huddle together, heads bowed, gently weeping.

It's an unusual sight for Iraq. After all, men here don't cry, generally. But this is a trauma healing group at the Pool of Siloam Ecumenical Centre, an Open Doors Centre of Hope – and these men take their lead from Jesus.

"Jesus cried when he lost his friend," says 28-year-old Jubran who set up and now runs the Centre. "So it's ok to cry. We've had so many wars, my whole life there was war and civil war. People should express their feelings, and we cry with them."

Jubran and Bishop Mar Chimon

Daniel, now 32, established this Centre of Hope back in 2019 as part of Open Doors' seven-year Hope for the Middle East campaign. The aim was to see the church in the Middle East restored as a beacon of hope for communities, nations and the region.

Your support made it happen.

Today, around 80% of churches in Iraq (150) and more than half of churches in Syria (287) are now Centres of Hope. They primarily offer trauma healing, but also provide spiritual support, education and vocational training within local communities.

More than 200,000 people have been reached – and lives are being changed.

"Our main goal is to bring the healing message of the Bible," said Jubran, who ministers to around 500 people a year. "From the Bible we learn how to deal with our pain and live in peace. Every day, I see the results of our work in people's lives and in our staff. People have changed for the better!"

Your prayers, too, had an impact. By December 2022, following a three-month campaign to unite the world in prayer for the Middle East, more than 105,000 prayers had been offered in 184 countries.

This overwhelming support from

the global church sent a powerful message of love and unity to our persecuted brothers and sisters. Bishop Daniel, who helped establish the Centre of Hope with Jubran, said, "Thank you for the help you have given us. With you, we can accomplish programs essential for our community. I always say, we might forget the people who persecuted us, but we will not forget who supported us."

**"We will not forget who supported us."**



## PLEASE PRAY



- Pray for Jubran and Bishop Daniel, young Christian leaders, who remain in Iraq to build a strong and faithful church.
- Pray for healing among Middle East believers traumatized by persecution, violence and loss.
- Give thanks for Hope for the Middle East, and all that we have achieved together.



# 'Thank you is too little.'

Farah and Janan couldn't wait to return to Nineveh Plains, Iraq, after ISIS were driven out. But the destruction of their beloved community left them broken. Your support meant everything.



Farah stood in the wreckage of her once-beautiful home. Slogans of ISIS, the Islamic extremist group, were sprayed on the walls. Across the road, her hairdressing salon had been looted and destroyed.

"I had an eagerness to return to my homeland and memories there," said Farah, now 33. "But when we saw what our village had become, there was heartache. It was a wrecked and burned place."

It had been three years since Farah, her husband Janan and their toddler Gaith had walked out of their home in Nineveh Plains with just the clothes on their backs. ISIS had arrived – and Christians like Farah were being persecuted. "We thought we'd be back in two days," recalls Farah. "It took years."

So in 2017, shortly after their village had been liberated, Farah and her family were back. But how do you start again when your home is trashed and your workplace ruined?

The answer: *with your support.*

Between 2017 and 2022, your gifts helped rebuild more than 2,250 houses in the Nineveh Plains region, allowing thousands of persecuted Christian families like Farah's to return home. Farah was one of the over 200 people to receive start-up funds of up to \$5,000, thanks to your support. The loans are paid back over the following years, and

the last 20% is a gift to the recipient.

Farah used her loan to buy equipment for her hairdressing business and just before Christmas 2017, she re-opened the salon – to a loyal customer base. "The first client was a customer who used to come before ISIS!"

Farah, Janan, Gaith (now a teenager) and seven-year-old Maria are among just over 200,000 believers remaining in Iraq. Twenty years ago, there were 1.5 million Christians. Life is still hard, and the tough economic situation means Farah works long hours and Janan holds two jobs.

But this family chose to stay because of your support and prayers.

"Iraq is my country. I was born here and I will die here," said Farah. "You helped us, stood by us, encouraged us. Without your help surely it would have been impossible to return and go back to business. The words thank you are too little."

## PLEASE PRAY

"Suffering and persecution makes it frightening for Christians to remain in Iraq. But we are here. I would like to ask you to pray that safety and stability would return to Iraq. That's the dream of every Christian."

Farah, from Nineveh Plains, Iraq

# BECAUSE OF YOU...



*Some of the Nigerian youth show off their new Bibles, a treasure that they received because of the generosity of supporters like you.*

## YOU PROVIDED BIBLES TO CHRISTIAN YOUTH IN NIGERIA

At a local Baptist church in northern Nigeria, more than 130 youth gathered to receive a special gift – their own Bible, thanks to supporters like you. These young believers experience both marginalization and violence on a daily basis because of their faith in Jesus Christ, but they are resilient in the face of persecution.

Matthew, one recipient, said, “We only have one Bible that is shared amongst members of my family and I can’t carry it around or read it on my own time. For to have my own Bible...I am so grateful to God.”

## THANKS TO YOU, MALAYSIAN FARMERS RECEIVED TRAINING

Thanks to you, Open Doors partners were able to put on a one-month program for farmers in Malaysia that were struggling with the high cost of fertilizers and other agricultural inputs. Nineteen farmers participated in the training where they learned how to create their own fertilizer and other farming supplies sustainably. The training was held within a local church and the farmers not only received practical knowledge but also emotional and spiritual encouragement. The head of the training, Daniel\*, said, “They responded with much gratitude. They were so glad to learn other methods of farming and their enthusiasm was contagious!”



*Because of you, these Malaysian farmers were able to receive practical agricultural training and spiritual discipleship, both of which will help the church thrive.*



*Zareh, Lucine and their daughter Serena are grateful for their restored apartment.*

## YOU'RE HELPING REPAIR HOMES DAMAGED BY AN EARTHQUAKE IN SYRIA

Thanks to your gifts and prayers, Open Doors partners have been able to inspect and begin repairs on more than 1,200 homes damaged by the earthquakes in Aleppo, Syria. This kind of help is the long-term aid our partners provide all over Syria—strengthening a church that has been through crisis after crisis. Because of this support, Syrian Christians will be able to remain in their homeland and continue to be salt and light in Syria for Jesus Christ.

## OPEN DOORS COMING TO ALBERTA



Join us for *Night With The Persecuted Church*, an in-person event, to hear stories that will help you connect with your brothers and sisters who have sacrificed everything to follow Christ.

We would love to come to your church! If you live in **Grande Prairie or Edmonton, AB**, Open Doors Canada would love to share with you the importance of praying for the Persecuted Church. Contact us today at (905) 636-0944.

- > Calgary Chinese Baptist Church, Calgary, AB  
September 28 @ 7:00 pm
- > Location TBD, Grande Prairie, AB  
September 29
- > Location TBD, Edmonton, AB  
September 30
- > Tofield Community Church, Tofield, AB  
October 1 @ 10:30am (Sunday Service)

For more information, and to RSVP, visit:  
[www.persecutedchurch.ca](http://www.persecutedchurch.ca).



# The future looks desolate for Baher's generation

## UNLESS WE ACT

Egypt's young Christians are being worn down by relentless persecution.

Baher left school at 13 to work in a quarry, after persecution left his family desperately poor. Robbed of options because of his faith, Baher (like many persecuted believers) was forced to take the most dangerous work. Within a week, his arm was severed in a horrific accident. Then his brother died in the job.

*"I hated myself and I hated God."*

Young believers like Baher need hope. Not just in Egypt, but across the Middle East.

Because if this generation's faith is crushed by persecution, the church in the region faces a bleak future.

**Will you rewrite the future for young Christians, to bring hope and purpose?**

Every \$74 could train and disciple vulnerable young quarry workers in Egypt, to strengthen their faith.

Visit [www.opendoorscanada.org](http://www.opendoorscanada.org) to make a gift today, return the enclosed envelope or phone (905) 636-0944.

*Thank you*

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