

# OPEN DOORS

MAGAZINE



## Faith that defies fear

Meet the survivors of a church bombing

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*“Strengthen what  
remains.”*

*Revelation 3:2*

# Alex's Corner



**"... LIKE A  
PERSON WHO  
BUILDS A  
HOUSE ON  
SOLID ROCK."**

Matthew 24:7b

Alex Kan  
Church Relations Officer  
Open Doors  
Hong Kong

## ***Amid fear, faith is alive.***

Thirty seconds. In just thirty seconds, a suicide bomb attack claimed 22 lives, destroyed a church, and tore apart a family.

After reading the report on the St. Elias Church bombing (p4), the office fell silent for a long time. Elias lost seven family members. Hanan looked beneath the burnt face of a child and recognized the shoes belonging to her daughter. I dare not imagine that scene.

Yet what we witness even more is a faith over fear.

Elias said, "Our faith is built on rock, not bubbies of soap."

Hanan said, "We go to church, but fear exists."

It is precisely because they acknowledge their fear that their faith is so real.

Then there is Zaid\* (p10) in Yemen, who was driven out of his home because of Jesus, and Ernesto\* (p12) in Mozambique who refused to deny his Lord and nearly died on the cross. Literally.

But we also see healing. A bomb attack rocked Jenny's world (p8), but your gifts and prayers are strengthening her faith — and empowering her to help others. Five surviving children (p14) sit quietly creating with clay — that is the beginning of healing.

Persecution is never far away. "If one part suffers, every part suffers with it." (1 Cor 12:26) They are our family.

The church in Syria has shrunk from 1.8 million to 300,000. They are not without hope, but they need us to stand together with them. Every gift you give and every prayer you offer tells them: You are not alone.

"Strengthen what remains and is about to die." (Rev 3:2)

May the Lord who strengthens them also strengthen you and me.

*\*name changed for security reasons*



# FAITH OVER FEAR



**Lives were ripped apart when a suicide bomber attacked this church. A year on, Elias and his family remain in Syria. But they need your help.**

The attack took just 30 seconds.

Thirty seconds for a suicide bomber to kill 22 Christians. To destroy Saint Elias Church, in Damascus, Syria. And to leave this family broken and reeling.

Elias, 56, and his wife Hanan, 39, will never forget what happened on Sunday June 22 last year. They lost seven family members. “It was a massacre,” says Elias. “We went through 14 years of civil war, but an assault inside the church is unheard of.”

The father-of-five thinks back to the moment when 300 people in the church were startled by the sound of gunshots...



St Elias Church, in the Dweila area of Damascus, Syria, after the devastating bomb attack. 22 Christians lost their lives.

## A MASSACRE

“The door was thrown open, and we were assaulted by a terrorist shooting left and right,” remembers Elias. “My brothers, Boutros and Geryes, charged and tackled the terrorist. But he detonated his explosives.”

The blast killed people instantly – and plunged the church into chaos, confusion and fear. “You cannot imagine the scene,” says Elias. “The church turned red.”

A shard of metal hit Elias in the thigh, and he was bleeding badly. His two brothers and a sister were killed. Meanwhile, Hanan searched for the children in panic. “I started shouting for them, saying to myself, Lord, please let me find one more child,” she says, holding back tears.

## “We experienced faith and fear..”

### ELIAS

“I saw a girl with blood coming out of her eyes. Her face was swollen and her hair was burned. I looked down and recognised the shoes she was wearing – and realised it was my daughter.”

Elias, Hanan and their children survived. But while the attack lasted only 30 seconds, this family lives with the trauma and memories every day.

## DWINDLING CHURCH

Conflict and persecution have driven thousands of Christians to leave Syria in recent years. In 2011, there were around 1.8 million believers. Now, the church numbers just 300,000.

The bombing at Saint Elias Church struck at the very heart of a dwindling community. Many believers no longer feel safe going to church. But, even amid fear,

faith is alive. Recently, 22 children were baptised at Saint Elias, the same number of Christians who lost their lives in the June 2025 attack.

“We go to church, but fear exists. Yet even if we are afraid, we will still go,” says Hanan, her words filled with fearless defiance. Leaving Syria may be an option in the future. But for now, they remain: “If it is God’s will, we will stay.”



Elias, 56, lights candles to remember his siblings killed in the bombing.

## “FAITH BUILT ON ROCK”

Recently, the family returned to Saint Elias Church for the first time since the bombing. Workmen pause while the family light candles at the altar.

Elias leans on a crutch, and metal pins protrude from his leg. The children, Elen, Sarah, Taqla, Ibrahim and Christina, are nervous. A car horn sounds outside, and Ibrahim panics and flees with his siblings. Their trauma is raw and easily triggered.

“The children fear the smallest sound. They think they’re being attacked,” explains Hanan, sadly.

This family carries deep scars, but they know one thing for certain...

## “No matter what happens, we will come to church.”

### HANAN

“We experienced faith and fear here. But we know the Lord will not forsake us,” says Elias. “Our faith is built on rock, not bubbles of soap.”

At Open Doors, our vision is to strengthen the bold faith of Christians like Elias, Hanan and their children. Dozens of

church leaders in Syria have been trained to run trauma healing workshops, and Elias and Hanan’s children regularly attend sessions in Damascus.

Raneen\*, a trained psychologist who leads Open Doors’ trauma healing in Syria, says “True healing is found in Jesus Christ. We want to bring people back to God.” But this vital work can only happen with your gifts and prayers.

Back at his home, Elias picks up an icon of Jesus as the Good Shepherd that he saved from the church rubble, still marked with dried blood. “We live day by day,” he says. “We have no ambition but to remain faithful.”

*\*Name changed for their safety*

## Will you support faith that defies fear?

### PLEASE GIVE

Every \$200 could provide persecution survival training to a believer to help them persevere.

Every \$230 could provide trauma care to a Christian who’s faced extreme persecution.

Every \$420 could give essential support to a Christian family in a time of crisis.

Give now: [donation.opendoors.org.hk](https://donation.opendoors.org.hk)

### PLEASE PRAY

- Pray for Elias, Hanan and their five children. Ask God to strengthen their faith, heal their wounds, and empower them as witnesses to the Lord’s goodness.

- Pray for Open Doors’ local partners in Syria, who has lived through war, violence and disasters. Give thanks for their service to the Syrian church and pray for strength.
- Pray for faithful remnants of believers everywhere, who keep following Jesus despite fear, loss and persecution. Pray they will know they are not alone.



Your support can provide trauma healing to children who survived the attack on Saint Elias Church.

# FINDING HEALING

## Thanks to you

Your support put Jenny on a path to healing after her father was killed. Now, she's helping other believers traumatised by violent persecution in Syria.

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A bomb attack rocked Jenny's world. But your gifts and prayers are strengthening her faith – and empowering her to help others.

Jenny was chatting with a friend outside her home, enjoying the warm evening, when an explosion ripped through the peace – and her world changed in an instant.

Suddenly, messages started flying around. The blast was at St Elias Church... A suicide bomber... People were dead... Her father had been at Mass, he wasn't answering his phone...

"At that moment, I felt everything ceased to exist," remembers Jenny. "I was shaking all over. I sat down because I couldn't stand up."

## **"THE LORD IS ON OUR SIDE AND THE CHURCH WILL BE STRENGTHENED."**

Jenny raced to the church, in the Dweila area of Damascus, Syria – it was a scene of chaos and desperation. Then to the hospital. Jenny's father was in surgery, badly wounded. But soon the news came: he had not survived.

Jenny was shocked, heartbroken and numb with grief. But in her darkest days, you were there – and your prayers and kindness put Jenny on a path towards healing.

## **Loved and supported**

"We were shown affection by everyone, including all churches worldwide," says Jenny, when she thinks back to the days after her father's death. "We knew there were people who loved us, who shared our sadness."

Your support has helped to train trauma counsellors in Damascus – and Jenny is one of them. The techniques she learned helped her process her own grief. "I knew I was experiencing trauma and post-traumatic stress," says Jenny, "so I tried using methods that would support me."

Now, strengthened by you, this courageous woman is volunteering as a counsellor to help other young victims of the Saint Elias Church bombing. "It's my duty to stand beside them and support them, just as I received support along the way," she says.

Your generous gifts mean trauma healing is available to children and adults. The programme mixes biblical teaching with counselling methods, and the focus is on bringing people back to God. Violence and persecution, like the church attack, often spark doubts in people's faith.

"The fear people faced needs time, but time heals," says Jenny. "God is all goodness. When we go to Him, there is no better place. We need to be in our church. I hope the churches will go back to being full to the brim."

She added, "Prayers are what we need most right now. We need divine help to get through what we are facing."



## **PLEASE PRAY**

- Pray for Jenny as she continues to heal from the grief and pain of the bomb attack.
- Give thanks for the Syrian Christians trained to provide trauma healing.
- Jenny says, "Pray for the children to be strong. It is hard for them to forget what they saw at Saint Elias Church."

A close-up, low-angle shot of a person's profile as they read an open book. The room is dimly lit, with light coming from a window in the background, creating a warm, intimate atmosphere. The book is the central focus, with its pages slightly blurred. The person is wearing a dark garment. The background shows a patterned rug and some household items, suggesting a living space.

# STRENGTHENING WHAT REMAINS IN YEMEN

Zaid lost everything when his faith in Christ was discovered... was his new faith worth it?

**It was a chilly evening when Zaid\* was kicked out of his parents' house.**

He wandered the streets of his city in Yemen, lost, confused. Doubts ran through his mind: "Is this new faith worth it? Is everything I'm going through worth it?"

He'd grown up in a conservative Muslim family and tried his best to please God. His doubts about Islam led him to search for the truth. His journey has not been easy or pain-free. And it all started with a dream.

**'Save me'**

During his search for truth, Zaid began to learn more about Christianity. One night, Zaid decided to call out to this new God that he was reading about: "Before I went

to sleep, I asked Him: 'God, if you exist in Christianity, tell me, and I will come to you. If you exist, tell me: Where are you? Save me.'"

That night, and for several consecutive nights after, Zaid dreamed the same dream.

"I was in a lush, green garden, and I saw a strong light shining. This light was approaching me, and then a voice said, 'I left the 99, and I came for you.' I woke up, startled," Zaid shares, with tears in his eyes. "I opened my phone, and as soon as I scrolled, a photo appeared on my screen: a lush, green garden and a figure of Jesus standing there with sheep surrounding Him. Written on that photo were the same words I heard: 'He left the 99 and came for you.' In that moment, I felt like the world stopped."



Yemeni Christian Zaid has a vision for 40,000 house churches.

Zaid realized he had received the confirmation that he had been searching for!

Zaid's faith in Jesus put him in immediate danger. "[My father] beat me badly," Zaid says. "I had bruises all over my body. It was the first time he had ever laid hands on me. My father is a kind and sweet man, but his

reaction was the opposite."

After he was expelled from his family house, Zaid eventually found a new home in another city, and he entered ministry. Yemen is where God has called Zaid – and, in this tiny Christian community, your gifts and prayers are strengthening a remarkable leader.

Now, through the help of Open Doors local partners, Zaid is starting a local discipleship house where new believers can meet, live together and be disciplined day after day—a place to equip believers to lead house churches across the country.

"My vision is to have 40,000 house churches in Yemen," he says, "One for every 1,000 Yemenis, so they can enjoy fellowship and grow together."

## Future hope

Zaid takes courage from Paul, in the New Testament. "Paul lived in a dangerous place, similar to me," says Zaid. "He was surrounded by Pharisees; I'm surrounded by extremists. But Paul transformed his community from darkness to light."

Your financial support is vital, of course. But above all, Zaid values your prayers.

"Not long ago, we received a voice note on WhatsApp," says Zaid. "We played the recording at our meeting. It was amazing... Like a spiritual recharge for our batteries. We are very encouraged to know you are praying for us."

## "We should go to the dark places... so that everyone gets to see"

Thanks to your steadfast support, Zaid has fearless faith – and, because of you, he remains in Yemen. "God was with the early church, giving them the capability and resources," says Zaid. "And he is with us. We should go to the dark places. We are the light, and we carry the light within us, so that everybody gets to see it."


*\*Name changed for security reasons*

## Please pray

- Give thanks for Zaid's courageous ministry, and pray for God's protection on him.
- Zaid says, "Pray for peace in Yemen... peace from war but also spiritual peace."
- Lift up the secret believers attending Zaid's discipleship house. Pray for faith to grow.



WWL  
03



# SUFFERING WITH CHRIST BEARING HIS CROSS

## ERNESTO'S STORY

*Please be aware that this story contains details of persecution that readers may find particularly distressing.*

Eyes around the world have finally turned to the violence that Nigerian Christians are facing. But Nigeria is not an isolated case: violence is overwhelming communities across sub-Saharan Africa, and there are many stories of persecution that the world needs to hear.

One such story is that of a man called Ernesto\* from Mozambique. For most of Ernesto's life, persecution was a distant worry. It was only when armed militants invaded his community that it took on a terrifying reality in his life, leaving scars, seen and unseen, for years to come.

### **"I DIDN'T KNOW HOW TO ESCAPE"**

Ernesto provided for his family by selling fish. He would travel to the beach near his house, buy fish from the local fishermen and return to sell it. It was a simple, contented life. But everything changed one day when over 100 extremists invaded his home.

"Between five and six in the afternoon, the terrorists arrived and started shooting," Ernesto recalls. "I tried to run, but I kept hearing gunshots. I didn't know how to escape."

A crescendo of shouts and the crackle of fires began to fill Ernesto's ears as he ran. However, he was soon caught.

The militants loaded looted goods onto the backs of their captives. Ernesto couldn't bear the weight and collapsed. Unable to rise, the captors hit Ernesto's back and then ordered him to pray.

### **"I'M A CHRISTIAN"**

"They said that I had to pray in Arabic so that I could carry the luggage. I said 'No, I am not a Muslim. I'm a Christian.'"

His captors were immediately roused. "Do you pray to Jesus? Are you a Christian?" they demanded. Ernesto refused to deny it and the extremists began to laugh. One then pulled out a knife and began to torture him – still he refused to deny his Saviour.

“They said, ‘Since you are insisting on talking about Jesus, we will show you what Jesus passed through.’”

That was when the jihadists brought out long nails and a hammer.

### “CRUCIFY ME LIKE JESUS”

Ernesto remembers each detail. “They looked for a large tree and cut a stake, nailed the stake to that tree so that it could serve as a cross,” he says. “Their idea was to crucify me like Jesus.”

His captors used nails and wires to tie Ernesto to the cross and set part of his body on fire. “I could not even defend myself.”

That seemed like the end for Ernesto. But God had other plans. During the whole ordeal, a couple from the village were hiding nearby. When the jihadists departed, they darted out and extinguished the fire, untied Ernesto and transported him to a nearby town where they reported everything to the police.

Ernesto was taken to hospital, still alive.

### “I HAVE FORGIVEN THEM”

Initially, Ernesto’s injuries rendered him paralysed. He spent 45 days in hospital before returning home to heal. The scars

on his body were unignorable, as were the ones on his mind, but the God of resurrection life began to restore Ernesto. A local partner visited Ernesto and covered his medical bills, supporting him during his seven-month recovery period.

“They helped me, they prayed for me. I’m feeling well because of the intervention of these brothers in Christ”, Ernesto says.

Despite all that he has experienced, he has known the love of God. He looks forward with faith, asking for your prayers: “I ask for prayers for my Northern Zone. Churches are unsafe. Many people are displaced.”

He even looks on his persecutors with love, just as Jesus did. “I ask God to forgive these people,” he says. “I don’t hold any grudges against them. I’ve also forgiven them.”

### PLEASE PRAY:

- Praise God for Ernesto’s unwavering faith
- That he would continue to heal
- That God would protect His church across sub-Saharan Africa in the face of violence.

*\*Name changed for security reasons*



Ernesto’s scars remain with him, but so does his trust in Jesus

### HAVE YOU SIGNED YET?



More than 500,000 people have signed the Arise Africa petition, calling for protection, justice and restoration for the African church – help us reach our target of 1 million! Sign and share the Arise Africa petition at [leavesofhealing.org/petition](https://leavesofhealing.org/petition).

# HEALING IN SYRIA

A small group of five children sits on blue chairs around two small tables. On them are balls of colorful clay and little molds to form animals, hearts and stars.

Sitting with the kids is a woman in her 20s. She talks to one of the children as she advises the rest of the group on how to use the clay.

You could find this scene at any number of nursery schools in the world.

But this isn't a preschool or a kindergarten. The kids work with the clay, their faces serious—there is no laughter, no excited talk. This is not a random group of Syrian children. The woman is a counselor, and these youngsters are here because they've seen things no child should have witnessed.

These children were all at Saint Elias Church in Damascus when a suicide bomber attacked their church. The attack

on June 22, 2015, has left a mark on the hearts and minds of many Syrian Christians ... and has left these little brothers and sisters traumatized.

Today, the group is at the end of one of the counseling sessions supported by Open Doors local partners in Syria. Scars from the explosion are still visible. Young Sarah can no longer see out of one of her eyes, and she lost two of her uncles and an aunt. She continues to see her father struggle to recover from his severe leg injury.

As the kids finish up their clay, the counseling session ends. They will soon return home—not healed, but hopefully assured that Jesus loves them and will walk through their pain with them. The road to wholeness will not be quick or easy, but by God's grace and thanks to the gifts and prayers of Open Doors supporters, these sessions are a start.

***Your gifts and prayers make this work possible—and show Syrian kids that they're not alone. Thank you!***



# MAKE YOUR VOICE COUNT

1m signatures for displaced Christians in Africa

**BREAK THE SILENCE**

**STOP THE VIOLENCE**

Stand with Christians in Sub-Saharan Africa. Call upon the global community to ensure dignity and respect for them.

Please share this petition with others if you have already added your voice.

**GO TO [LEAVESOFHEALING.ORG](http://LEAVESOFHEALING.ORG) TO FIND OUT MORE**



**SUPPORT  
CHRISTIANS  
LIVING  
WHERE FAITH  
COSTS THE  
MOST!**

In Yemen and around the world, Christians risk everything to follow Jesus. The 2026 World Watch List shows the reality of this. Persecution remains one of the biggest issues facing God's people.

The best way to help is by becoming a **Monthly Donor**. Monthly Donors ensure that Open Doors is able to stand with believers in both urgent needs and through long-term, sustainable support.

Visit [www.opendoors.org.hk](http://www.opendoors.org.hk), click "Donate" and select "Monthly Donation" to get started.

## Make your Will for free

You can give your persecuted family hope of a brighter future by including Open Doors as one of the beneficiaries in your Will. It won't cost you anything right away but it will mean a lifetime of support for those who will suffer for following Jesus.

You can make a FREE Will with ForeverGift, if you donate HK\$10,000 to Open Doors Hong Kong. Find out more at [opendoors.org.hk/getinvolved/leavelegacy](http://opendoors.org.hk/getinvolved/leavelegacy) or [forevergift.hk/opendoorshk](http://forevergift.hk/opendoorshk).





# STRENGTHEN WHAT REMAINS

## Revelation 3:2

### Will you support faith that defies fear?

Elias and his family were in church when a suicide bomber attacked. 22 Christians were killed. Their lives were ripped apart.

But they're still here. Faithful. Now they urgently need your support.

Every **HK\$230** could provide vital

trauma care to a Christian who's faced persecution and violence.

"We experienced faith and fear here," says Elias. "But the Lord will not forsake us."

Give now: [donation.opendoors.org.hk](https://donation.opendoors.org.hk)

*Thank you!*

We are a tax-exempt charity (under Section 88 of the Inland Revenue).

### Open Doors Hong Kong Limited

P.O. Box 78516, Mongkok Post Office, Kowloon, Hong Kong  
enquiryhk@od.org • (Tel) +852 3525 0820 • (WA) +852 5608 8729  
[www.opendoors.org.hk](http://www.opendoors.org.hk)



@opendoorshk



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