

THE VOICE OF THE MARTYRS

November 2020



NEPAL WHEN FAMILY IS THE ENEMY



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“Remember them that are in bonds, as bound with them.” Heb 13:3



Living with the *Enemy*

Surita had worshiped Hindu idols, requested prayer from a Buddhist priest and even visited witch doctors, but nothing had relieved her illness or her 4-year-old son's mysterious stomach issues. Finally, after a Christian man shared the Gospel and prayed for them, both of them began to improve.

Convinced that Jesus had healed them, Surita and her son started attending a Christian church in their town south of Kathmandu, Nepal. And two months later, she abandoned her vague blend of Hinduism and Buddhism, placed her trust in Jesus Christ and got baptized. "I realized that healing is not an important thing," she said. "The first thing I need is to be forgiven for my sins."

Surita's Buddhist husband, Kamal,

did not object to his wife and son attending the church since they had found healing there. But he didn't go to church with them at first because he was often busy at work, driving a cement truck. After witnessing their complete healing, however, he decided to join them for worship ... at least briefly.

Kamal's father, Bikash, was a tall Buddhist man with a long history of harassing Christians in an attempt to stop the spread of Christianity in the area. And when he heard that Kamal and his family were attending church, he threatened them. Surita and Kamal lived with Kamal's parents, so Bikash's threats carried weight.

Kamal immediately stopped going to church with his wife and son, and Surita, who continued attending,

quickly became a target of her in-laws. First, her mother-in-law verbally attacked her, even though she had once claimed faith in Jesus herself. She had left the church after failing to be healed through prayer, so she told Surita that there is no truth in the church and that she should return to Buddhism.

Months of verbal attacks eventually progressed to physical attacks as well. One day, Bikash stormed into Surita's room in a drunken rage and began tossing her belongings around until he found her Bible. He then grabbed a handful of Surita's hair and started hitting her on the back of the head with the Bible. He hit her so hard for 10 minutes that the Bible fell apart.

"At the time, I was remembering the pain of Christ on the cross," Surita

"If we are content with our Believers in the church and we just worship, persecution never comes. When we evangelize ... and one church is planted and grows, then persecution is a part of that."

said. "I thought if Christ suffered for me and gave His life for me, then this is a privilege for me to suffer for Him. Even if I die here, it doesn't matter because eternal life is secured for me. I felt privileged to suffer for Christ."

After Bikash left the room, Surita calmed herself and began to pray for her father-in-law. But when he returned to her room, he told her that she would have to move out of the house. Surita persuaded him to wait a few days until Kamal returned home, promising herself that if Kamal sided with his father she would leave her husband and move in with her parents.

"I am ready to leave my husband, but not Christ," Surita told Bikash.

Surita's pastor, Shalva, had suffered his own share of harassment from Surita's father-in-law over the years. And when he heard that Bikash had beaten Surita, he invited her to the church, where he prayed for her and encouraged her with passages of Scripture. He also gave Surita a new Bible to replace the tattered copy she was still holding and explained

that we can expect to be persecuted just as Jesus and His disciples were persecuted.

By the end of their conversation, the pastor saw a change in Surita. "She wants to encourage the people who are in the same situation," he said. "She wants to encourage others through her testimony."

Kamal returned home four days after the beating at about midnight. When his parents told him that he and Surita had to leave because she had embraced Christianity, Kamal told them unapologetically that his wife could follow Christ if she wanted. He told them that he and his family would leave the next morning.

Kamal's bold rebuke of his parents is rare among Buddhists in Nepal, and he did so knowing that it could cost him his inheritance. As expected, his share of the inheritance was soon promised to his younger brother.

"I really thank God for my husband," Surita said. "Even though he was not a Believer, he still decided to stand with me."

An Ever-Present Problem

Pastor Shalva helped the couple find an apartment in a nearby city, further angering Bikash, who had quarrelled with the pastor ever since he first planted a church in the village two decades ago and led a Buddhist family to Christ. A month after Pastor Shalva planted his first church, he had to file a restraining order against Bikash because of the continual harassment of church members and himself. But despite years of tension between the church and Buddhists like Bikash, the church is still growing.

"If we are content with our Believers in the church and we just worship, persecution never comes," Pastor Shalva said. "When we evangelize, make disciples and one church is planted and grows, then persecution is a part of that."

The pastor hears reports of persecution at least once a week. And he and church elders faithfully visit the persecuted, consult each other about each case and pray about next steps. "For the case we cannot solve, like Surita's case, I share with my prayer circle friends and we press together and decide how we can rescue or help them," Pastor Shalva said.

One day in December 2019, Bikash called a village meeting to address the growing number of people who were leaving Buddhism to become Christians. The meeting drew a crowd of about 100 people, including all the village authorities, Pastor Shalva and other church leaders. During the course of the meeting, Bikash brazenly called for the imprisonment of the pastor and other church leaders.

"Bikash was trying to make the case against me using the anti-conversion law," Pastor Shalva said.

Nepal's government enacted a law in 2017 criminalizing conversion to another religion. And in 2018, the prime minister and other government



Surita was verbally and physically abused by her father-in-law for attending a small church after she began following Jesus.

officials publicly said that anyone who changed his or her religion would be expelled from the country.

When a village leader at the meeting acknowledged that Surita had not been coerced to become a Christian but had made the decision on her own, Bikash was incensed. He stormed over to Pastor Shalva, grabbed him by the hand and dragged him away to scold and threaten him.

"His threats toward me have become normal for me," Pastor Shalva said, smiling. "For the last 20 years he has been threatening me, so I don't

worry about that."

After staying in their new apartment for six months, Kamal and Surita reluctantly returned to their in-laws' village. Kamal decided it would be best for them to build a small structure on land he owned near his parents.

Although Surita didn't want to go anywhere near Bikash, she respected Kamal's decision to move back to the village. Still, it hasn't been easy, especially when Kamal is away.

The land where the couple built their temporary home of boards and tin is near the proposed site of

a new international airport. Surita is confident that the government will offer them new land, where she hopes they can build a better home farther away from her in-laws.

Until then, Surita and Kamal's neighbours, most of whom are Buddhist, stand ready to help if Bikash attempts to harass them. The neighbours know to come running if they hear banging on the tin siding of the house.

Surita said she does fear another attack. In two instances, Bikash tried to hit her while he was intoxicated. "My father-in-law is more vicious now," she said, "and just in the last few months he got drunk and went to the person who preached the Gospel to me and grabbed his neck. He said, 'You are the one who preached to my daughter-in-law and made her a Christian. I will kill you here.'"

A History of Trouble

When Pastor Shalva started his church, Bikash wasn't the only threat he faced. Maoist insurgents, who were then embroiled in a civil war with government forces, strongly opposed the effect Christianity was having on some young Nepalis. For many, the only choices had been leaving the country or taking up arms to fight with the Maoists. But the pastor provided a third option: "I was encouraging young people to come to church and carry a Bible, not a gun," the pastor said.

"Youths were in the church," he explained. "That was the problem for the Maoists, because when all the young people are going in the church then they wouldn't get involved in the war. The Maoist leader came and told me, 'Stop running church here.'"

The Maoist insurgency, which left more than 17,000 dead and displaced hundreds of thousands of people, led to dissolution of the monarchy and establishment of a new constitution. Today, the Nepal Communist Party holds an almost two-thirds majority in Parliament, dominating parliamentary seats in six of Nepal's seven provinces.

"The time during the civil war was a peak time for the Maoists," Pastor



Top left: Surita and her husband were forced to move to the city for a while to get away from her abusive father-in-law. **Top right:** Their pastor has been harassed by him for 20 years, but the threats do not bother him anymore. **Bottom:** In Nepal's rural villages, communities put enormous pressure on Christians who don't adhere to societal norms.



Surita and her son experienced healing after Christians prayed for them. She has asked us to pray with her that her father-in-law will come to know Jesus as she does.

Shalva said. "I was attacked many times, and then they tried many times to stop Christianity from growing there. They couldn't, and now there are 70 families at my church."

In 2009, as Pastor Shalva planted a second church in another village, Maoist leaders met with Buddhist priests to discuss the pastor's evangelistic work and the resulting growth of Christianity in the area. "They had a meeting to kill me on my way to visit the new church as I crossed through the forest," Shalva said.

A woman who attended Pastor Shalva's church overheard her son, a Maoist insurgent, discussing the plan to kill the pastor during a Maoist meeting in her house. She then told the pastor about the plot and also told him that Bikash was among those present at the meeting.

After praying about it, Pastor Shalva decided to continue his visits to the new church. Although he had reservations, he believed God would protect him since he was doing His work. "Of course, the Lord is our security," he said, "but I didn't feel that secure going to church because I had to go through the forest."

Pastor Shalva has continued his work, but he has experienced increasing pressure from some in the communities where new churches have been planted. He said many villagers watch his every move, waiting for something they can use against him as evidence of a forced conversion.

While he hasn't experienced severe persecution recently, Pastor Shalva said Bikash still encourages young Buddhists to throw rocks at the church. "A few tiles are broken," the pastor said with a smile.

Praying for Change

Pastor Shalva recently visited Bikash, who is struggling with a skin allergy that may be related to alcoholism. "He was itching everywhere and had lots of wounds," the pastor said. "I told him, 'Kneel down before Christ Jesus and ask for forgiveness and this will be healed.'"

But Bikash refused, saying only, "I don't listen to you."

Surita asks for prayer for her father-in-law; she wants him to know Jesus as she does. Recently, she urged him to stop drinking, shared the Gospel with him and invited him to church. She said she hopes he will accept her invitation at some point.

"One day, I want to see him kneeling down before Christ and praying," Surita said. "If he kneels down and asks forgiveness, he will be forgiven ... and get eternal life. That is my honest prayer for him."



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FOR PERSECUTED CHRISTIANS

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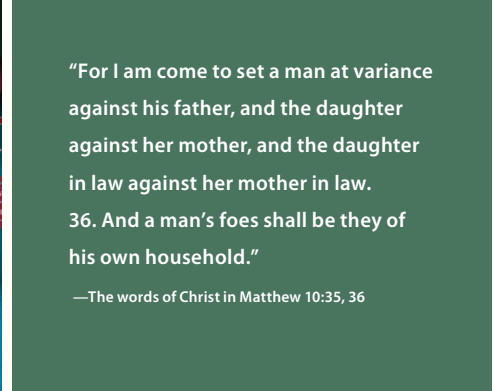
SUNDAY, 01 NOVEMBER 2020
AND THROUGHOUT NOVEMBER

Join a global prayer meeting for our
persecuted Brothers And Sisters In Christ (BASIC).



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Prayer Diary

S	22	INDIA
M	23	NORTH KOREA
T	24	INDONESIA
W	25	ISRAEL
T	26	JORDAN
F	27	QATAR
S	28	TUNISIA
S	29	BHUTAN
M	30	YEMEN

Pray that those who receive Christ will remain faithful despite opposition.

[illegible]

T 1	COLOMBIA
W 2	MALDIVES
T 3	JORDAN
F 4	LEBANON
S 5	ALGERIA
S 6	SUDAN
M 7	TURKMENISTAN
T 8	KYRGYZSTAN
W 9	SOMALIA
T 10	COLOMBIA
F 11	OMAN
S 12	MYANMAR
S 13	TUNISIA
M 14	ALGERIA
T 15	BAHRAIN
W 16	BANGLADESH
T 17	TAJIKISTAN
F 18	MALDIVES
S 19	SOMALIA

Pray that the Lord will soften the hearts of government leaders toward Christians.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 26 27 28 29 30 31 32 33 34 35 36 37 38 39 40 41 42 43 44 45 46 47 48 49 50 51 52 53 54 55 56 57 58 59 60 61 62 63 64 65 66 67 68 69 70 71 72 73 74 75 76 77 78 79 80 81 82 83 84 85 86 87 88 89 90 91 92 93 94 95 96 97 98 99 100

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