

Along *the Way*

Estimated Reading Level: Ages 12-15

***Editor's Note: This true story describes the inspiring faith of young Christians who were faced with persecution as a result of following Jesus and deals with themes of violence. We encourage parents and guardians to take the time to read and discuss the subject matter with younger audiences.**

Haroon, Atish, and six of their friends chatted excitedly in the back of their van. They were headed to western Pakistan on their first ministry trip. As they drove through a local market, their van got a flat tire.

Knowing the people in the area were Muslims, they took the opportunity to share about Jesus while they waited for the repair. Haroon was telling a group of villagers about Christ's love for them, when Atish noticed men pushing their way toward them.

"Come with us now!" these members of the secret police demanded. The authorities put the five Christian men into a car and drove them to a police station. The rest of the group, three young women, followed in another vehicle. Scared, the students began to pray. This was the first time they had experienced such opposition for their faith.

"You came here to spread Christianity!" the interrogators insisted. The soldiers put burlap bags over their heads and loaded them into a truck, leaving the women at the police station.

Each day was the same – interrogations and beatings. "If you accept Islam, I will forgive you," the interrogator told Haroon. "But if you don't, we will kill you."

Haroon countered, "I will not leave Jesus Christ."

The male students were kept in dark cells and slept on a hot concrete floor. Atish says, "They told us we would spend six or seven years in prison, and our families wouldn't know where we were."

After 52 days, the authorities placed bags over their heads and loaded them into trucks. They drove up a mountain, were dropped off, and told to count to 500. Hearing the truck drive off, Atish lifted the bag from his head and saw the captors were gone!

"I will not leave Jesus Christ."

"We started praising God," Haroon says. The five young men thankfully returned home and learned that the female students had been kept at the police station for a week, suffering only verbal abuse.

Haroon and Atish, although still coping with trauma, persist in spreading the Gospel. "At times I am courageous, other times it haunts me," Atish reveals. Although Haroon's family tried to dissuade him from returning to mission work, he too is steadfast in his commitment to serving the Lord: "I am ready to die for Jesus Christ."