

How A Brave Pakistani Taught Me to Stop Whining

Spending time last week with a persecuted Christian brother ruined me forever.

I can't reveal my new Pakistani friend's name, even though he gave me permission to use it. I could never live with myself if he died because of something I wrote, but he wants the world to know his amazing story. So I'll just call him Saleem.

I met this young church leader last weekend during a missions conference in a northeastern state. The same day we met, Islamic radicals were burning Christian houses to the ground in Gojra, an area not far from Saleem's city. So far, the body count in Gojra has been estimated to be as high as 20, and 19 others were injured when masked militants associated with the Taliban attacked a peaceful Christian settlement.

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Last week's violence flared after a Christian was accused of desecrating a copy of the Quran. One of Saleem's friends was severely wounded. This happens often in Pakistan, where so-called blasphemy laws make it a capital offense to tear a page of the Islamic holy book or to insult the name of Muhammad. Right now, a 4-year-old girl is waiting in a prison cell to be executed for damaging a Quran.

"The Muslims hate us," Saleem told me. "But Christians are protesting the Islamic violence. We are peaceful."

Saleem lifted up his sleeve and showed me two scars near his elbow and wrist. They mark where a bullet passed through one end of his arm to the other when Islamic militants shot him in the city of Lahore in 2005. If you take a close look at Saleem's scalp, under his thick black hair, you will find many scars from where he was beaten on the head with sticks.

"Many members of my church have been put in jail because of these 'blasphemy' laws," Saleem said—noting that the charges were false. Saleem receives untraceable text messages almost every day from Taliban members threatening to kill him.

Islamic militants are upset because Christianity is growing more rapidly in Pakistan than anyone in government will admit. Official statistics say Pakistan is 2 percent Christian. Saleem claims the figure is much higher. He says many former Muslims won't state their religion in surveys because they fear reprisals from radical Islamists—and because Christians are denied jobs and forced to live in ghettos.

Although Saleem leads a network of 900 house churches in his city (with an average membership of 200 each), he is not a wealthy man. He and his wife and son share a small house with six other family members. There are bullet holes in their front gate. They keep a water buffalo nearby and sell its milk to make extra money.

Miracles have followed this young pastor, who began directing his church network in 1997. In May 2008, a Muslim man brought his dead 6-year-old son to an evangelistic meeting. Said Saleem: "I saw the fire of God on that child and he was revived. It was the presence of God. It wasn't me. The doctor stood in the meeting and gave a report. He said the child had been dead."

In most of Saleem's outdoor meetings, up to 80 percent of the audience is Muslim. Huge numbers of them are converted to Christ when they see displays of God's miracle power. "We have

seen blind eyes opened, the paralyzed walk, deaf ears opened," he said. "We see people get out of wheelchairs. We see many miracles in Jesus' name."

Saleem added that Presbyterian Christians in his country are totally open to the supernatural work of the Holy Spirit: "The Presbyterians speak in tongues. They believe in miracles. They believe that without the Holy Spirit we cannot preach and teach."

It is one thing to read about persecuted Christians. It was quite another experience to eat several meals with this brother, listen to him pray in Urdu and look at the brand marks on his body. Two days with Saleem forced me to do a reality check.

I realized I've been complaining in my heart in recent days about trivial things—the price of gasoline, the sour economy and the slowness of some Internet connections. Now I feel ridiculous. I've repented for my ungrateful attitude. I'm going to start each day remembering Saleem and the millions like him who suffer joyfully for Christ.

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