



## Middle Eastern Muslims Find Faith in Jesus

“Unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds” – **John 12:24**

Harvesters' speciality is multiplication. Multiplication can only happen if seeds die.” These are the words of a missionary working in a persecuted nation in the Middle East. His words are spoken with passion... but not ignorance. Roberto\* has heard shootings and seen explosions, has lived in conflict zones and preached the Gospel to enemy militia. Yet he still prays, “take me where no one is going.”

When war raged in the Middle East, Roberto served refugees who were fleeing into the country where he lived. He raised funds to provide welcome kits. By the end of the year, numerous Muslim refugees had come to know Christ and were baptised.

One returned home and began evangelising about Jesus! He led a woman to Christ, who has since planted a church filled with Muslim converts. In October 2020 there were around 25 members. Now there are over 160 ex-Muslim converts who meet in 15 small groups. They celebrated more baptisms in August.

Yet, expanding the Kingdom in the Middle East is challenging. Two local pastors were forced to flee due to persecution this year.

One impactful story is that of Omar\*. He comes from a wealthy, influential family who hate Christians greatly. As a child, he was hung from a balcony when his father discovered he had visited a Catholic service with his friend. And devastatingly, his

older brother – who had secretly become a Christian – was shot dead in front of Omar's eyes!

During a job interview, Omar questioned the lady in front of him about her cross necklace. Worried, she told him they couldn't talk there, but to come to her home and he could meet her pastor. Omar gave his life to Christ that day and was baptised in the local river.

He started a discipleship course and began to serve on the outreach team. But, one dreadful day his family discovered his new identity as a Christian and kidnapped him.

Roberto heard Omar being tortured through a phone call and cried, “Lord, this will be the first time I'll see one of my disciples die.” For three long days, he heard nothing of Omar. “No windows, no lights, beating, no sleep, no toilet, no eating, shaver cutting him – but he did not deny Jesus.” Miraculously, Omar was let go! He ran to meet his pastors who washed him and took him for food. As they cried together, Omar declared, “I don't want your pity. What I suffered for Jesus I would suffer all over again. Jesus was with me the whole time.”

\*Names changed for protection. ✉

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# New Churches Are Opening in India

## DESPITE PERSECUTION AND PANDEMIC

“I will build my church, and all the powers of hell will not conquer it” – **Matt 16:18**

India became the epicentre of a devastating wave of Covid-19 earlier this year. Crematoriums were stretched beyond capacity and bodies were piling up in the rivers. Dying was happening in plain view. Numerous Harvesters pastors were lost among the tens of thousands of tragedies.

**And yet, the most astounding tales coming from India were not the ones of horror, but the ones of hope.**

Harvesters' Indian pastors were determined to stand firm through the crisis, when covering with fear would have been completely understandable. It could have made sense to pause evangelical efforts for a while, given the monster they were facing. But the pastors knew that was not the call they were given.

Instead, reports came through of pastors spending their allocated shopping hour – the period of time when they could buy essential goods – sharing the Gospel in the marketplace. In another region, one leader had gathered all the pastors to volunteer at the hospitals. Yet another pastor evangelised to over 70 families in a nearby village. One leader said, “In the midst of fear and anxiety, the Lord asked me to be a super spreader of hope.”

As church buildings across the globe closed their doors, the Church in India started to grow!

### LIFE GIVING WATER

In a hot and dry northern village, Pastor Arjun's\* congregation have faced persecution since he planted the church. India is listed as the world's tenth most persecuted nation by Open Doors, and less than 5% of its population is Christian.

“The student pastors could not meet with the believers. One hand Covid restriction and on the other hand persecution,” said Arjun. “I was worried and disappointed. We prayed for God's wisdom.”

His prayer was answered. Pastor Arjun came up with a creative way around the restrictions that allowed no more than five people to meet. He applied to build a borehole in the town. It was a way to serve his community – and, as an essential service, there were fewer restrictions for those working on the project.

“This is a strategy we used at church to gather for evangelism,” he explained. “I mobilized the church members to gather every day at the borewell to conduct



*During the pandemic, Indian pastors have come up with creative ways to still meet as a church, like gathering at the community borehole – sharing about Jesus who is the living water – or having church services under a tree in the village.*



the church services and share the Gospel to those who came to fetch the water.”

“Though the enemy stopped us gathering at home, God opened the door to gather at the community borewell for worship. Hindus closed their temples and homes. As the church opened the doors to the community to fetch water, we took the opportunity to share about Jesus who is the living water.”

“Whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life”

**John 4:14**

### TREE OF LIFE

Jai\* works in “one of the most unreached areas” of his region. He has been able to continue his Harvesters’ training online – like many Harvesters pastors around the world have been fortunate to do over this last year. He meets together with the other pastors in his region online every Friday for prayer. Plus, they like to “review what we have learned during the training.”

All of the churches that Pastor Jai has planted have been with ex-Hindu converts. “When they accepted Jesus Christ, their family was opposed by the community.” The Christians in India know what it means to count the cost of following Jesus.

“I preached the gospel to those whom I met on the streets,” he explains. “We celebrated by worshipping under the tree.”

“I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing”

**John 15:5**

Despite very real challenges facing the Church in India, the resilience, strength and persistence of the Christians in this nation is evident. Please keep the pastors in your prayers as they continue to lead their congregants through these unprecedented times of crisis in India.

\*Names changed for protection. ✉



*When you partner with Harvesters, you're opening the way for the unreached to know Jesus. Thank you for your gifts and prayers!*



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Steven Loots, CEO of Harvesters Ministries has a vision to see the church flourish and expand. Many local church leaders who hear about the exponential church growth happening through Harvesters want to know if the principles will also work for their local congregation. For this reason, Steven has packed 20 years' worth of experience into a very practical 7-hour course, aptly named Disciplemakers, to present to interested churches at no cost to them.

These are the very principles that we have used all over the world to win and disciple more than 5 million people in over 65,000 newly planted churches in the last 20 years. It covers foundational Biblical principles and presents practical strategies for evangelism and discipleship.

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Get in touch with Harvesters Ministries if you would like us to come and present the free Disciple Makers Course at your church.

# Opening the Way