

## Rev. Shahbaz Masih Boota



LTR: Sameer, Rev. Shahbaz, Mrs. Silvia, Felix, Sheryl

### My Testimony

I was born in 1978 into a nominal Christian family in the village of Kotli Moman in Sialkot District, Punjab Province. There was no church in our village or the surrounding area, so I was unable to attend church in my childhood, and I received no spiritual instruction from my family. However, I was interested in spiritual things and it made me different from the rest of my siblings. Family members and relatives often sensed that I was a religious person. My grandfather and father were good and moral people, but I felt there was something missing in my life. It wasn't until much later that I realized it was Jesus who was missing.

Our family moved to Rawalpindi when I was in grade three and nine years old. I began to attend a church regularly. It was here that I heard the message of salvation through Jesus Christ. I felt as if the message was meant just for me. The word of God began to work in my life. I began to have taste of God's goodness, but I realized, no matter how much I attended church or did religious things, something was still missing. I now know I was ready to ask Christ to forgive me of my sin and receive Him as my Lord and Savior, but no one shared this with me at that time.

I was upset and uncomfortable. When I finished secondary school, I met a pastor (a ZBS graduate) who was leading a Bible class by extension in our area. He invited me to this Bible study class. It was the time I began to read the Bible again, which I had stopped earlier. The Bible class was very interesting. It was a course called the "Abundant Life" which was based on the Gospel of John and was prepared by Open Theological Seminary (TEE). It was a life changing course for me. I studied John 1:12 deeply. This course was three-months in length. The course was helpful to learn in simple way how to receive Jesus Christ to be ones' Lord and Savior. This course and the pastor who was leading it helped me to understand that I was a sinner and that Jesus died for my sin. I also came to know that by

receiving Jesus Christ into my life I could become God's child. At the end of this study, I bowed before God, I confessed my sin and received Christ as my personal Savior and Lord on 18<sup>th</sup> of November 1995. This was the happiest day of my life because Jesus came into my life and saved me. Through Christ's salvation, I received peace and eternal joy.

The pastor encouraged me greatly, so I began to take part in church ministry with him. He continued to visit our area (a settlement of Christian families) and started weekly prayer meeting in our house. These meetings became a regular weekly program. I was encouraged to share my testimony in the weekly prayer meeting and conduct meetings in my colony whenever the pastor was absent. These meetings continued for two years, and I learned many new things about spiritual life from both my pastor and other believers. Some of my relatives and other people joined our meeting and in two years' time these family meetings became a small church. We rented a house for meetings because the church membership was growing.

My pastor and I worked hard to plant the church in our area, DhokeSeydian Rawalpindi, when I finished college. God was at work, and several people accepted Jesus Christ and joined our fellowship. During this time, God provided resources and a place of church meetings and worship was purchased. At this stage the question arose who would take the responsibility to be the pastor of this new church, as when the church continued to grow. Our senior pastor had responsibilities for other churches and the outreach ministry, so the leaders and members began to pray for a full-time pastor for this new church.

After much prayer our pastor and administrators decided that I should take the responsibility as a pastor for this church. However, I was not willing because I wanted to further my education. My plan was to get a good education and to obtain a good job. I only wanted to do part-time ministry, not full-time. While our pastor and the church were praying, I also prayed and fasted for God's guidance. After many days of prayer, and in consultation with my family and Christian friends, I realized that God was preparing my heart to accept the responsibility of pastoring this church.

In 1997, I was appointed as the first full-time pastor of Brethren Bethany Church DhokeSaydian Rawalpindi. I grew in spiritual life during this time. I worked under the guidance and supervision of my senior pastor. I praise God for the many changed lives I saw during that time in my ministry. God used me to train some other brothers and sisters for His work. We had a good team in the church whom God used for His glory.

Along with the pastoral ministry, I continued my education and obtained the degrees of B. A and B.Ed. (bachelor's in education) I wanted to study even more even as I continued my pastoral ministry. In August 2000, I enrolled in a local university for an M.Sc. in Sociology degree. This seemed like the next best step for me, but I had no peace about this decision. Every day when I prayed and studied the God's word, I felt I was going against God's will. It seemed that God wanted me to leave the university. I argued with God because I had spent a lot of money. My family was poor, and they arranged that money with many difficulties. I thought if I left this course of study, I would disappoint them. Furthermore, my family needed my financial support which was not possible through my work as a pastor. I

believed I needed to earn money, so I could help my family, and that this was only possible with a good education. I pleaded with God to allow me to continue this course of study and even tried to bargain with Him by offering to serve the church part-time and by giving the church more money. So, I continued with my classes.

For four months the conflict between God and me continued. My first exams were coming to an end, but God's voice kept speaking to me and asking me to trust Him. I ignored it again and went for my exam the next day. After my first paper I came back and started studying for the next test. I felt a deep conviction that I had sinned against God. I was so upset that night that I could not sleep. I was terribly confused. I continued studying the God's word each day, however. The next morning, I was reading from Isaiah and God greatly encouraged me. After that mornings reading, I prayed silently with tears on my face. God spoke to me again and said: "I will not leave you. I will bless you. Trust in me and follow me. I will use you for my glory." At that time, I fell on my face before God and confessed my sin and said, "God, I will trust in you and follow you in all ways and in all times, please help and guide me".

The next day I did not go to the university. I faced opposition from my family and friends but by God's grace I was firm to my decision. I continued my pastoral work with the senior pastor. I was thinking and praying about why God had stopped me from my course of study and what was God's plan for me. I did not understand the plan of God at that time, but I believe that God was simply asking me to trust Him for my future. A few days later, I learned that ZBS (ZBI at that time) had shifted from Attock City to Rawalpindi and that they were offering part-time theological studies. I had a deep desire to learn the word of God. One day I visited ZBS and met with the principal (Rev. Barkat Pervaiz) and Professor Ashkenaz Asif and inquired about courses. They encouraged me to join ZBS full-time. My previous struggles began to make sense to me, so I talked with my pastor in charge, spent time in prayer, and then joined ZBI as a full-time student. The pastor in charge asked me to continue the pastoral ministry in DhokeSeydian brethren church, however.

In January 2001, I started my theological studies at ZBS. I grew deeply in my understanding of God's word and how to minister more effectively. I continued my pastoral work in Brethren Bethany Church DhokeSeydian till 2002. I finished my B. Th in three-years and God gave me the honor of receiving the best student award at my graduation.

I went to Peshawar the provincial capital of the Khyber Pakhton Khawa Province, as a church planter and a local missionary to the Christian colony Chirag Abad after my graduation. God was at work because after only a few months a small church was planted. Many lives were touched, and many drug addicts came to Christ through the ministry of this church plant. While serving in Peshawar, God arranged my life partner and I got married Silvia in 2005. She became a wonderful partner in the ministry with me. We worked in Peshawar from 2004 to 2008. God blessed us with a son, Sameer in Peshawar and then God gave us a son, Felix and daughter Sheryl in Rawalpindi. Silvia is teaching religious studies to Christian girls in a high school in Rawalpindi, run by the Dioceses of Lahore.

In 2008, God called us back to ZBS and I joined ZBS as a teacher. ZBS arranged for my further theological training in Sri Lanka, so I was sent to Lanka Bible College with family to do M.Div. studies. Silvia was also able to do some courses in Sri Lanka. I came back and started as a part-time faculty and I became Full-time Lecturer in 2012. I was sent by ZBS to Philippines for my M.Th. in Systematic Theology at the Asia Graduate School of Theology. Silvia was also able to complete a special certificate course at International Graduates School of Leadership (IGSL) in Manila. I completed the M.Th. degree and came back in 2014 and join again ZBS as faculty. At present I am enrolled for a PhD program at the Oxford Centre for and Religion and Public Life.

I was appointed Principal of Zarephath Bible Seminary on July 23, 2018.