

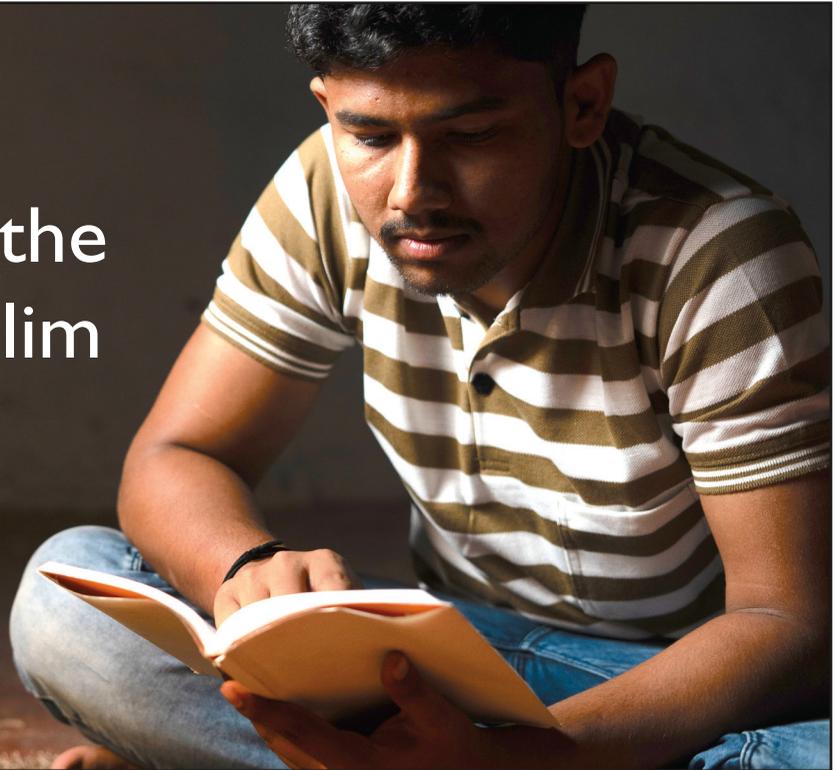
# INTERCEDE

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## Understanding the Process of Muslim Conversion

By Pastor \*Michael



*\*Pastor Michael is the pseudonym for the senior pastor of a large and dynamic congregation in a Muslim-majority nation in South Asia. Pastor Michael is himself a Christian from a Muslim background. His church has 12 branches and has sent out 40 local missionaries to plant churches throughout the nation. Pastor Michael also serves as the national superintendent of his denomination. In this capacity, he has seen one church planted every three weeks. This abridged article is excerpted from his book: *Ministry and Planting Churches in a Restricted Context*.*

In the traditional way of evangelism, it is often perceived that we preach a gospel message, give an altar call, and ask people to express their desire to follow Jesus by an uplifted hand. We then ask them to repeat the sinner's prayer. If they have prayed after us, we presume that they have become Christians. This traditional approach does not work with Muslims. Almost inevitably, there is a level-by-level process that a seeking Muslim must go through before becoming a strong follower and disciple of Jesus, the Messiah.

In some cases, sincere Muslims may come to the altar many times or "commit their lives to Jesus" over and over

again. At this point, the church may conclude that the new believers are losing their salvation each week and need to recommit their lives to the Lord! In reality, the new seekers often find it hard to accept that their sins are forgiven and that they have truly been born again. Deep within their hearts a struggle is going on as they attempt to attach to their new faith and detach from practices they have followed all their lives.

Those who disciple these new believers need to understand that there is much uncertainty and ambiguity in Islam about salvation. When Muslims hear a clear gospel message that *salvation is by faith alone*, it takes a time for this to register in their mind and heart. That is why they often respond each time the call for salvation is given.

### **Analyzing the Process of Muslim Conversion Sympathizer→Seeker→Believer→Confused→Disciple**

Moving from being a Sympathizer to becoming a Disciple is a process. Recognizing that this is a journey will help you evaluate the progress of the person with whom you have been working. Keep in mind that some seekers take longer than others in their response at the different levels. In my

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# Until All Have Heard

How then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? – Romans 10:14

Mark Brink

International Director  
Global Initiative:  
Reaching Muslim Peoples



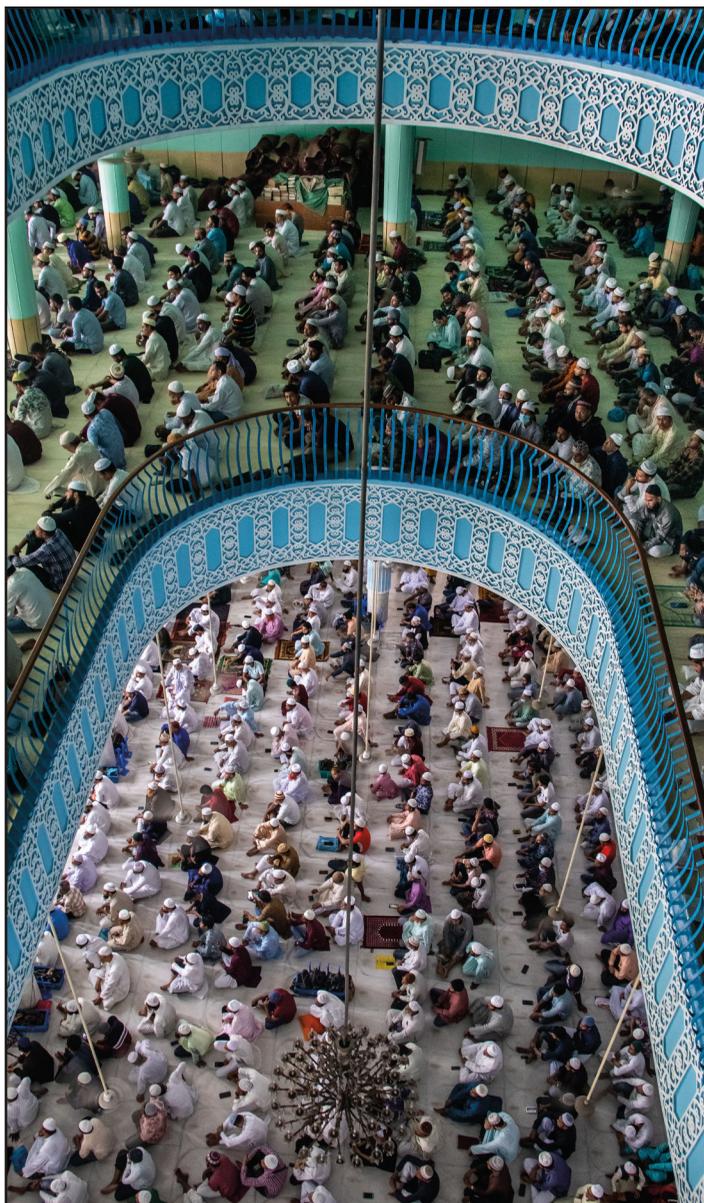
Animism is engrained in the practices and life of Muslims. The belief that the world around them, seen and unseen, is inhabited by spirit beings leads them to seek ways to control their destiny. These folk Islamic practices are a mixture of Islamic beliefs and animistic practices. Muslims are seeking protection from these spirit beings, *jinn*, by whatever means possible. Allah, who is unknowable and

unapproachable, does not provide an answer to their most crucial and pressing life problems.

When a Muslim confesses Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord, his whole pattern of thinking and reality must be transformed by the Word and Spirit. During these early years of faith, the new believer from a Muslim background will struggle to gain a biblical worldview. Moving from being a believer to a disciple of Jesus Christ is a gradual process. **The new believer needs the Holy Spirit to clarify his or her new identity in Jesus Christ**, which must be worked out in everyday life experiences.

This issue of the *Intercede* was taken from the writings of a former Muslim who shares the process he navigated to become a disciple of Jesus Christ. During this process, the support and care of the church and individual believers is crucial. The new believer will transition from a works-based religion to a grace-based relationship with Jesus Christ. Nabeel Qureshi, in his book *Seeking Allah, Finding Jesus*, put it this way: “I was seeing the world in a new light. I had been wearing Muslim colored glasses my entire life, and they had been taken off. EVERYTHING looked different and I needed to examine this new world more carefully” (p. 282). Nabeel goes on to share how he faced theological struggles, broken relationships with family, and an identity crisis. The new believer from a Muslim background will struggle with theological questions about the nature of God, the Trinity, the deity of Jesus, and other significant theological issues. They will also have to deal with family issues, because leaving Islam will be viewed as betrayal—resulting in isolation and/or different levels of persecution. Additionally, the new believer will struggle with identity issues as their new identity in Christ will take precedence over their former cultural Islamic identity.

New believers coming out of Islam need the Church to become their new family! As these new converts pass through the “confused believer” stage, we must care for them as a parent would care for his or her own child. Please allow this edition of the *Intercede* to lead you to action and intercession for these new believers so that they truly become disciples of Jesus Christ.





# Muslim World News

## **Pakistan: Death Sentence for Blasphemy**

More than five years after his arrest, a Christian mechanic booked on charges of blasphemy was sentenced to death by a Lahore court in July 2022. Ashfaq Masih has been in jail since 2017. The accused, who has a wife and a daughter, also lost his mother in 2019 while he was behind the bars.

According to reports, in June 2017, Masih got into a dispute with a Muslim customer in Lahore after he repaired the latter's bike. When Masih asked for payment, the customer did not pay the entire amount and asked for a waiver on grounds that he was a religious devotee. Masih refused the request, saying he believed in Christ. The issue of money led to a heated argument and a crowd gathered, accusing Masih of "disrespecting" Muhammad. The mechanic had allegedly said that for Christians, Jesus was supreme. This was enough for his arrest.—*The Print*

## **Afghanistan: Allegiance to Taliban**

Thousands of Afghan clerics vowed to remain loyal to the Taliban following the conclusion of a July 2022 meeting with top leaders from the hardline Islamist group in Kabul.

The gathering was called to solidify the Taliban's rule and featured a rare appearance by the Taliban's reclusive supreme leader, Hibatullah Akhundzada.

Taliban officials present at the ceremony called for allegiance to Akhundzada, loyalty to the group, and the complete acceptance of sharia law as the basic principle of rule.

"By the grace of God, the Islamic system has come to rule in Afghanistan," the declaration read.

"We not only strongly support it, but will also defend it.

We consider this to be the national and religious duty of the entire nation."—*WION News*

## **Iran: President's Daughter Indicted for Blasphemy**

Fa'ezeh Hashemi Rafsanjani, an Iranian politician and ex-lawmaker, has been indicted in a legal case brought against her over her comments deemed insulting to Muhammad, as well as accusations of propaganda activities against the country's Islamic establishment.

Ali Salehi, prosecutor of Tehran's Public and Revolution Court, said an indictment had been issued against the politician, who is the daughter of former Iranian President Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani. Hashemi angered many in Iran by making comments about Muhammad, who she claimed had "wasted" the rich assets of his wife, Khadijah.

Faced with the public backlash, Hashemi later offered an apology and said she did not intend to insult Muhammad, describing herself as a "faithful Muslim."—*Iran Front Page*

## **Burkina Faso: Jihadists Murder 22**

A jihadist attack in northwest Burkina Faso left 22 people dead and many others injured, according to a report published by Burkina Faso's government. The attack took place in the village of Bouraso in Burkina Faso's Boucle de Mouhoun region.

Conflict has plagued Burkina Faso in 2022, with 530 violent attacks occurring between February and May. Twelve attacks by jihadi militants occurred in June with approximately 135 people killed, according to a report from the Associated Press.—*International Christian Concern*

# Understanding the Process

*continued from*



ministry among Muslims, I have noticed that, in some cases, they quickly respond and move from one level to the other, while other individuals take a lot of time to make the transitions. In my life, the process took two years. The time frame for reaching the fifth level may vary somewhere between six months to two years. Over a long period of time, I have observed that those who make rapid progress in the process are often those who backslide the quickest. Each new seeker must be taken from step to step until he or she is finally able to take a mature stand for Jesus as Savior and Lord. This occurs when the Word of God becomes credible, relevant, and active in their lives.

## **The Sympathizer Level**

These people have some attraction to Christ and Christianity. They are the most responsive group. Perhaps they have somehow heard the Word. Their hearts are soft. In our church planting strategy, we are doing much pre-evangelism work in order to discover the Sympathizer. In preparing His disciples for Kingdom work, Jesus said:

And whatever town or village you enter, find out who is worthy in it and stay there until you depart. As you enter the house, greet it. And if the house is worthy, let your peace come upon it, but if it is not worthy, let your peace return to you. And if anyone will not receive you or listen to your words, shake

off the dust from your feet when you leave that house or town. (Matt. 10:11-14)

Jesus instructed them to find the man of peace and stay with him. As a principle, we find this is a good place to start. Offer the powerful message of eternal life and demonstrate the miraculous in that place. Those who hear and sympathize will hopefully move forward in faith and eventually reap eternal life. So often we see little response because we invest little. Let us find, stay, invest, and reap.

## **The Seeker Level**

The seed is sown when the Sympathizer is presented with the Gospel. In this stage, the person is open but not fully committed to the gospel. As sincere Seekers, they have many questions in their minds. They may start coming to the church or Christian gatherings. They may read the Bible or even participate in discussions, but they are not yet believers. One must not mistakenly assume that their eagerness means they have become believers in Jesus. Eventually, they must be challenged to accept Jesus as their Savior and Lord.

## **The Believer Level**

If Seekers can be met at the point of their felt need and presented with an understandable gospel message, they will respond and many will become true believers. Again, the message must be presented clearly. The Muslim hearer must know the possible consequences of this decision. They must be encouraged to count the cost of becoming a believer. Upon the basis of their informed decision to follow Jesus as Lord and Savior, this is where their new spiritual life truly begins. They are born again.

## **The Confused Believer Level**

This is the most critical and delicate part in the process of conversion. In this stage, expect some to be Confused Believers. At this level, new believers may continue to follow a few of their old beliefs as well as the new. Some new believers might think it is acceptable to go to the mosque, pray five times a day, fast, and keep other Muslim religious practices. At this stage, they might be praying to Jesus as well as chanting prayers to their prophet. Or, sometimes, they will simply insert Jesus into their Islamic prayers. They may go to church in the morning and attend mosque and prayers in the afternoon. Confused Believers experience difficulty detaching from their past. They are all mixed up. During this critical time, they must decide whether to go forward in Christ and leave the past behind or to return to their former faith.

# Process of Muslim Conversion

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Tragically, this is the level when those who disciple new believers from a Muslim background may become frustrated and fatigued; they may be tempted to actually abandon them. Some people in the church may look at the new converts with suspicion and come to the conclusion that these “Muslims” have not really become followers of Christ. Remember this is a delicate stage. The Confused Believers are trying to come to terms with their new-found faith. If the church expresses doubts about their salvation, they become lonely and discouraged.

The church must handle individuals at the Confused Believer level with grace and loving actions. Individuals who are discipling the new believers must be prayerful and patient. Remember: Confused Believers are carefully watching the mature Christian believers. So, this is the time for mature Christian believers to exhibit scriptural values and to be patient with the Confused Believers until Christ is formed in them (Gal. 4:19). Please do not abandon them; see them through this stage of their spiritual journey. Stay with them, surrounding them with the love of the Lord Jesus Christ and ministering the Word of God to them. Engage in spiritual warfare on their behalf and do not give up until they embrace the truth regarding the person of the Lord Jesus Christ.

## **The Disciple Level**

If Confused Believers are followed-up with loving action and faith-building teaching, they will become strong disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ. The key is to “see them through” this delicate stage. Discipleship is a life-long process and, in the life of the new believer from a Muslim background, coming out of the Confused Believer stage is the beginning of the road to successful discipleship.

It is important to note that at each of the five levels, new believers must be encouraged to move on to the next level. Otherwise, they will likely slide back. As previously stated, at the Confused Believer level, many leaders are tempted to give up and abandon the process altogether, but this is a very crucial and critical stage. If you do not properly follow up, you risk losing them for good. The Confused Believer may become completely disillusioned with Christianity. Remember that it took a lot of courage for these friends to come to faith in Christ and to step into a church or a small Christian fellowship. They have now come a long way on their journey. Disappointment and separation likely means they will never step into a church again and, often, they will become hostile toward Christians and the church.

Remember that relationship is everything in the eastern context, particularly among Muslims. Develop life-long relationships with them that last beyond the perimeters of discipleship. Spiritual fathers are not easily forgotten. Be a spiritual father and mentor to new believers who are looking for guidance in their lives. In Islam, there is no mediator between God and man; therefore, Muslims look for spiritual and holy men to lead them to God. Embrace the opportunity to be the person that can lead a seeking Muslim to God through the Lord Jesus Christ.

Remember that we are striving for a full “spiritual breakthrough.” This will not come without a solid foundation in the Word of God. John 8:32 says, “And you will know the truth and the truth will set you free.” The prerequisite to this statement is, “If you continue in my Word...” (John 8:31). The Word of God must have preeminence when we teach new believers.

Great care and caution should be taken when following up with the new Christians from a Muslim background. Many Christian terms and concepts are simply unknown to them. For example, Islam teaches that salvation is earned by gaining enough merits through the practice of the five pillars—in order to outweigh the penalty of sin. Simply stated, Islam focuses on performing certain rituals and tenets in order to obtain salvation. We must teach them that the changes are from within. The discipler must allow the Holy Spirit to work in the lives of new Christians from a Muslim background by teaching them the Word of God. Therefore, the discipleship process should address specific areas of studies.

## **Key Topics for the Discipling Process**

While the following list is not exhaustive, it does contain what I feel are key topics that ought to be covered in discipling new converts.

### **The Divinity of Jesus Christ**

All Muslims believe that Jesus was a prophet, but strongly oppose the idea of Jesus as God. They must be taught who Jesus really is. The “Seven ‘I AMs’ of Jesus” in the Gospel of John are a faith-building study for Muslim background believers. The birth, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus must be clearly taught. Even though there are some similarities in these facts between Islam and Christianity, the opposing positions far outweigh the similarities. For example, the death and resurrection of Jesus is not accepted in Islam. On the other hand, Muslims are deeply moved upon reading of

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# Understanding Muslim Conversion

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the miracles of Jesus, and these mighty miracles can prove that Jesus was divine and not just another prophet.

## **The Father Heart of God**

God as creator is accepted in Islam, but God as Father is blasphemy. Muslims point out that nowhere in the Quran is God addressed as Father. Even in the 99 names of Allah, not one describes God as Father. In my ministry among Muslims, I have discovered that Christians from a Muslim background find it extremely hard to accept God as Father. This is due, of course, to their upbringing in Islam. We can patiently show them that it is in a spiritual sense that we refer to God as our Father. I have found that a real breakthrough comes when new believers from a Muslim background are able to acknowledge God as Father. And interestingly, those who do not accept that Jesus is God's Son also find it hard to believe in God as their Father.

## **The Holy Spirit**

Teaching on the gifts and fruits of the Holy Spirit is very helpful, especially with Sufi Muslims who believe in signs and miracles. It is also important to teach on the Holy Spirit from the aspect that He is our helpful friend.

## **Prayer**

As mentioned earlier, we must teach the newly converted Muslim to pray on his own. We also must teach them to pray for others. The element of intercessory prayer should be encouraged. The dynamic of praying for others through intercession is a missing element of prayer in Islam.

## **The Word of God**

Encourage them to meditate on, memorize, and apply passages from the Word of God. Teach them that one of the titles of Jesus is "the Word of God." In the Quran, one of the names of Jesus is "Word of God." Muslims, however, argue that this is spoken as "a Word of God" and not as "the Word of God." Teach the new believers about the authority of the Word of God. Also, encourage them to ask questions. The idea of questioning the Quran is highly objectionable in Islam, but for Jesus followers, we actually encourage them to ask questions about the true Word of God.

## **Tithing**

New believers must be taught about the blessing of giving. We must teach them the scriptural principle of "giving for the Lord." Seed sowing must be encouraged. I am a firm believer that a financial problem is a spiritual problem. Satan knows that when we give, we are blessed; therefore, he keeps us from giving. Satan wants people to be bound in the

mindset of poverty and to always be on the receiving end. We must release our finances to God. As new believers release their finances to God and learn to tithe and give to help one another, a spiritual breakthrough takes place.

## **The Great Commission**

From the very onset of their spiritual journey, we should encourage new believers to be involved in witnessing. This may not always be with words, but even by kind actions we can let others see the changes that have taken place in our lives. Sometimes it may be as simple as passing out gospel literature. Encourage new believers to share their testimony. It will help the hearer, but it will also encourage growth in the life of the new believer.

## **Holy Communion**

Due to the teaching in Islam about the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ, sometimes in a gathering of new believers from a Muslim background and potential seekers, we might tend to accommodate their "feelings" and, thus, hesitate to talk about or serve Holy Communion. The opposite should be practiced. Right away, we must teach this truth to new believers, as this is the command of Jesus. Celebrating the Lord's Table with new believers from a Muslim background can be a very spiritually uplifting time. It is a sacred and appropriate time to remember the sacrifice of Jesus.

It is noteworthy that sacrifice in Arabic is *qurbani*, which comes from *qurb*, meaning "to bring near." This is a good time to ask if any animal sacrifice can bring us closer to God. Of course, we know that only Jesus, through His death as the perfect sacrifice, can bring us close to God.

## **The Sermon on the Mount**

The teachings of Matthew 5-7 show the fulfillment of laws through Jesus Christ. Muslims understand "laws" and "rituals" but lack the matter of fulfillment. Many practical day-to-day teachings are covered in these passages and are, therefore, valuable for sharing with new believers from a Muslim background.

In closing, I kindly remind you to maintain a positive attitude as you disciple new converts from a Muslim background. A negative attitude toward God, people, and creation tends to make our message negative. Lead them to the positive aspects of the person of Christ: His forgiveness, His acceptance of sinners, and His unconditional love. Teach the Scripture with certainty. On every issue, give them the biblical perspective and, in all aspects, encourage obedience to the Word of God.



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[Facebook.com/JumaaPrayer](https://www.facebook.com/JumaaPrayer)*

## **Friday, September 2, 2022. Please pray for**

...*12 ultra-conservative Muslim women in northern Turkey* who have recently turned to Christ and been baptized (5 Turks, 6 Afghans, and 1 Syrian). Pray all will be protected from radical Islamists and be free to share the gospel.

...*in-country Chinese Christians* who have taken online “Introduction to Islam” classes with the goal of reaching compatriot Chinese Muslims for Christ.

...*a ministry in the Middle East producing specialized Bibles* for converts from a Muslim background.

## **Friday, September 9, 2022. Please pray for**

...*Selima, an Afghan Christian from a Muslim background*, who says: “After 20 years of children being able to study and women able to work, it is difficult to see the veil of darkness return.” Of Afghanistan’s 39 million pop., 99% are Muslim.

...*Muslims who, in increasing numbers*, are hearing the gospel in Arabic through the “5fish” phone app.

...*the Muslim mayor of a major city in Uzbekistan*. This past Ramadan, a Christian businessman attended an *iftar* (fasting) meal at the mayor’s home. The businessman shared Christ with the mayor and gifted him an Uzbek Bible.

## **Friday, September 16, 2022. Please pray for**

...*Edison, a former factory worker in India, whom God called to ministry*: “I have chosen you to plant churches in Islam-dominated communities.” After years of sacrifice, many believers from Muslim backgrounds are coming to Jesus.

...*pastors and churches in Pakistan*. In spite of the risk of persecution, many pastors and churches are taking bolder steps to reach the Muslims of their country. Of Pakistan’s population of 224 million, 97.6% are Muslim.

...*an African pastor*, who writes, “Pray for us. We are having great success in converting Muslims and baptizing them in the name of our Lord Jesus. Our persecutors use guns in their forceful conversions but we employ the sword of the Spirit.”

## **Friday, September 23, 2022. Please pray for**

...*the country of Algeria*. In the last five years, Muslim authorities have forcefully closed 16 church buildings, based on a 2006 ordinance that regulates any non-Muslim worship. Of Algeria’s population of 45 million, 96.5% are Muslim.

...*ministry teams working in mostly Muslim refugee camps in France*. A worker reports, “We are seeing much fruit, but some converts are persecuted by fellow refugees.”

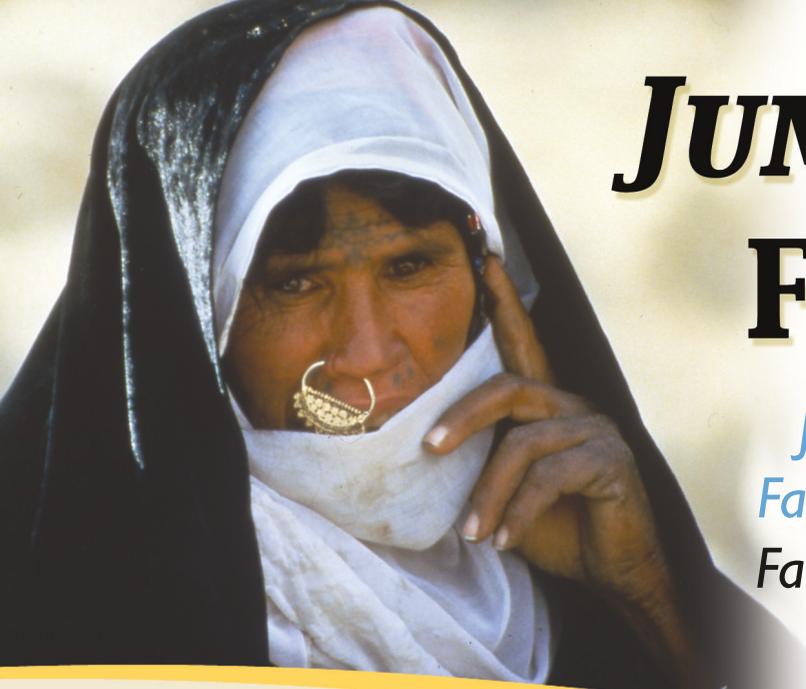
...*a church in Haj Abdullah, Sudan*, which closed when Muslim leaders charged it with “giving food to children to convert them.” The church is now open and the pastor says, “Pray that our doors will remain open for the advance of the Gospel.”

## **Friday, September 30, 2022. Please pray for**

...*comfort for the grieving family of Sylvia Kombi*, a Christian woman of great influence in the Democratic Republic of Congo. Returning from a ministry assignment, she was brutally murdered by extremist Muslims in eastern DRC.

...*an increase of intercessory prayer and fasting efforts in areas of the Middle East* where “acts of Islamic witchcraft” are being used to break the power and influence of house churches.

...*Suhaila, a new follower of Jesus in Iran*. Fearing family retaliation, she is staying with friends.



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**Friday, October 7, 2022. Please pray for**

...*the Kucak outreach ministry in Turkey*. Its books, magazines, and calendars are widely distributed among the children and teens of Turkey. Of Turkey's population of 85 million, 96% are Muslim.

...*"safe houses" in Iran that provide a haven for women* who escape from the rages of abusive husbands and fathers.

...*believers in the Odisha State of India* who have a strong vision to reach the 1.4 million Muslims in their State. They have started a Jumaa Prayer Fellowship to regularly intercede for the Muslims of their area.

**Friday, October 14, 2022. Please pray for**

...*Christians in Borno State, Nigeria*. Islamists killed 4 Christians and abducted 22 girls in January. A survivor said, "The attacks will never stop us from worshipping the Lord, because the Christ in us is not the church buildings they destroy."

...*the safety of ministry teams in Baghdad* feeding Iraq's internally displaced people and who assist at a medical clinic treating people of all faiths.

...*"many" Muslim Omanis who attend home cell groups and express the desire to follow Jesus*, but lack the courage to take the step. Oman occupies the southeastern corner of the Arabian Peninsula. Of its 5 million people, 91% are Muslim.

**Friday, October 21, 2022. Please pray for**

...*an Afghan, identifying himself as "a Taliban fighter,"* who recently contacted Pamir Ministries, and asked: "Can you send me a Bible in Pashto?" A link was sent to him to download the Pashto Bible.

...*workers to reach the Syrian Kurds in Lebanon*, who are nearly all Muslim and make up ten to fifteen percent of the population. They are a people in search of a homeland.

...*Nasreen, a former Muslim*. She fled militant attacks in Mosul, Iraq, and is trying to rebuild her life in Jordan. The Bible Society provided her with an Arabic Bible: "I have searched for answers in the Bible and it has changed my life."

**Friday, October 28, 2022. Please pray for**

...*outreach ministries to the 3.6 million Syrian refugees* stuck in the country of Turkey. Some are attending churches; others are being exposed to the gospel via radio, television, and internet broadcasts in their own language of Arabic.

...*the Amazigh, a Berber-speaking Muslim people group in North Africa*, who have expressed interest in animated video presentations of their pre-Islamic Christian heritage. May the Holy Spirit use this series to draw them "back" to Christ.

...*120 Central Asians* who have come to the Lord through the "i43" ministry, based off Isaiah 43, "Bring my sons from afar and my daughters from the ends of the earth...the people I formed for myself that they may proclaim my praise."

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P.O. Box 2730, Springfield, MO 65801-2730

1-866-816-0824 (toll free)

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