

JULY

PRAYER GUIDE (IMPACT INDIA)

Christians in India are urgently asking for our prayers as they find themselves caught between two crises: pandemic and persecution. So we have set aside July to pray with them. There is much to pray into, but also many things to be grateful for. Thank you - your prayers make such a difference and mean so much to your persecuted family. All names have been changed for security reasons.

STANDING FOR TRUTH

"Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." (John 8:32)

1

A new report called Destructive Lies is launched, highlighting the plight of Christians in India. Its findings are based on independent research by the London School of Economics and include policy recommendations. Pray that the report will be attended to action on behalf of Christians and other religious minorities in India.

2

Article 25 of the Indian Constitution guarantees freedom of religion, yet Hindu extremist groups often use anti-Christian propaganda to spread the lie that India is a Hindu state where Christians don't belong. Sadly, Christians in India with low levels of education often don't know they have the constitutional right to practise their faith. Open Doors local partners work with believers to highlight their constitutional rights, equipping them to counter false accusations. Pray that God will give believers courage and favour as they stand up for their rights.

3

Believers in India are often accused of following a 'foreign' religion. However, Christian tradition holds that the gospel was introduced in the country in the first century through Thomas, one of Jesus' 12 disciples. Give thanks that God's promise that 'all nations on earth will be blessed' (Genesis 22:18) includes India. Pray that India's rich Christian heritage will be embraced across the country.

4

Some Indian states have anti-conversion laws, designed to prevent involuntary religious conversions. However, in practice, these vaguely worded laws are frequently used to harass Christians taking part in normal activities that are part of their faith, like holding a prayer meeting or attending a church service. Tellingly, the laws do not apply if an Indian 're-converts' to Hinduism. Pray that these laws will be repealed, or that a deterrent will be put in place to prevent false accusations.

5

Hindu extremists promote Hindutva. It's an ideology that disregards Indian Christians and Muslims (and other religious minorities) as true Indians because they have allegiances that lie outside India, and believes the country should be purified of their presence. But Indian Christians don't see themselves as any less Indian because of their faith, and many seek to serve their communities. Ask the Lord to

open the eyes of many Indians to see the valuable role Christians play in Indian society.

6

When Ankita's son fell seriously ill, she visited many doctors, but none could help him. "I decided to bring him to the church for prayers even though we were Hindus," she shares. "He was completely healed!" Ankita and her husband are now Christians. It's one of many stories that exposes the lie of Hindu extremists who claim that, since many new Christians are poor with low levels of education, they must have been paid to convert. Praise God for all those coming to know Jesus through miraculous healings.

7

States that have predominantly tribal populations have laws to protect their culture and traditions. But village leaders sometimes abuse these laws to persecute those who choose to change their faith. Ask God to strengthen believers from tribal backgrounds facing rejection and discrimination for leaving their traditional faith.

8

In 2014, a leader of a large Hindu extremist group said that there will be no Christians left in India by 2021. Despite a rise in persecution in recent years, believers continue to courageously follow Jesus. Ravi was killed because he refused to stop telling others about Jesus. "If needed I will die for Jesus, but I will never leave Him," shares his wife, Sumi. Praise God for the witness of believers like Ravi and Sumi, and ask the Lord to thwart the plans of extremists.

PERSECUTION

"And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or fields for my sake will receive a hundred times as much and will inherit eternal life." (Matthew 19:29)

9

Vinata and her husband have faced constant harassment from their community since becoming Christians. One day, Vinata was at home praying with her pastor and his family when Hindu extremists barged in. They were all seriously injured and were refused treatment at hospital because of pressure from the extremists. Thanks to you, they received treatment at a private hospital and are getting support as they file a case against their attackers. Pray that the perpetrators will be brought to justice, and that Vinata, her pastor and their families will find strength in God's comfort.

10

After refusing to stop sharing the gospel with others, despite threats, Gaurav was falsely accused of using fraudulent means to convert people to Christianity. He and two of his friends were imprisoned for four months. It was a further three years before their innocence was proven, during which time they were ostracised by their community and deemed criminals. Open Doors local partners came alongside them to provide practical and legal aid. Praise God that they have been cleared of charges, and pray that God will use our brothers' persevering faith to help others.

11

When Aditi (16) and her parents became Christians, their community mocked and rejected them, whilst relatives withdrew financial support. Aditi was about to abandon her studies when you stepped in to pay her school fees. Despite ongoing challenges, the family trusts in God. "It's true that we need courage to trust in God. And that courage comes through prayer," Aditi's father shares. Ask the Lord to build up Aditi through her studies, and pray that her relatives will receive Jesus as Lord.

12

Since starting a church a few years ago, which around 200 people now attend, Suraj has been closely watched by Hindu extremists. They are angry that people have left their traditional faith to go to his church. The hostility came to a head when they beat him for three hours, threatening further consequences unless he shuts the church. Pray for the protection of Suraj and his family, and that God will use the witness of the church to draw the extremists to the love of Jesus.

13

Praveen and his wife Shanti became Christians after God healed Shanti when a local pastor prayed for her. But their new faith led to hostility from the wider family, who refused to give Praveen land that he had inherited. The couple set up their own shop, but it didn't make a profit – and then the pandemic hit. Today the shop is running well after you provided goods to fill their shelves. "I am so grateful for the kind help," Shanti shares. Pray that the love shown to Praveen and Shanti will powerfully impact their family and community.

14

In the run up to local elections, Hindu extremists burned down the hut where a church led by Pastor Sameer gathered, accusing the Christians of embracing a 'foreign' religion and persuading people to vote against their Hindu political party. With your help, the church has built a new place to meet. "It greatly encouraged our faith to know that there are others standing with us," Pastor Sameer shares. "Since the church hall is bigger, even more people come to our church." Give thanks to God that He has made the church fruitful in the land of their suffering (Genesis 41:52).

15

Keep praying for Tara (15), who became a Christian after a friend invited her to church where, after receiving prayer, she was healed of an illness. Sadly, Tara was ostracised by her parents who confined her to her small room and treated her as impure, not allowing her to touch anything in the kitchen. Open Doors partners helped Tara get admission to a boarding school. However, due to Covid-19 she is back living with her family. Ask the Lord to use this time to reveal His love to Tara's family.

YOUR SUPPORT

"Defend my cause and redeem me; preserve my life according to your promise." (Psalm 119:154)

16

Covid-19 has exacerbated the persecution of Christians in India, and many believers have faced discrimination in the distribution of aid. But your support has ensured food relief has reached over 126,000 believers in India during the pandemic. "We were so discouraged when they ignored us while distributing relief aid to all in the village," shares Aarti. "I thank the brothers for travelling this far and blessing us with groceries in our hour of need." Pray that Open Doors partners will be able to meet the needs of more believers during the pandemic.

17

When 18-year-old Nikhil gave his life to Jesus, his brothers beat him and he was kicked out of the family home. Coming from a high caste, the family were embarrassed that Nikhil chose Christianity. Thankfully, Nikhil's pastor allowed him to stay at his church, whilst Open Doors local partners came alongside him with the provision of food aid. "My own family disowned me but now you are my family," Nikhil shares. Pray that Nikhil will flourish in his faith and studies.

18

During the same incident in which Vinita was seriously injured (see 9 July), Preetha, the pastor's wife, was also hurt after being attacked with a metal rod. She was left unconscious and her hand was nearly cut off. Like Vinita, Preetha was refused medical treatment at the hospital because of pressure from the extremists who attacked her. Thankfully, your support meant she received care at a private hospital. "Had Open Doors partners not helped us, I would have died," shares Preetha, whose hand has been permanently damaged and still causes her pain. Pray for complete healing.

19

Many Christians in India face social exclusion for being Christians, including Sumitra who was unable to get work in her local community. "We could barely manage to have meals twice a day," she says. But with your prayers and support, Open Doors local partners helped to create a small cottage industry making chips, providing an income for Sumitra and other Christian families denied work because of their faith. "I thank you for bringing happiness in my life," Sumitra shares. Pray that God will use the business to bless not just the Christian families but the whole community.

20

Thousands of believers in India have received digital Bibles, thanks to your generosity. They enable Christians to listen to the Bible as an audio book, which is a huge help to Christians with low levels of literacy. The digital Bibles – which also feature videos and testimonies – are also ideal for believers who need to be discreet when reading the Bible. "I can easily hide it when there is a security issue," shares Akshay. Pray that God will use these Bibles in an instrumental way to build the faith of believers in India.

21

Mahesh is a pastor in his 50s. He and members of his church have faced a string of false accusations by Hindu extremists, even facing arrest after being accused of forcibly converting people. But now they are better equipped to deal with accusations after receiving training from Open Doors local partners – and it wasn't long before the church had to put this into practice. "I was well educated on how to deal with it and thus talked to the authorities boldly, quoting my rights," Mahesh shares. Pray that Open Doors can reach more believers with this training so they will have courage and wisdom to defend their rights.

22

When Rupa decided to follow Jesus, her father was extremely angry and refused to finance her education. But with your help, Rupa has been able to continue her studies. "I fall short of words to thank [Open Doors]," she shares. "I desire to be involved in children and youth ministry after I complete my studies." Ask the Lord to use the studies to equip and encourage Rupa in her ministry ambitions, and pray that her father will become a Christian.

23

Pray for Open Doors local partners taking great personal risks to deliver vital Covid aid and to come alongside believers facing discrimination and attack. Your prayers are pivotal to their work. "We can go and are able to take risks, being in those difficult areas at difficult times to support those people," shares Pastor Samuel, one of the partners. "It's only because you are praying that we are able to do that." Ask the Lord to protect, strengthen and encourage our partners and their families.

COURAGEOUS FAITH

"In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven." (Matthew 5:16)

24

Raju was hosting a prayer meeting when Hindu extremists severely beat him and his wife. When a leader of the group who attacked the couple later died in an accident, and another leader fell sick, Raju saw an opportunity to reach out with love and forgiveness. "God put compassion for them in my heart," he says. "I went to the hospital and prayed for that sick leader. He said nothing but bowed his head in prayer. He didn't become a Christian but I feel God had spoken to his heart." Pray that Raju's actions and words will continue to powerfully speak to the leader's heart.

25

Sanna and her family came to faith after her mother was healed of a terminal illness. It led to severe persecution from their local community. For two years, they were prohibited from visiting other people's homes, otherwise they'd face a fine equivalent to two months' salary. But attitudes have since begun to soften. "The village people noted through the life of this family that Christians are good people," an Open Doors partner explains. "This led them to remove the prior imposed penalty." However, the family still encounters opposition. Pray that acceptance of them will grow.

26

When Kusum's husband and five-year-old son died, her community, including her in-laws, said it was her fault for refusing to renounce her faith in Jesus. It's led to severe persecution. Once, her father-in-law came to her house with

an axe, threatening to kill her. But a remarkable shift has occurred, with members of her family and community coming to know Jesus. Even Kusum's father-in-law, who is not a Christian, lets her pray with him. However, there remain people in Kusum's village who continue to persecute Christians. Pray that they, and Kusum's father-in-law, will be drawn to faith in Jesus.

27

Pastor Raman was in his church when the building was set on fire by a group of young people bribed by Hindu extremists. Burning wood fell on him as he tried to escape. Thankfully, he has recovered from his injuries. Despite this terrifying incident, Pastor Raman is committed to the ministry he feels God has called him to – planting churches in the villages around his town. "I know it can be dangerous. I also know that I might die. But I am not afraid," he says. Ask the Lord to protect Pastor Ramam and multiply his ministry.

28

Pastor Aman and his family became Christians after God healed his mother of a terminal illness. The family has since led many villagers to faith in Jesus, prompting the local authorities to ask them to leave, even threatening them. But opposition has greatly reduced since a local girl became ill and Aman's family were called to pray for her – and she was healed! "From that one incident the whole village witnessed the power in the name of Jesus," Aman says. Pray that God will continue to use this family to bless their local community.

29

Madan was a teenager when he got involved in a gang, taking money to beat, even kill, people. He also persecuted Christians. Whilst in jail, someone gave Madan a Bible and told him about Jesus. After leaving prison he began attending church. He is now the pastor of a church in an area strongly opposed to Christians. Despite receiving threats and beatings, Madan is unafraid. "There are always more miracles and healings when there is more persecution." Praise God that no one is beyond His reach, and pray for more stories of those who persecute Christians giving their lives to Jesus.

30

It was an anxious time for Usha. She'd just given birth to a boy who had a birth defect in his feet, and she was struggling financially. After meeting a pastor, Usha went to church and her son was healed! Usha invited others to church. Many gave their lives to Jesus, including her whole family. Usha's courageous faith is making an enormous difference to her community – and this despite persecution (she is underpaid for work she does and has been overlooked in the distribution of Covid-19 aid). Pray that all new believers will share Usha's courage and faith.

31

Thank you for walking with your Indian brothers and sisters in prayer this month. Knowing that believers around the world are praying for them is a huge encouragement to our persecuted family. Sagar is a pastor from India who has faced much persecution. "I was greatly encouraged when I learnt that when we go through persecution, not only does the local church pray for us, but also believers all over the world are praying for us," he says. "This knowledge gives me immense strength and joy."