

Monday 24th May

Evan and Carys' story

In the middle of a COVID pandemic, we got married! One of the reasons we were drawn to each other was the other's calling and desire to serve God amongst Muslims overseas and we felt God was leading us to pursue this together.

These callings came about gradually for each of us. Evan was brought up in a Muslim country where his parents lived as overseas workers. Inspired by their work, he had always been drawn to doing something similar for the adventure and the purpose given by serving God. As he grew up, what had been a childhood dream became something he invested in and prayed about. God increasingly challenged him with the call to 'make disciples' and 'to preach the gospel where Christ wasn't known'. Muslims were an obvious group to focus on.

Carys had grown up alongside Muslim friends at school and had enjoyed getting to know international students at university. As the gospel took on a deeper personal weight and significance, sharing that with those who knew nothing of Jesus became a joy and a delight, as did seeing them respond. Over a short space of time, feeling God's nudging and being challenged by the lack of people going, Carys too felt called to 'go'.

As university finished, we both started to explore this call. Along with a group of other student friends, we felt God leading us to move to a place where the church isn't present. That puts us where we are now, part of a small church plant in Manchester. This has been a fantastic first step as the area we live in is one of the most diverse places in the UK, with a large Muslim population. We befriend Iranians, Kurds, North Africans, Pakistanis; you name it, they live here! It has taught us a lot about being the church and the challenges of church planting as well as the joys of community with a common purpose and a desire to worship Jesus. Finally, and maybe mostly importantly, it gave us time to realise how similar God's call on our lives is and to decide to run this life alongside each other as a couple.

We expect to be here for another few years as we get used to married life, gain experience in working with Muslims and prepare to go overseas.

- Pray for the church network we are part of, that God would establish his kingdom here and reveal himself to many Muslims.
- Pray for us and others like us who are in the 'in-between' stage, having a call to the unreached, but knowing that it isn't time to go yet. Pray that God would clearly lead and place supportive and encouraging people around us.
- Pray that God would call groups of people together to serve him amongst the unreached.

Tuesday 25th May

The information in the articles on the next four days comes primarily but not exclusively from Mark, a former Frontiers worker with Somalis in the Horn of Africa.

What does it mean to be a Somali believer?

"When all the people saw this, they fell prostrate and cried, "The Lord – He is God! The Lord – He is God!"" 1 Kings 18:39

Somalis – stereotyped around the world as pirates and Islamic extremists – are coming to faith in Jesus, and communities are beginning to see their positive impact on society. Growing numbers are saying things such as: I am surprised by these followers of Isa al-Masih. I always thought they were focussed on themselves, but they are caring well for their clan and their family. They still represent what it means to be Somali.

While the Somali Christians are still quite few in number, the seeds of the gospel are beginning to take root in the soil of their society, just as Jesus described in Mark 4.



Source: Unsplash

Somalis are 99.67% Muslim. A common saying goes, ‘To be Somali is to be Muslim.’ Yet God has been at work in the region. Over the last 100 years, individuals came to faith, but no lasting, multigenerational community formed. Since 1991, when the country started its descent into lawlessness, the Somali church has been growing significantly. In the past six years, I have seen much growth; with communities of Christians spanning across five cities that previously had no believers or only a few isolated believers who shared no interaction with each other.

Most Somali Christians keep their faith completely secret. If al-Shabaab finds someone who has become a Christian, they will often kill them on the spot.

Somali Christians are despised and heavily persecuted, even martyred, but are also growing in faith and in vision. Somalia remains the world’s third-most dangerous place to follow Christ, according to Open Doors’ World Watch List. Burdened for their country, Muslim background believers (MBBs) are leading more boldly and will clearly not just disappear. Those in power admit that Somalis are no longer 100% Muslim but insist that all Somalis remain Muslim.

Sheikhs on television warn the Muslim community to protect their youth, for many of them are beginning to follow Jesus. They warn that it is Somalis who are converting them, not foreigners.

You might want to watch a 90-second video to learn more about the Somalis:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kXjAvRe7rQk>

- Pray for the believing minority who suffer great persecution and martyrdom.
- Church history tells us that the church grows most when persecution is present. Pray that believers among the Somalis will endure persecution in a Christ-like way, willing to give their lives for the sake of the gospel if that is what is called for.
- Pray for courage and strength for those who are boldly sharing their faith.

Sources of some content: <https://www.operationworld.org/country/soma/owtext.html> and <https://www.pray30days.org/2020/pray-for-somalia/>

Wednesday 26th May

Challenging the societal notions of caste

Omar is a Christian elder among the approximately 400 Somali Muslim background believers (MBBs) networked across the Horn of Africa (Ethiopia, Somalia, Somaliland, Djibouti, and Kenya). Fifty Somalis were

baptised as followers of Jesus in the last year, and the number of baptisms has continued to grow annually over the past six years.

Amira was from a lower caste clan and therefore not seen as a suitable spouse for Omar, despite being a young follower of Jesus. Omar's clan leaders said she would bring disgrace to the clan; she could not be trusted and she would be unfaithful. Believers told Omar he should marry a foreigner – marrying a Somali was only trouble for an MBB. Previous Somali MBB marriages had ended in divorce, imprisonment, or the loss of their children. Not even one Somali MBB marriage existed in the region at the time Omar was considering marriage.

Omar not only married Amira but paid double the expected dowry to emphasise her worth. Four years after their marriage, Amira is now one of the most respected wives in the clan. The culture of MBBs marrying within their caste changed through Omar and Amira's example. Now, male believers who have seen Omar and Amira's marriage desire to marry a believing Somali woman, regardless of caste. The way Amira loves her culture, shows hospitality, dresses honourably, and cares for her husband and children is a model for other women. The respect she gives friends and family shows how much she fears God. Her marriage to Omar has inspired more Somali MBB marriages, causing whole families rather than just individuals to become followers of Jesus and leading to generational discipleship.

As a result, the community is giving attention and energy to what it means to be a godly Somali husband or wife, what it looks like to lead their children in the way of Jesus while they attend the local Islamic schools, and what it looks like to work and provide for a family as a follower of Jesus.

- In a recent prayer guide we read how badly some Muslim women are treated by their husbands. Let's thank God for Omar and Amira and the wonderful example they are to their community of a God-fearing husband and wife.
- Let's ask for MBBs to shine for Jesus in their communities in the way they live and conduct their lives as followers of Jesus, and to cause others to be drawn to His ways.
- Let's thank God for the number of Somalis coming to faith. Let's pray they are disciplined well and are godly examples to their relational networks.

Thursday 27th May

Seeing the image of God reflected in every clan

Historically, Somalis have been a nomadic people, living in small family groups in the desert. When they experience drought or danger, they depend on the larger clan network to help, and they know how to find each other.

Within the Somali network of believers, the elders have asked, "How can we support each other as a community if we are all isolated and endangered? How can we be a spiritual clan for one another and support each other across clan lines?" This very idea questions the cultural norm, because in their society, the ties with blood relatives are the only bonds that matter. Somali loyalty is to their clan and not their nation and there is much mistrust between clans.

The elders in the MBB network decided that one way to fight isolation would be to intentionally link local fellowships. When someone is baptised, elders from different areas attend the event, demonstrating to the new believers that they are a part of a community across the region. The goal is to provide the support needed to develop as mature disciples and seek transformation within each clan, a task that often seems impossible. Knowing they are a part of something God is doing across all their clans and across the world gives the believers strength to press on in the faith, engaging with their communities instead of remaining on the sidelines of society.



Source Wikimedia Commons

Rahima, who lives in Somalia, recently described what a drastic change this represents. She started to follow Jesus over thirty years ago, long before this recent burst of growth in the Somali church. In 2020, the network of Somali Christians came together, with representatives from every country in the Horn of Africa. This well-respected older woman said to the hundred or so people who gathered, "For many years, I've felt so isolated. But now I know that I'm not alone! If I need help or encouragement, I can just go to local believers and pray and be with my brothers and sisters." The life of the Somali church as a whole is progressing across natural clan lines and across national borders, and Rahima is one among many who have been blessed by this change.

- Let's thank God for the elders in the MBB network who have worked so hard to break down barriers and link new believers with the larger network of brothers and sisters in Christ. Pray for their protection and for wisdom in everything they do.
- Let's thank God for the perseverance of Somali MBBs and ask Him to protect those who must keep their faith a secret. Let's pray for them to find fellowship with other believers.
- Pray for safe fellowship and encouragement for isolated believers and for God to strengthen them in their Christian walk. Ask God to soften the hearts of their friends and family so they too come to faith in Jesus.

Friday 28th May

Building a God-honouring Somali society

Somali elders are asking: "How do we honour God in our society?" To find the answer, they're wrestling with each other and, like Jacob, wrestling with God. Everyone involved understands that generational devastation through war, violence, and famine, leading to abuse, drug addiction, and the breakdown of the family unit, must be healed. Hundreds have been killed in suicide attacks. Current unemployment stands at 60%, while 80% of those who have jobs aren't earning enough to provide for their family's needs. These topics of past and present hardship are paramount as these brothers and sisters wrestle with what it means to steward and subdue the earth.

Somali society is unlikely to be fully healed from the devastation of sin and evil, war and famine, or violence and abuse in our lifetime or in the lifetimes of these young leaders. Yet we are privileged to be a part of their



Source: Wikimedia Commons

journey and see new growth arise out of the fertile soil of faith amid suffering.

We have seen individuals and families trust in Jesus and risk more than we could imagine. We have seen small fellowships spring up all over the Somali region, interconnected with each other. We have attended Christian weddings and have witnessed children being born to believing parents. We have seen ex-militants struggle into newly redeemed lives. We hear Somali Christians discuss ways to bless their society by starting businesses and developing high-quality education centres for their communities. As I write this

article, a new library is opening, envisioned by one of the elders in the network and funded by the African Union. These snapshots are glimpses of hope after much devastation. Somali believers view their work as worship to God and a witness to the community. Developing healthy communities that care for everyone is a vital part of their spiritual vision and practice.

We eagerly anticipate watching God's story unveiled in Somali lives, not only in the number of Somalis turning to Jesus but the transformational impact they are beginning to have in their society.

- Pray for Somalis to no longer be a people group known around the world as pirates but as a part of the priesthood of all believers.
- Pray for the new and rapidly growing Church in Somalia to be disciplined well and grow in faith. Hebrews 12:1-3
- Pray that Somalis will find a way to work together for the common good to rebuild their country and bring much-needed peace and stability to this region.

Saturday 29th May

Christian workers among the Somali people

"For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways," declares the Lord. "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways." Isaiah 55:8-9

In the past few days, we have read accounts from Mark, a Frontiers worker who, with his wife, has laboured in this region for several years. There are many Christian workers living among the Somalis and serving selflessly in various ministries. Some of them have been killed for their ministry. Things have changed since the onset of civil war in 1991; access into Somalia is now extremely difficult and dangerous. Despite all the concerns and difficulties, Christian workers continue to faithfully labour among the Somali people throughout the Horn of Africa and around the world. They use their practical skills to help the Somali people in many ways. They dig wells, feed the hungry and teach them how to farm and run a small business. They

help treat the sick and provide education. They care for the needs of Somali mothers and children. They train and work alongside local healthcare professionals. All these activities and more are done in the loving name of Jesus Christ.

It is difficult for Christian workers to share the good news of Jesus Christ. Often it takes years until a friendship has grown to such a level that they can talk about their hope in Him. Islamic controls are tight. This limits a seeker's ability to ask honest questions about the Christian faith.

Despite all the barriers to the gospel, we know the Lord is touching the hearts of Somalis and drawing them to Himself. God has opened amazing windows of opportunity and different doors through which Christian workers, as well as Somali MBBs, can also bring light and hope.

Let's take a moment to praise and worship God for His wonderful grace and mercy, available to everyone regardless of race or religion. Listen to Be Enthroned by Bethel Music:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l3BJoKj0MZg>

- Let's take a moment to thank God for workers, past and present who, like Mark and his wife, have obeyed God and gone to this region - in spite of very difficult and dangerous conditions - to bring the good news to unreached peoples.
- Pray for more workers who are willing to go to Somalia and the other countries in the Horn of Africa. Pray they will find effective and creative avenues of outreach.