

Open *Doors*

MAGAZINE

MARCH | APRIL 2024

**WORTHLESS?
OR WORTH EVERYTHING.**

STRENGTHENING CHRISTIANS WHERE FAITH COSTS THE MOST

www.opendoorscanada.org



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Open Doors Canada
 8-19 Brownridge Rd.
 Halton Hills, ON L7G 0C6

(905) 636-0944
www.opendoorscanada.org
opendoors@odcan.org



/OpenDoorsCanada

Cover image: Women are already vulnerable in the Middle East – but Christian women are made to feel worthless. You can help a woman know her value in Christ. Read Simin’s story on page 4.

OPEN DOORS MAGAZINE is published 6 times a year to provide concerned Christians with information about events affecting persecuted Christians worldwide. ODC is a member of Canadian Centre for Christian Charities and the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada. The material contained in this publication cannot be reproduced in any form, including on the internet, without written permission. © 2024 Open Doors Canada.

GARY’S TAKE

Dear Friend,

Over several years, Open Doors has conducted research which shows that Christian women and girls are doubly vulnerable to persecution. Women are targeted because of their gender and because of their faith. Gender-specific persecution is widely used to repress the Christian community because it often goes unnoticed and is a low risk to perpetrators. The persecution targeted at men is more easily recorded and monitored but persecution against women and girls is hidden, complex and violent.

In this issue you will read the story of Simin from Iran. As in her story, persecution against Christian women often takes place quietly within a family, conducted by the very people a woman would turn to for love and trust. Imagine having your name erased from all family records by your own father because you chose to follow Jesus.

Open Doors’ vision is that every woman persecuted for her faith and gender is seen, valued and empowered. Open Doors partners deliver projects around the world that meet the specific needs of persecuted Christian women. Whether that means humanitarian relief for Iraqi refugees, trauma care in Nigeria or political advocacy in India, each project aims to restore the hope, dignity and identity of vulnerable Christian women.

However, to ensure that this issue is adequately responded to, we must all do our part. As Christians living in Canada, we can pray for our sisters who live in areas where they are vulnerable to attack. We can give them a voice by speaking out about their plight with people in power. We can also support the many Open Doors projects that deliver help and aid to ensure they don’t feel abandoned by the global Church. How will you respond today?

Grace & Peace,

Pastor Gary Stagg
 Executive Director



NO WOMAN IS WORTHLESS



Simin, from Iran, lost her home, job and freedom to persecution.

*Image is representative

Women are already vulnerable in the Middle East – but Christian women are made to feel worthless. You can help a woman know her value in Christ.

Anger blazed in her father's eyes as he flipped over the kitchen table and roared at Sara*. "All this time you asked about Christianity, I thought it would pass. But apparently I did not raise you right!"

He snatched Sara's phone and locked her in her bedroom. Sara remained there, trapped, for 10 whole days. Later, she discovered her father had erased her name from the family records.

It was a brutal, ruthless rejection – all because this young woman had turned her back on Islam and chosen Jesus instead.

For months, Sara, who lived in Iraq, had been reading a Bible given to her by a Christian friend. The loving God she discovered in Scripture couldn't be more different from the God of Islam she'd been raised to fear. "After I found Christ, my life transformed completely," said Sara.

But now, spurned by the family she loved, Sara felt worthless. She's not the only one.

UNDER ATTACK

Across the Middle East, women are vulnerable. They have fewer rights than men and limited opportunities. But if a woman is also a disciple of Christ, her vulnerability is exploited and she becomes the target for intense persecution.

While men tend to face violent, physical and public attacks for their faith, the persecution of women is insidious and cruel. According to Open Doors' latest report on Gender-Specific Religious Persecution, the value of Christian women is under attack.

"IN THE BIBLE, WOMEN HAVE SO MUCH VALUE. WE ARE SEEN!"

Women are shamed by sexual violence, devalued by forced marriage, and stripped of their identity by the loss of work and independence. Often, their suffering is hidden because persecution happens behind closed doors.

SIMIN'S STORY

Simin*, from Iran, was a young nurse when she opened a Bible for the first time – and God touched her heart.

"In the Bible, women have so much value. We are seen!" she

exclaimed. "I felt I was walking with Jesus, and it changed me."

But faith cost Simin dearly. Her family mocked her. Her father said she'd lost her mind. "Islam and the regime in Iran destroyed the identity of women and almost all women are broken," she said. One day, Simin's home was raided by police – and her sense of worth was stripped away.

"My husband and I were in prison for 18 days. Just a few hours after we were found guilty, the hospital called to say I was fired," said Simin. "We realized the only way to survive and keep serving Jesus was to flee Iran. It was terrifying, but we had to sacrifice."

GOD-GIVEN POTENTIAL

No woman should be made to feel worthless. Women like Sara and Simin need to know their value in Christ. They need your help to fulfil their God-given potential.

Your gifts and prayers this Easter can provide persecuted women with desperately needed leadership and discipleship training, trauma care and pastoral support. At Centres of Hope across the Middle East, you can help women grow in faith, start their own businesses, and support one another.

For Sara, rejected by loved ones, the care of her global church family



means the world. She escaped her father and now attends a Centre of Hope church in northern Iraq. Her dream is to get an identity card which states her Christian faith.

"GOD BROUGHT ME TO MY LOWEST, ONLY TO LIFT ME UP AGAIN."

"I've never regretted the decision I made," said Sara. "God brought me down to my lowest, only to lift me up again."

And for Simin, who lost her home, job and freedom, your support strengthens her to serve other women. "I'm getting better, mentally and spiritually. I'm not there yet, but I understand the pain of other women and I want to comfort them."

Two different stories. Two women made to feel worthless by persecution. But one powerful church family, which can lift up persecuted women so they know their value in Christ.

*Names changed to protect their identities

Will you help persecuted women know their value in Christ?

PLEASE PRAY

- For Simin, that her faith will grow and she'll have the strength to support other women.
- For Sara, that she would deeply know her value as a cherished, unique child of God.
- For courage for women across the Middle East who are shamed, mocked and made to feel worthless because of their faith.

PLEASE GIVE

Every \$32 could give four women Biblical literature to help nurture her faith.

Every \$45 could give a Christian woman food to help her family survive for a month.

Every \$75 could help a persecuted woman start a small business, giving her financial security.

INSECURITY: THE 2024 GENDER REPORT

Seven years of gender-specific religious persecution (GSRP) research findings have confirmed a clear pattern, that whether male or female, young or old, religious persecution is rarely experienced as a single, isolated Pressure Point. For **men and boys**, GSRP is focused, visible and severe. It is marked by targeted physical violence, including lethal violence, as well as by state and economic pressures. For **women and girls**, it is complex, hidden and violent. It is characterized by sexual violence and forced marriage, as well as by insidious, invisible violence behind closed doors.

Learn more by downloading the full report from our website:
www.opendoorscanada.org/genderedpersecution

NORTH KOREA *NEVER ABANDONED* TOUR

COMING TO SASKATCHEWAN

Join us for this in-person event to hear stories that will help you connect with your brothers and sisters who have sacrificed everything to follow Christ.

SATURDAY, MAY 4 - 5:00PM

Morning Star Ministries
3540 6th Ave, Regina, SK S4T 0N5

SUNDAY, MAY 5 - 10:30AM

Yorkton Victory Church
38 Bradbrooke Dr, Yorkton, SK S3N 4J7

SUNDAY, MAY 5 - 7:00PM

First Baptist Church
1010 Main St N, Moose Jaw, SK S6H 3K8

More dates coming soon! Visit www.persecutedchurch.ca to see all events.

We are planning this tour across Canada in 2024. If you would like us to come to your church, contact us at odcevents@odcan.org or call (905) 636-0944.

A Mother Empowered

When a bomb struck Aleppo, Syria, Ani's dreams were shattered and her daughter suffered life-changing injuries. But your support lifted Ani – and empowered her.



Ani's eyes fill with tears as she remembers the terrifying explosion that rocked her world.

"I was holding my baby Maria in my lap, and in a matter of seconds I saw myself flying and Maria crying. We fell and I saw Maria had a huge wound on her head. I have no recollection after that."

It was 2014, several years into Syria's civil war, and recently-married Ani and Sarkis were doing their best to survive in their hometown of Aleppo. As a Christian family, they were at extreme risk from groups like ISIS. The bomb blast left seven-month-old Maria fighting for her life.

"Doctors removed mortar fragments from Maria's head, but one shard remained," said Ani. "It was too risky to remove the last piece of shell from her brain."

Thankfully, Maria pulled through, but needs ongoing medical care. Ani turned to Jesus in a way she never had before. And you were there to love and support your sister in Christ.

Ani started attending a Centre of Hope church, where you provided practical and spiritual through Open Doors' partners. "Whenever we prayed, I would hear at Maria's next hospital appointment that the bones had started to heal without the need for further surgery," said Ani.

Ani joined a Bible group. "I found peace and safety," she smiled, "I've never felt this way before." When Ani became pregnant again, your support helped renovate the family's new home. And after baby Eliza had arrived, your gifts empowered Ani to start a small business by providing her with sewing machines.

Now, a decade on from the bomb that changed their lives, Ani and Sarkis – and their daughters Maria and Eliza – are full of faith and courage. Life is still hard, and many Christians are leaving Syria because of persecution, but this family has chosen to remain.

"When I come to our church, I feel as if I am home," said Ani. "I can face life's challenges with a sense of peace because I know the Lord is with me. I love my country, and because of my business I can stay here and provide for my family."

She added, "I hope one day Maria will tell others how Jesus worked in her life. I hope she and Eliza will be servants of the Lord. Your support has been vital to me. You helped me through so much and made my life easier."



WWL
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PLEASE PRAY

- For complete healing for Maria, now 10, who needs regular medical care.
- For Ani, that she will be a powerful witness who shines God's light in Aleppo.
- For peace and security in Syria, and for an end to religious persecution.

FINDING HER VALUE



Sara encountered Jesus when a friend gave her a Bible. Today, your support strengthens her faith.

When Iraqi believer, Sara, was rejected by her family, she felt worthless. Thanks to you, she's discovering her value in Christ.

The door slammed shut and Sara's* father turned the key. She was locked in her bedroom...

For 10 days, Sara remained in that room with nothing to eat, while her father simmered with rage at her new-found faith in Jesus. "I would have preferred if you ran away with

a man to get married, and not done this," he told Sara.

It's hard to believe this bright young woman, a medical student in Baghdad, Iraq, could be made to feel so worthless. Sara loved her father, and the rejection was deeply painful. But she did not give up on Jesus. "I felt lonely and hopeless, but I kept my faith and kept praying to God."

Miraculously, Sara escaped and fled north. However, as an

unmarried woman and a convert, she was extremely vulnerable. Her father had erased her name from the family records, and she was continually harassed by men.

But God guided Sara into a Centre of Hope – and towards your faithful support.

Sara turned away from the hurt and shame caused by loved ones, and stepped into the arms of her global church family. There, thanks to you, Sara is valued, empowered and strengthened in her faith.

"Before, my life was empty," said Sara. "I didn't have the joy and peace that I have now in my heart. Now, I am grateful for all the bad things I've been through because I know God better and I was transformed into His image."

Today, Sara attends a church which is an Open Doors' Centre of Hope. There are more than 100 Centres of Hope in Iraq, and more across the Middle East. Your generosity means these centres shine as beacons of light, providing persecuted believers with spiritual, practical and emotional help.

With your gifts and prayers, Centres of Hope run Bible studies and distribute Scripture, provide health and medical aid, and run income-generating projects, education and trauma healing.

Sara has not only received training to grow as a disciple, she's also part of a women's group where she feels safe and loved. She knows her value in Christ, and is courageously beginning to share the gospel with others.

"My dream is to get an identity card that says I am Christian, that I belong to Him in my ID," said Sara. "I have never regretted the decision I made for Jesus. God brought me down to my lowest, only to lift me up again."

**Name changed to protect her identity*



PLEASE PRAY

- Ask that Sara's faith and ministry in Iraq would grow.
- For Sara's father, that God will touch his heart and reveal Himself.
- For protection over Sara, and other persecuted women in the Middle East.

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BECAUSE OF YOU...

THANKS TO YOU, SAMIH AND MARIA NAVIGATED A DEVASTATING EARTHQUAKE



Samih and Maria and their newborn baby Ralph were just a few of the many Syrian Christians who received aid after losing their home to an earthquake.

One year ago when an earthquake devastated parts of Syria and Türkiye, your response meant that the affected Christian community was not alone. Samih and Maria were two of the thousands of people forced from their home. The couple was left in the streets with their two children, including a newborn. Thanks to the generosity and prayers of Open Doors supporters, they were able to navigate the many challenges that followed. In particular, Maria is grateful that they were able to afford clothing and diapers for their baby. Today, they live safely together in a new, one bedroom apartment.

SECRET CHRISTIANS IN NORTH KOREA ARE THANKFUL FOR YOUR AID



North Korea remains the hardest place on earth to follow Jesus, but secret Christians are thankful for the support they received from people like you.

Through its networks in China, Open Doors supports North Korean Christians with food, medicines, practical aid, safe houses, Bible studies and more. Recently, a number of North Korean Christians told us how much they appreciate the support that the worldwide Church has made possible. One secret Christian sends this blessing for Open Doors' supporters. "I want to thank you for all the items that you've given us. I pray that the blessing of the Father be with you, so that all may go well with and be in good health, and that it may go well with your soul."

YOUR GENEROSITY ALLOWS FOR PERSECUTION TRAINING IN CHINA



With growing restrictions in China, it is important for the Chinese church to be trained in how to stand strong amidst the storm.

Open Doors partners in China were able to begin 2024 with a successful persecution training program for local Christians called SSTS: Standing Strong Through the Storm. The three-day event was surrounded by prayer, but also significant apprehension. A previous program had almost been discovered, but this event went through without a problem. Local church leaders were encouraged, and one partner says joyfully "The Lord is in control! He is the God who makes all things work together for good. May everyone involved in this event be strengthened even more after experiencing God's help!"

YOU ALLOWED A SINGLE MOTHER IN NEPAL TO HAVE A LIVELIHOOD



Indira's two children will receive an education thanks to the extra income you provided.

Indira* was born a Hindu, but encountered Jesus through a local Christian. Following her conversion, her husband tried to force her to recant: he assaulted her physically and abused her mentally. Despite that, she stayed strong in her faith. Ultimately, she was expelled from the house with her two children and went to stay with her mother.

Indira works in a school, but her income is not enough to pay for her children's school fees. Your generosity and prayers allowed Open Doors partners to help Indira begin a goat farming business. With this support, Indira is able to make ends meet, as well as send her two children to school. Thank you for ensuring Indira makes a living and her children get an education!

SHE PAID THE PRICE.

SHOW SIMIN HER VALUE.

The cost of following Jesus is huge for women in Iran and the Middle East. Simin* lost her home, her job, her freedom.

No woman should be made to feel worthless.

This Easter, you can help persecuted women like Simin fulfil their God-given potential by providing leadership and discipleship training, trauma care and pastoral support.

Please, this Easter, will you help persecuted women know their value in Christ?

Every \$32 could give four women Biblical literature to help nurture her faith.

Every \$45 could give a Christian woman food to help her family survive for a month.

Please give using the response form, phone (905) 636-0944 or visit www.opendoorscanada.org.

Thank you

**Name has been changed and illustrative image used to protect her identity*

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