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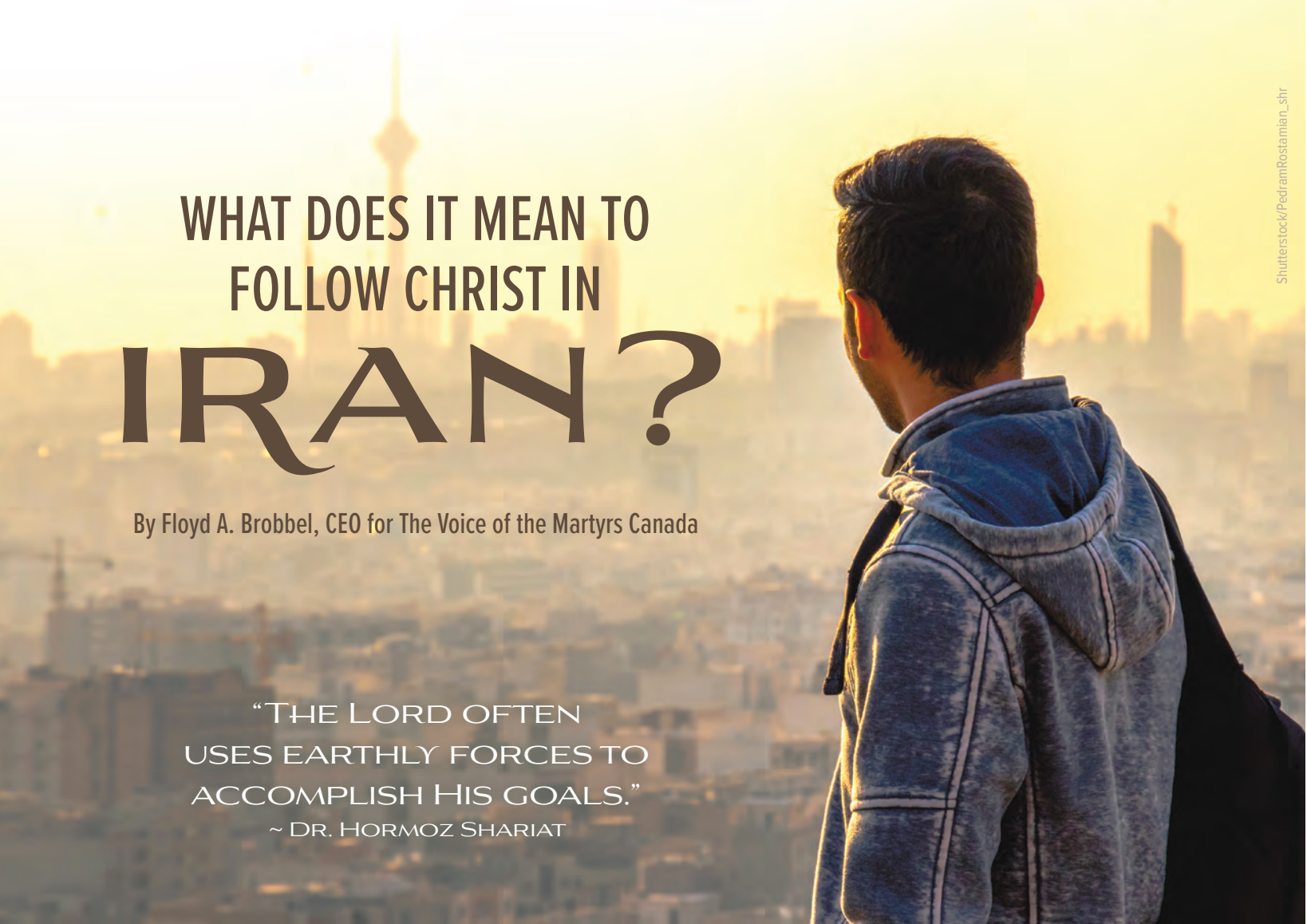
# The Voice of the Martyrs Canada



*The Journey to Recovery*

IRANIANS DISCOVER FREEDOM IN CHRIST





# WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO FOLLOW CHRIST IN IRAN?

By Floyd A. Brobbel, CEO for The Voice of the Martyrs Canada

“THE LORD OFTEN USES EARTHLY FORCES TO ACCOMPLISH HIS GOALS.”

~ DR. HORMOZ SHARIAT

Though most Iranians consider themselves Muslim, there is a growing momentum taking place within the population, resulting in their disillusionment with Islam. Dr. Hormoz Shariat states, “After 35 years of Islamic rule, many Iranian Muslims have concluded that Islam is not the answer, but the problem.”<sup>1</sup> There was great hope that the 1979 Islamic Revolution would usher in a time of stability, prosperity and freedom. As these hopes failed to materialize, and the dream of Iran’s affluence faded from view, citizens became disillusioned with Islam. As a result, many began searching for an alternative religious belief and, while doing so, discovered the truth revealed in Jesus Christ.

Owning a Bible or sharing the Gospel with others is illegal, so most believers secretly gather to worship. Secrecy is vital when conducting underground church meetings, for the Iranian government views Christianity as a threat to their Islamic traditions and faith. Under Iranian law, a Muslim who leaves their faith and converts to another religion can be charged

with apostasy, which carries a possible death sentence. Christians, therefore, face the constant threat of arrest, imprisonment and torture.

Despite the serious risks, the underground church in Iran is thriving. Estimates suggest that there are currently between 300,000 to one million Christians in Iran, most of whom are part of the underground church.<sup>2</sup> The church continues to grow because of its faithful leaders who are willing to sacrifice (their lives, if needed) to expand the body of Christ. Additionally, as a result of their members’ solid commitment to fellowship, discipleship and innovation, resiliency is a prevailing characteristic of the underground church in this Middle Eastern country.

The underground church, which is mainly comprised of young believers, functions as a community of belonging and support. In this atmosphere, believers are loved, encouraged and challenged to grow in their faith. As they spiritually develop and mature, they work together to discover new ways to present the Gospel to their neighbours. It is with this unified



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heart of compassion and purpose that followers of Christ seek to fulfill the Great Commission in Iran, trusting that God will make a way where there seems to be no way.

Dr. Mike Ansari states: “The underground church in Iran is also a source of hope. It is a reminder that God’s Kingdom is not confined to physical borders or political systems. The church in Iran is growing, and it is shaping the future of Christianity in this restricted country. As the Apostle Paul wrote to the church in Rome, *‘I am not ashamed of the Gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes’* (Romans 1:16).”<sup>3</sup>

There is a saying that “light shines brightest in the night.” As John 1:4-5 declares, Gospel truth proclaimed in regions of darkness unveils God’s glory: *“In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.”* Such truth and hope are found in Christ alone. Persecution cannot separate His faithful followers from His love, and so our prayer is that the love of Christ will win many more Iranians through the witness and sacrifice of His church.

Grace and peace,

Endnotes:

<sup>1</sup> Dr. Shariat is the Founder and Director of Iran Alive Ministries (iranalive.org) and author of *Iran’s Great Awakening*.

<sup>2</sup> www.mnnonline.org/news/the-underground-church-of-iran-2023-update

<sup>3</sup> Dr. Ansari is the President of Heart4Iran (heart4iran.com).



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Vanessa Brobbel, Manager of Special Projects,  
and her creative team.

### The goals of VOMC are expressed in our “Ministry Purposes” as follows:

1. To encourage and empower persecuted Christians to fulfill the Great Commission (Matthew 28:19-20).
2. To give practical relief and spiritual support to the families of Christian martyrs (Matthew 25:36).
3. To equip persecuted Christians to love and win to Christ those opposed to the Gospel (Romans 12:14).
4. To help believers rebuild their lives and Christian witness in countries where they have formerly suffered oppression (Nehemiah 1:3; 2:5).
5. To promote the fellowship of all believers by informing the world of the faith and courage of persecuted Christians, thereby inspiring believers to a deeper level of commitment to Christ and involvement in His Great Commission (Hebrews 13:3; Galatians 6:2).

Spending of funds is confined to board-approved programs and projects. Each restricted contribution designated towards a board-approved program or project will be used as designated with the understanding that when the need for such a program or project has been met, or cannot be completed for any reason determined by the board, the remaining restricted contributions designated for such program or project will be used where needed most. Gifts from individual donors of \$10 and more are acknowledged and received with an official receipt for income tax purposes.



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# The Journey to Recovery

## IRANIANS DISCOVER FREEDOM IN CHRIST

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A former Muslim drug addict discovered freedom in Christ, and now he leads many others in Iran through addiction recovery.

Shahrokh came to know Jesus Christ while struggling with drug addiction. After overcoming his addiction and placing his trust in Christ, the former Muslim began leading his own addiction-recovery group, walking participants through a 12-step program that acknowledges a higher power without specifically mentioning God or Jesus. In Iran, where it is illegal to leave Islam, that's the only way he can operate.

Recovery group leaders like Shahrokh know that, if they get caught leading Muslims to Christ, they can be charged with “acting against national security” – a common charge used against Christians in Iran. So, when an Iranian security official suddenly summoned the group leader to his security office for interrogation, Shahrokh had a general idea what to expect.

Despite experiencing harsh treatment by governing authorities and being subjected to a law that prohibits conversions to Christianity, Muslims throughout Iran are turning to Christ as their personal Saviour

in record numbers. In Shahrokh's case, the security official was aware that the former drug addict had become a Christian. To prevent him from sharing his faith with others, the official tried to corner Shahrokh with questions during the interrogation. Yet, each time, the Holy Spirit inspired Shahrokh with the right words to say.

### SURPRISED BY THE RECOVERY LEADER'S BOLDNESS

Acknowledging his role as a group leader in the city, Shahrokh told the official that he maintains regular contact with recovery group members as they work to overcome their addictions. And during the discussion, he reminded the official that the group of recovering addicts is associated with a well-known international organization that is officially registered in Iran.

Hoping to anger Shahrokh, the official began to criticize those in the group who had come to faith in Christ. But Shahrokh was not intimidated. He simply

# "You cannot stop the work of God...."



replied that Jesus seems to be helping Iranians who turn to God in their times of need. "If some of these people turn to Christ for help, and for deliverance to help them not return to addiction, then they have not done anything wrong," Shahrokh reasoned with the security official. "You should be happy that these people in our country are no longer taking drugs."

Drug addiction is rampant in Iran, which has the highest number per capita of opiate addicts throughout the world. Nearly three percent of the Iranian population consisting of people older than 15 years of age (representative of more than two million people) are addicted to opiates. In addition, many other drugs are widely abused by people in this Middle Eastern country.

Angry at Shahrokh's suggestion that Jesus could help those struggling with addiction, the official showed him a list of 400 recent Christian converts in the city who weren't addicted to drugs. But considering that he only disciples the 80 believers who came to know Christ through the recovery group, Shahrokh assured the official that he did not know those on the list nor where the list came from.

"Why are you lying?" the official asked angrily. "If you and your friends have not evangelized them, then how did they become Christians?" In response, Shahrokh wisely replied: "I am ready to swear on the Bible, and with God as my witness, that I am not telling a lie. If I or my friends were in contact with these 400 people, we would have certainly told you." Shahrokh then challenged the official, hoping to get more information about the Christians so he could connect with them: "You give us the addresses of these people so that we can identify them and ask them how they became Christians."

Surprised by the believer's boldness, the official was finally persuaded that Shahrokh truly didn't know the people on the list. He then asked Shahrokh to help him understand who was leading so many Iranians to abandon Islam and instead place their faith in Christ. After all, the rapid increase in Muslims turning to Christianity is well documented, with an estimated total of 750,000 to 1.2 million Christian converts living in Iran today.

Shahrokh gave the official an inspired response. "You cannot stop the work of God," he explained. "If a person has a dream of Jesus, or God directly reveals Himself in a vision and draws them to Himself – or if [someone] has seen a miracle of Christ and follows after Him – then no one is at fault... You cannot block the divine methods God uses to meet human beings."

The recovery group leader continued by saying, "You can close Christian social activities and house groups, or put Christian workers in prison, but you cannot stop people from seeing dreams or visions. You cannot put Jesus Christ in prison. You cannot stop the work of the Holy Spirit. He is at work and, in different ways, He reveals the truth to people. Can you change the hearts and inner lives of people where the Lord dwells?"

Impacted by Shahrokh's testimony of God's transforming power, the official – with a sense of awe on his face – immediately dismissed him. Since the interrogation, Shahrokh has heard nothing more from Iranian security officials. Although aware that he could be called in again at any time, he has continued leading Iranian Muslims and atheists to Christ as he helps them find freedom from addiction.

## BEYOND HUMANLY DEvised PLANS

Shahrokh is one of the many former addicts in his part of Iran who have recently come to faith in Christ and begun to work among those struggling with addictions. Yet, not all of them demonstrate such boldness. Shahrokh is grateful that the Holy Spirit helped him to respond wisely during the interrogation, allowing him to continue his ministry work today. Thankfully, Iranians are being freed from their addictions, and God's Kingdom is continuing to expand throughout the country. "Glory be to the name of the Lord," Shahrokh concludes, "for His wide, great and unlimited work is taking place above the plans of enemies and politicians." 🌟



# WHY ARE PERSECUTED IRANIAN CHRISTIANS SO THANKFUL?

By Dr. Hormoz Shariat  
Founder of Iran Alive Ministries

*"Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, 'I am the light of the world. Whoever follows Me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.'" John 8:12 ESV*

We all have read testimonies of persecuted Christians who, with all sincerity, declared that they were honoured to suffer for Christ. How is it that they can be so thankful in the face of such horror and even death? I have found at least three reasons persecuted followers of Jesus in Iran rejoice in the midst of opposition.

## **First, Iranian Christians personally experience the transforming power of Jesus.**

In Islamic countries such as Iran, there is great spiritual darkness. People live with cruelty, judgement and death as expected norms. In Islam, individual lives do not have much value. This dark environment creates such hopelessness in people that Muslims who become Christians experience major change and joy.

When they step out of spiritual darkness, they are rejuvenated in God's light. From hatred to love, from hopelessness to hope, from bondage to freedom, converts to Christianity undergo a profound transformation. Such change produces a deep, heartfelt appreciation for their Saviour and Lord. And so, these believers are willing and ready to suffer for Christ, no matter how harsh the persecution.



Photo: VOM Canada

## **Second, Iranian Christians realize their desperate need to walk with Jesus.**

Persecuted Christians quickly realize that Jesus is all they need, so He is all they want. Walking daily with Jesus is not an option for them, but an acute need.

For those of us who do not face the same intensity of persecution, a vibrant, deep spiritual walk with the Holy Spirit may seem optional. If we do not spend time in His Word, pray regularly, or go to church, then we won't notice when an immediate negative impact [takes place in our spiritual lives]. Therefore, in our "freedom," we have to be intentional about

remembering what Jesus has done for us, so that we will realize our desperate need to walk closely with Him.

## **Third, Iranian Christians see suffering as a way to say "thank you" to Jesus.**

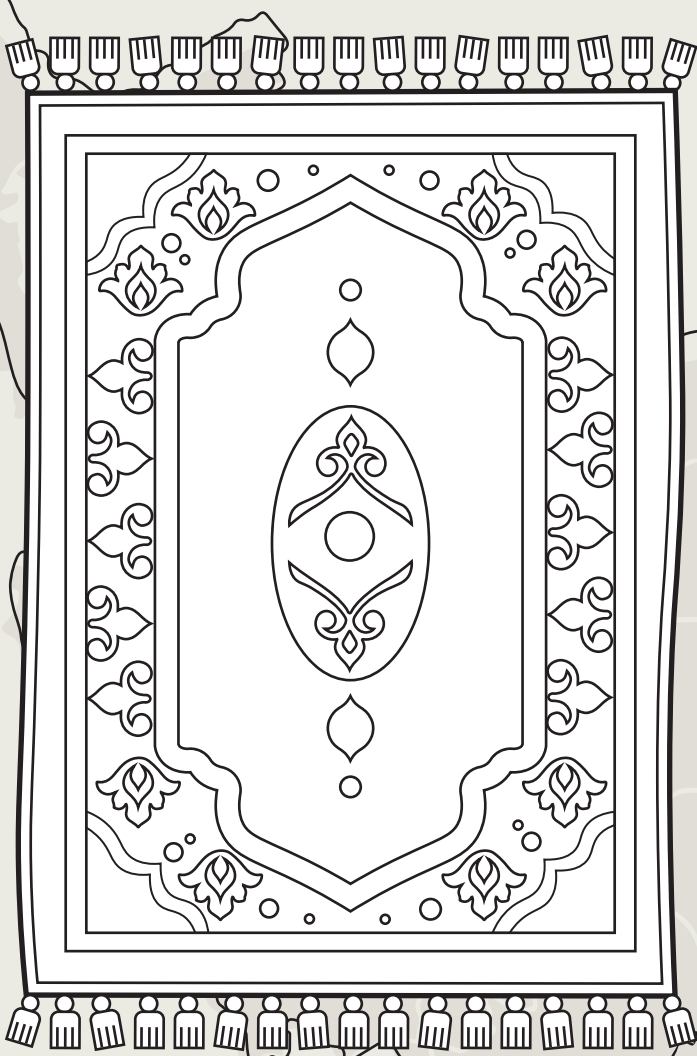
Persecuted believers actively express thanks to Jesus when they willingly suffer like He did. Every day, our Christian

brothers and sisters living in hostile regions are ready to lay down their lives for Jesus. Not all are called to martyrdom, but Jesus expects all those who are His to live as martyrs. To do so requires trusting the One who redeemed us and consecrating our very lives to Him for His glory. ☺

# Table Talk IRAN

## How to Play:

Each *adobe house* (building structure) contains a term relating to the country of Iran, plus one extra letter. Unscramble the individual words and then put a circle around each unused letter. Then arrange all of the circled letters to spell the bonus word. Printable resources can be found at: [vomcanada.com/TableTalkIran](http://vomcanada.com/TableTalkIran)



Colour Me!



## Clues

1. \_\_\_\_\_: A follower of the religion Islam.

2. \_\_\_\_\_: Iran's original country name.

3. \_\_\_\_\_: A market in a Middle Eastern or Asian country.

4. \_\_\_\_\_: A large cloth worn as a combined head covering, veil and shawl.

5. \_\_\_\_\_: The abandonment or renunciation of a religious or political belief.

6. \_\_\_\_\_: A river in Southwestern Asia.

7. \_\_\_\_\_: A floor covering of thick woven material, typically not placed over the entire floor.

8. \_\_\_\_\_: An animal that was featured on the flag of Iran until 1979.

9. \_\_\_\_\_: High respect; great esteem.

Bonus Word: \_\_\_\_\_

In Iran, practising Christianity is illegal according to the country's authorities. As a result, Christians must meet in secret to avoid being detected. Just as each *adobe house* contained a hidden letter in plain sight, Christians must carefully blend in with those around them while still being different by demonstrating the character of Christ.



# Along the Way

Violet, the artist of the featured calendar painting, had for years been involved in many exhibitions in Tehran, the capital city of Iran. Primarily, the subject of her work focused on women and the challenges they faced in Iranian society. However, after coming to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, Violet's views of the world around her began to change. She longed to glorify the Lord Jesus with her artistic talent and was commissioned by a church in Tehran to paint two pieces that expressed sections of the Bible. In another collection, titled *The Song of Salvation*, she chronicled her own journey of "salvation from darkness to the light of Christ."

In 2013, Violet became an Iranian religious refugee who relocated to Canada after experiencing strong pressure to renounce Jesus as her Lord. Among the tactics used to dissuade her faith, the forfeiture of her income and job position were at the top. Violet lost her faculty role at the University of Tehran where she taught graphic engineering and art. Even so, she still believes that God is good. Doors of opportunity opened here in Canada for Violet to exhibit her paintings at Regent's College. This featured piece, titled, "The Lord Will Embrace His Own," is part of *The Song of Salvation* exhibit, in which she declares her devotion to God and thankfulness for His salvation.

**Artist:** Banafsheh (Violet) Behzadian

**Artwork Title:** "The Lord Will Embrace His Own"

**Medium:** Acrylic

**Website:** <http://banafshehbehzadian.com>





# September 2023

**His Way** “Though you have not seen Him, you love Him. Though you do not now see Him, you believe in Him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls.”

1 Peter 1:8-9 ESV

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
<b>3</b> <b>UZBEKISTAN</b> Pray that more teaching resources will reach the growing number of Christians.	<b>4</b> <b>UGANDA</b> Pray that those working with Christian converts from Islam will receive pastoral training.	<b>5</b> <b>BAHRAIN</b> Pray that Bahrainis will receive their own copy of the Bible.	<b>6</b> <b>CHINA</b> Pray for less opposition from authorities, and thus greater freedoms to worship.	<b>7</b> <b>QATAR</b> Pray that those who hear the Gospel will seek to know more about God's saving grace.	<b>8</b> <b>ETHIOPIA</b> Pray for an end to the conflict between the government and minority groups.	<b>9</b> <b>MALDIVES</b> Pray that Christians will find new ways to share the Gospel despite severe governmental restrictions.
<b>10</b> <b>MALI</b> Pray that believers who lost jobs as a result of military coups will find new opportunities of employment.	<b>11</b> <b>NEPAL</b> Pray that Christians will be living testaments of God's grace to their neighbours.	<b>12</b> <b>YEMEN</b> Pray that Yemeni believers will be strengthened and encouraged in their faith.	<b>13</b> <b>KUWAIT</b> Praise God for new believers in this Middle Eastern nation. May they be taught as disciples of Christ.	<b>14</b> <b>SAUDI ARABIA</b> Pray that, as Saudi Arabia becomes more open politically, it will open spiritually as well.	<b>15</b> <b>MYANMAR (BURMA)</b> Pray for the courage of Christians who have been threatened with expulsion from their villages.	<b>16</b> <b>BURKINA FASO</b> Pray that Pastor Albert will persevere in his faith as militant Islamists take control of his area.
<b>17</b> <b>TANZANIA</b> Pray for pastors in Zanzibar whose homes were destroyed by opposing Muslim neighbours.	<b>18</b> <b>BHUTAN</b> Pray that Christians in Bhutan will be strong and courageous when proclaiming the message of Christ.	<b>19</b> <b>PHILIPPINES</b> Pray for the peace of Christ to be experienced among believers facing sporadic attacks.	<b>20</b> <b>PAKISTAN</b> Pray that Christians will be secure in their identity as God's beloved children amid societal rejection.	<b>21</b> <b>CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC</b> Pray that displaced Christians will be able to return home, rebuild their houses and develop farmlands.	<b>22</b> <b>SOMALIA</b> Pray for the courage and effectiveness of Christians who evangelize and disciple Somalis.	<b>23</b> <b>TÜRKIYE (TURKEY)</b> Pray that Iranian refugees will be reached for Christ and provided needed ministry and resources.
<b>24</b> <b>AFGHANISTAN</b> Pray for the raising up of new Christian leaders, as many were forced to flee the country recently.	<b>25</b> <b>ERITREA</b> Pray for the perseverance of Christian prisoners, some of whom have been detained for nearly 20 years.	<b>26</b> <b>OMAN</b> Pray that Christians serving in Oman will maintain their courageous witness.	<b>27</b> <b>ALGERIA</b> Pray for the strengthening and mentoring of Christian youth who are attending a summer camp.	<b>28</b> <b>LAOS</b> Pray that every persecuted Christian will have access to a Bible in his or her own language this year.	<b>29</b> <b>MALAYSIA</b> Pray that new believers will stand strong as they encounter persecution for the first time.	<b>30</b> <b>COLOMBIA</b> Pray for the protection of Christian children who are targeted by guerrilla groups.



Scan to access  
Digital Calendar





# Identify the Facts

# IRAN

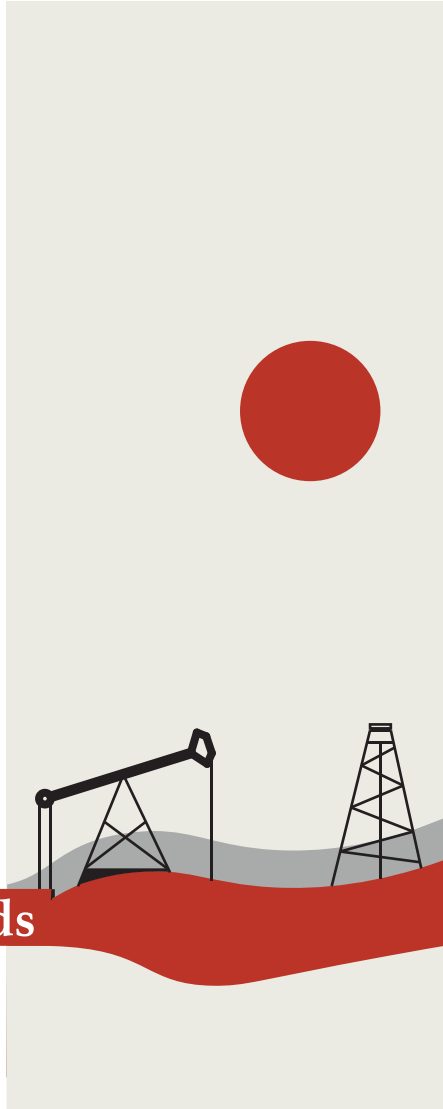
## Weigh In

1 While rug making is a common trade that many Iranians learn, it consists of different styles – depending on the region. One Persian rug can take years to complete, making it extremely valuable. Many families intentionally save up to purchase a rug as a legacy piece that can be passed down to following generations of their family.

2 In Iranian culture, most marriages are arranged by parents for the purpose of gaining social standing. Love is rarely a factor that's taken into consideration.

3 In Iran, Christians are not highly regarded in society. They have a difficult time finding jobs, being accepted into schools, and are at risk of being separated from their families if their faith is discovered.

4 Christian churches are not officially allowed in Iran. Still, Christians gather at great risk, meeting in homes to avoid being detected by governmental authorities. Despite the danger, Iran has one of the fastest growing Christian populations in the world – an underground church movement that's been expanding over the past two decades and continues to thrive today.



1 The carpets made in Iran are called Persian rugs. Research some of the reasons why families value these rugs. Is there anything in Canadian culture that is highly regarded and, therefore, passed down for generations? Do you have any specific items or heirlooms that were passed down from your ancestors?

2 Arranged marriages are rare in Canada; yet, in other countries of the world (including Iran), it is the expected norm. What are some pros and cons of arranged marriages? In what ways would your life change if your parents chose the person to whom you should marry?

3 Think about a situation where someone lied about you, bullied you, rejected you, or took something meaningful away from you that was clearly yours. What emotions and reactions did you have? Compare that situation and those feelings with Iranian Christians and what they're personally experiencing. How does that help you to pray more effectively? What are some things Canadians can learn from these believers?

4 Despite severe persecution (Iran is rated the 8<sup>th</sup> most hostile country in which to be a Christian), the Iranian church is still growing. What factors contribute to the church's growth in the midst of persecution? Hint: Muslims have 99 names for Allah, but "love" is not one of them.

## Recommended Reads

- *Cell 58: Imprisoned in Iran* by Dan Baumann, Floyd McClung
- *Iran's Great Awakening: How God is Using a Muslim Convert to Spark Revival* by Hormoz Shariat

## One Way

The fourth pillar of the Muslim faith is *saum*, the month-long feast of Ramadan. Devout followers of Islam are required to refrain from eating or drinking from sunup to sundown throughout this time. Exceptions are made for those who are sick, elderly or pregnant. Muslims celebrate Ramadan in hopes that Allah will forgive their sins, believing they must fulfill it perfectly to receive atonement. This is a continual practice for Muslims, and there is no assurance that their good works outweigh their bad, nor that they have secured a place in heaven.

Although Christians are encouraged to fast and pray, it is not a requirement for receiving God's forgiveness of sins. When His Son Jesus died on the cross, this sacrificial death became the final atonement – covering our sins once and for all. Therefore, Christians don't need to continually perform rituals to keep in good standing with God. When followers of Christ do choose to fast and pray, however, it is for the purpose of drawing close to God, rather than a means of working out our salvation (Ephesians 2:8-9).

## Way Out

Since Iranian Christians must gather secretly, they have limited access to resources, worship with other believers, and Bible training. To assist these believers, VOMC has several ongoing ministry projects, one of which involves partnering with Iran Alive Ministries. This partnering organization delivers weekly church services into people's homes through satellite TV – providing times of worship, sermons, and opportunities for listeners to contact the Iran Alive ministry team directly. Despite the governments' opposition to Christianity, our project partners are providing followers of Jesus in Iran with the resources and encouragement they need to be triumphant in their faith. To see the full scope of VOMC's international projects, visit [vomcanada.com](http://vomcanada.com).

Sources:  
<https://www.everyculture.com/Ge-It/Iran.html>  
<https://operationworld.org/locations/iran/>  
<https://www.opendoors.org/en-US/persecution/countries/iran/>  
<https://www.khanacademy.org/humanities/ap-art-history/introduction-cultures-religions-apah/islam-apah/a/the-five-pillars-of-islam>

Word Game Solutions: 1. Muslim 2. Persia 3. Bazaar 4. Chador 5. Apostasy 6. Euphrates 7. Rug 8. Lion 9. Honour Bonus Word: Christian





# VOM AROUND THE WORLD

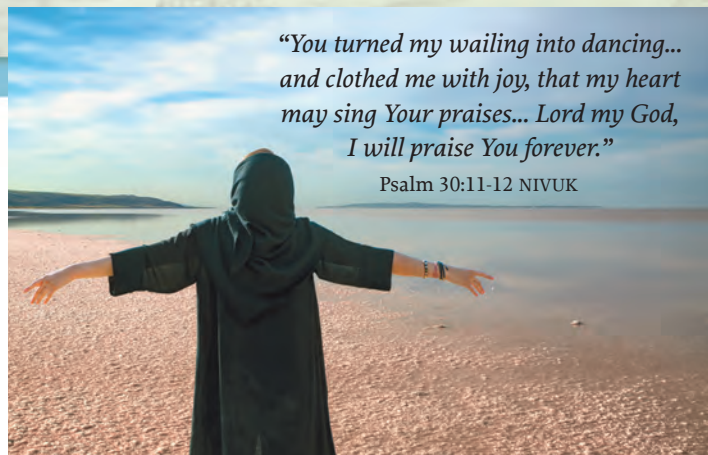
## God's Transforming Love

VOMC's commitment to the training and growth of the underground church aligns with the mission of Iran Alive Ministries through the project, *Church SeVen*, a virtual community where Iranian believers interact through satellite TV and digital media. This project promotes the fellowship of all Christian believers and seeks to provide the evangelism, training and discipleship necessary to strengthen house churches throughout the country. With a vision to transform Iran into a Christian nation during this generation, the *Church SeVen* ministry is bringing greatly needed hope to many isolated and persecuted believers. One of these satellite viewers is a young Iranian woman by the name of Serena.

When Serena turned 17, she was forced by her father to marry a man she did not know. Unfortunately, the stranger she married proved to be abusive. He locked Serena in the house daily, forbidding her to leave without his permission. Most nights, he would come home in a drunken stupor and beat Serena before violently raping her. Hopeless, she attempted to commit suicide three times.

One night, Serena desperately cried out to God: "You are neither loving nor just. You are just watching me suffer daily..." That very night, she dreamt of a Man who was wearing a white gown. When He opened His arms wide and said, "My daughter, come into My arms," she ran towards Him...falling into His welcoming arms with tears of joy. Even though Serena did not initially know who this Man was, she deeply felt His Fatherly love – as well as the peace, safety and happiness that exuded from His presence. She still vividly remembers how He gently stroked her hair and spoke so tenderly....

When Serena awoke from this incredibly profound dream, her life was different! She continued to sense His comforting presence. From that day onward, hope and joy were immersed within Serena's heart, and her



*"You turned my wailing into dancing... and clothed me with joy, that my heart may sing Your praises... Lord my God, I will praise You forever."*

Psalm 30:11-12 NIVUK

joyful laughter came back. The transformation in the young woman's countenance was so dramatic that it even amazed her family members. Three days later, when Serena went into town to shop with her Mom, a woman she didn't know suddenly approached her, held onto her hand, and announced: "The Lord has sent me to tell you that He loves you very much. You are not alone, and He has good news for you."

Upon hearing these encouraging words, Serena remembered her dream, and the recollection of that heartfelt moment suddenly brought tears to her eyes. In response to the explanation of Serena's impactful dream, the woman prophesied: "That Man wearing the white gown in your dream was Jesus Christ." Then the woman herself began to joyfully cry as she told Serena about the God of love, and the Scriptural truth that Jesus is actually God incarnate.

It has been a year since Serena began her walk with Jesus. Having received ongoing spiritual support from the *Church SeVen* community, her life has become happy and beautiful. This young Christian woman now prays for the salvation of her husband, who no longer physically abuses her but rather expresses kindness. Noticing how wonderfully the Lord is changing his heart, she has the assurance that he will one day be spiritually saved. Please join us in praying that Serena's husband – and all those in Iran who are in need of God's salvation through Christ – will experience His powerful love and, as a result, be transformed for His glory! 🌍

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# RESILIENT LOVE

## Announcing This Year's Visual Arts Highlights!

BY VANESSA BROBBEL

VOMC'S MANAGER OF SPECIAL PROJECTS



*“Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider Him who endured from sinners such hostility against Himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted.” Hebrews 12:1-3 ESV*

The question we posed to artists across Canada this past year has been, “What does resilient love look like?” While reading Hebrews 12:1-3, we see a picture of Jesus enduring the cross and being shamed by hostile sinners; yet, He did so with the joyful expectation of having a restored relationship with them.

One particular *Dennis the Menace* cartoon illustrates the nature of Jesus’ “resilient love” quite well. Picture Dennis and his friends leaving the house of Mrs. Wilson, a very kindly neighbour, with a plate full of cookies. The kids are wearing baffled expressions and debating what they had done to deserve the delicious baked treats. Dennis shrugs matter-of-factly: “Mrs. Wilson doesn’t give us cookies because *we’re* nice. We get cookies because *Mrs. Wilson* is nice.”

The resilient love of Christ is given not because we deserve it, but because it’s part of God’s identity. Jesus set the example for His followers by providing

many illustrations and parables, and then walked the road back to Jerusalem willingly...knowing what lay before Him – the tremendous *suffering* – in order to show us *how* to love resiliently.

Artists from all across Canada have reflected on the theme of “Resilient Love” and the words of Hebrews 12:1-3. In fact, we received several submissions of uniquely created artwork, ranging in a vast variety of art mediums, such as: sculpture; the use of watercolour, acrylic or oil for paintings; graphite pencils or pastels to draw sketches; digital art; multimedia and more. A jury of skilled artists, who graciously volunteered to adjudicate this year’s event, have made their selections after pouring over the artists’ thoughtfully crafted artwork submissions and descriptions.

In this month’s issue, we are highlighting the work of one adult and one youth whom the judges felt best communicated the theme of “Resilient Love,” along with a few honourable mentions.





**Adult Category Artist:** Miriam Bellamy  
**Title of Entry:** “The Good Samaritan”  
**Medium:** Oil painting on canvas  
**Dimensions:** 16” x 20”

**Description of Artwork:** Resilient love involves showing mercy. Even in the harshest of circumstances, such love serves as a testimony that is powerful and unstoppable. Love provides that glimmer of hope to keep going. The resulting resilience allows us to adapt and recover from difficult experiences. The parable of the Good Samaritan highlights what it is to walk the Christian journey in the footsteps of Christ – bringing the Good News of His salvation, even when those we minister to despise, ridicule and reject us. Resilient love enables us to extend His hands of mercy and demonstrate His love.

**Youth Category Artist:** Nadia Binnendyk  
**Title of Entry:** “Resilient Love”  
**Medium:** Clay, glaze and wire  
**Dimensions:** 8” x 10”

**Description of Artwork:** The theme of “Resilient Love” is uniquely conveyed through this clay bust of an emaciated man squinting towards heaven. Nadia informed us that the sculpted man is representative of North Korean Christians who suffer intense persecution for their faith. The two hands represent the spiritual comfort and solidarity of the church resting on his shoulders.

Nadia further explains that anyone simply being caught with a Bible is likely to be sent to a gruelling labour camp, and only a few prisoners return from there alive. Currently, there are an estimated 30,000 North Korean Christians being held captive in forced labour camps where they are subjected to starvation and torture. Although the North Korean constitution guarantees freedom of religion, in reality, government officials consider the practice of all other unapproved religions a political crime. They perceive any affiliated religious connections to be a threat, fearing outsiders may attempt to overthrow their government. *Juche* (the country’s official ideology) prioritizes obedience to North Korea’s three supreme political leaders: the late Kim Il Sung; the late Kim Jong Il; and now the two ancestral patriarchs’ presently reigning descendant, Kim Jong Un.



Those who are known to descend from Christian families in North Korea are categorized as being among the lowest class of citizens, whose social standing is traditionally referred to as *songbun*. Starvation, as depicted in the gaunt appearance of the sculpted North Korean prisoner, is always a danger for those with the lowest *songbun*, as they have the least access to food. The use of barbed wire represents the people’s lack of physical freedom, as the borders of North Korea are marked by fences, guards and tons of barbed wire. Repatriated escapees have reportedly sometimes been hung on the barbed wire as a warning to others who may try to escape.



# HONOURABLE MENTIONS



**Adult Category:** Norelice Mboutou  
**Title of Entry:** "The Resilient Love of Moses"  
**Medium:** Digitally hand drawn

**Youth Category:** Faith Minderhoud  
**Title of Entry:** "Pointing to Christ"  
**Medium:** Clay



**Youth Category:** Monica Beinert  
**Title of Entry:** "Look Up, Brother"  
**Medium:** Graphite pencils

**Adult Category:** Carolyn Bagnall  
**Title of Entry:** "Run for Jesus"  
**Medium:** Acrylic



## 2024 Visual Arts Theme...

**Art Gallery Showing**  
**HEART HEALTH**  
[vomcanada.com/ArtGalleryShowing](http://vomcanada.com/ArtGalleryShowing)

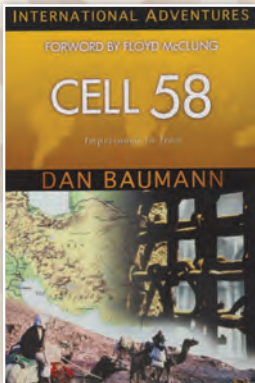
What are you really living for? It's crucial to realize that you either glorify God, or you glorify something or someone else. You're always making something look big. If you don't glorify God when you're involved in a conflict, you inevitably show that someone or something else rules your heart.  
- Ken Sande

**Voice of the Martyrs**  
Canada

Watch for more information in next month's issue!



# VOMC RESOURCES



## Cell 58 \$15

*"It's strange. I stand by his cell sometimes, and I hear him praying for us! He's doing all this for love? We know nothing about this God of love, but it sounds very right."*

~ An Iranian prison guard referencing Dan Baumann

Although he was just an ordinary traveller, Dan Baumann was wrongly accused of espionage and thrown into Iran's most infamous high-security prison while visiting the country. In that unlikely place, under the threat of execution and in the midst of despair, he witnessed the powerful triumph of God's love over fear. Join Dan as he relives his perilous trials by reading through the pages of *Cell 58*, an inspiring true story of courageous faith.

Paperback, 190 pages



## Iran's Great Awakening \$15

In the mid-1980s, Dr. Hormoz Shariat and his wife prayed, "Lord, use us to save Iran!" His passion to bless Muslims stems, in part, because of the murder of his brother Hamraz, who was arrested in Iran at the age of 16 on a minor political charge. After two years in jail, Hamraz was executed by a firing

squad. Yet, God showed Dr. Shariat that the best way to respond to this tragedy is to dedicate his life to bringing one million Muslims to salvation in Christ.

In his book, *Iran's Great Awakening*, Dr. Shariat takes readers on a journey out of bondage to freedom in Christ. Learn what the Bible says about Iran and why this Middle Eastern country is right at the cusp of something big, eternal, and of a great historical proportion – something that is already happening! God impressed on his heart, "I am going to do a great work in Iran and change that nation forever, and I am giving you the honour to be a part of it."

Paperback, 243 pages

## Hearts of Fire 2 \$15

This newly released follow-up to *Hearts of Fire* brings you the true stories of 12 courageous women. From the Colombian evangelist who was on the run for witnessing to guerilla fighters – to the American woman who publicly forgave the Islamic extremists who gunned down her husband on the streets of Benghazi, Libya – these women's lives were turned upside down when they obeyed the words of Christ. However, each of them embraced the hope found only in the unshakeable eternal Kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ.

In addition to these 12 stories, you will also read the testimonies of 11 other women who share how God's strength and provision was made available to them when their earthly kingdom was shaken while serving His eternal one. These role models of faith, obedience and perseverance will inspire you to likewise pursue Christ with your heart aflame, no matter the cost! Paperback, 384 pages



For information on the ministry's other helpful resources,  
visit: [www.vomcanada.com/store](http://www.vomcanada.com/store)





# INTERNATIONAL DAY OF PRAYER

FOR THE PERSECUTED CHURCH

**COURAGE** TO  
*rise above*  
JOSHUA 1:9

IDOP

**NOVEMBER 5, 2023**

Each November, believers around the world unite their hearts together in prayer on behalf of our persecuted brothers and sisters in Christ. In Canada, many churches even hold special services on the first Sunday of November to encourage congregants to remember those who are suffering severe hardships for their faith.

This year's International Day of Prayer for the Persecuted Church (IDOP) presents us with another opportunity to compassionately intercede on behalf of the estimated 360 million believers around the world who are experiencing high-to-extreme forms of persecution.

Please join us for this international prayer initiative, so persecuted believers will be reminded of God's promise in Joshua 1:9: *"...Be strong and courageous. Do not be frightened, and do not be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go."*

**For more information, visit: [www.idop.ca](http://www.idop.ca)**