

 **OpenDoors**

THE

[SECRET] CHURCH

EXPERIENCE

A resource for children and families

Sssh! Don't tell anyone but in some countries there are **SECRET** Christians.

They hide their Bibles and gather secretly in small groups so that they won't get into trouble. What if you had to be secret about being a Christian. How secret could you be?

Here's how to read the Bible, worship God and pray the secret church way:

To help you prepare...

To give you some background on the activities, you might find these videos and stories helpful.

- Parents in North Korea don't tell their children they are Christians, in case they tell others, but children might get involved in acting as look-outs without realising that it's for secret worship. See the Fast Food Second Course NORTH KOREA (suitable for younger children) **here**.
- They hide their Bibles for fear of discovery. **In this film** about Kim Sang-Hwa* (suitable for older children), she describes the day when, aged 12 years, she found a Bible in her house.
- Families in Iran meet secretly in small house churches. Kyana* (17 years old) from Iran, wrote **this song** herself, reflecting on what God was saying to her about her difficulties.
- Gideon was in prison in Eritrea. He wrote out Bible verses on toilet roll to share with others. He suffered severe punishment for this, but he endured it because of his belief that the Bible brings life. Read the full story **here**.
- Dok* was in prison in Laos for thirteen years. His wife used to bring him a basket of rice every day, secretly smuggling in Bible verses. Read Dok's story **here**.

There are lots more films, articles and resources at **www.opendoorsuk.org** and **www.opendoorsyouth.org**. Browse away! *names have been changed for security reasons

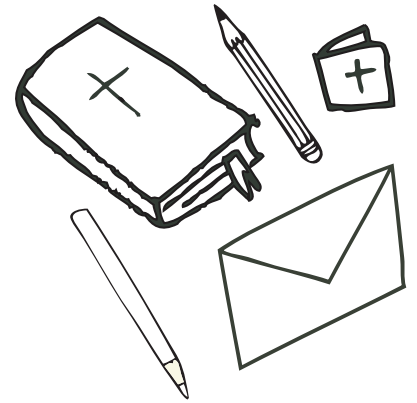
Summary

- 0.1 Hide everything that says you're a Christian.
- 0.2 Build a secret place to meet in.
- 0.3 Make a secret Bible container and hide a Bible in it.
- 0.4 Create a trail to your secret meeting place.
- 0.5 Read a Bible story so secret it doesn't mention Jesus.
- 0.6 Sing worship songs in whispers.
- 0.7 Learn a Bible verse and hide it in your sock.
- 0.8 Ask God to help you - and pray for others, too.
- 0.9 Share secret-style 'communion'.
- 1.0 After it's all over...

The Secret Church Experience

0.1 HIDE EVERYTHING THAT SAYS YOU'RE A CHRISTIAN

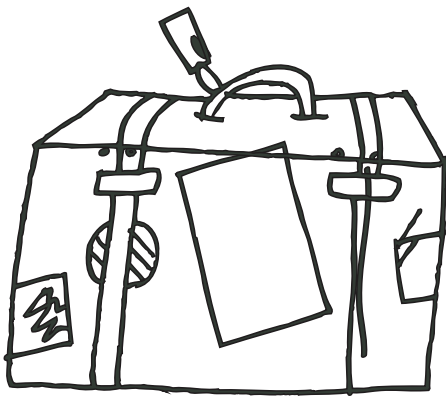
Look around your house. Can you see all the anything things that mark you as a Christian? Maybe there are books, pictures, jewellery, music, cards? If you find things like that, hide them away. They are evidence against you!



0.2 CREATE A SECRET PLACE TO MEET IN

Make a secret place for your secret church. You could make a den using:

- some old sheets or blankets hung over a washing stand or chairs
- a tent in your garden
- a shed
- the cupboard under the stairs, or another large cupboard
- behind the sofa
- under a table
- a tiny room with the curtains closed (use a torch to read by).



0.3 MAKE A SECRET BIBLE CONTAINER

In some countries, people have to hide their Bibles. Can you make a secret Bible container? You could try:

- decorating a shoe box to disguise it as a large book, a cushion or something else
- creating a 'false bottom' for a box - when you open the box, it looks like there's nothing inside, but when you lift up the bottom, you can find your secret things!
- using an empty food container, like a biscuit tin
- a big shoe, like a wellington boot
- if your den is outside, you could dig a hole and bury your things (put them in a waterproof container first!)

0.4 DEVISE A TRAIL TO YOUR SECRET MEETING PLACE

You've made your secret place. But how are other Christians going to find it?

Make up some clues and create a secret trail around your house using a code which leads you to a place where you can meet with your family. This symbol of a fish was used by secret Christians 2,000 years ago. Why not use that?



When you're ready, send a message to your family, inviting them to follow the trail. If you've got enough people, you could also appoint one to be a spy or secret policeman. Challenge your family to follow the trail without getting caught. This could be like a game of 'hide and seek' or 'sardines'. If you haven't got enough people, put a soft toy on guard outside the secret venue!

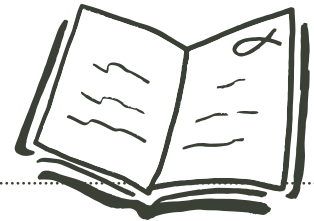
0.5 READ A STORY SO SECRET IT DOESN'T MENTION JESUS

Once you are all gathered silently inside, say a prayer of thanks and ask for God's protection, as secret believers do.

Now it's time to read the Bible. But in places like North Korea, it's too dangerous to mention Jesus or God, so Christians have to talk in coded ways to one another about Him. This Bible story (John 20: 19-23), has been rewritten to disguise who it's about.

Here's the code:

- **The One** = Jesus
- **Friends** = Jesus' disciples
- **Leader** = Lord
- **Father** = God



The One appears to his friends

¹⁹On the evening of that first day of the week, when the friends were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jewish leaders, The One came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!" ²⁰After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The friends were overjoyed when they saw their Leader. ²¹Again The One said, "Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you." ²²And with that he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Spirit of the Father. ²³If you forgive anyone's sins, their sins are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven." ²⁴Now Thomas (also known as the Twin), one of the Twelve, was not with the friends when The One came. ²⁵So the other friends told him, "We have seen The One!" But he said to them, "Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe."

²⁶A week later his friends were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, The One came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!" ²⁷Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe." ²⁸Thomas said to him, "My Leader and my Father!" ²⁹Then The One told him, "Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed." ³⁰The One performed many other signs in the presence of his friends, which are not recorded in this book. ³¹But these are written that you may believe that The One is The Special One, the Son of Our Father, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

0.6 SING WORSHIP SONGS IN WHISPERS

After He rose from the dead, Jesus could enter into a locked room. He often appears to people in the Middle East in dreams and visions as a man in white. Like Kyana, they respond to His love – and choose to follow him.

We sing worship songs at church. But for secret Christians, they mustn't be heard. So when they sing songs, they sing in a whisper.

Can you whisper worship as many secret Christians do? Secret Christians might not know many Christian songs as they might not have many opportunities to learn them.

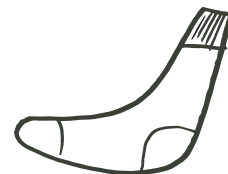
- Can you remember the first Christian songs you learned?
- Imagine you are only allowed to sing one worship song, which one would you choose, and why?
- Many Christian songs are based on parts of the Bible. Can you think of any?



0.7 LEARN A BIBLE VERSE AND HIDE IT IN YOUR SOCK

Christian prisoners value even the smallest part of the Bible, sometimes hiding verses on pieces of paper.

- Jumble up a Bible verse then put it back in the right order.
- Test yourself to see if you know it by taking some of the words away.
- Write out a verse on a piece of toilet roll like Gideon from Eritrea. Then hide it in your sock.



0.8 ASK GOD TO HELP YOU WITH ANYTHING YOU NEED - AND PRAY FOR OTHERS, TOO

Christians in China often start their meetings by asking one another about their problems and to share stories about how God is at work in their lives. Here are some different ways you could pray:

- Shoes off – thank God that by His Spirit He is with you right now, and pray that Christians who are meeting secretly would know God close to them.
- Kneel down – pray for protection for Christians who live in places where it's dangerous if they are found out to be a Christian. Pray that when persecuted Christians feel scared, that God would comfort them.
- Stand – pray for Christians who feel like they are standing alone and who are finding it hard to keep following Jesus. Pray that God would strengthen them and surround them in unexpected ways.
- Arms stretched – pray that more people would come to know Jesus. Pray that God would make Christians bold in sharing their faith.

0.9 SHARE SECRET-STYLE 'COMMUNION'

Everywhere around the world, Christians remember Jesus' death through bread and wine. Secret Christians do the same, but they might use biscuits and juice or crackers and honey instead of bread and wine. Alternatively, they use grapes or orange segments - the outside representing Christ's body and the inside, His blood.



- Look at pictures in an illustrated Bible to remind you of the disciples' last supper with Jesus.
- When you've finished, say the Lord's prayer quietly and leave your secret place one by one – you don't want to get caught!

1.0 AFTER IT'S ALL OVER...

Wherever you are, being a Christian is about being part of a family – a community - both with God but also with others. Often secret Christians find it really hard to have the regular Christian community we might find in church. Meeting another Christian can be rare and dangerous.



- Who encourages you to grow closer to God? Perhaps you could make a thank you card, telling them how they encourage you. Alternatively, you could make/draw/paint/write/take a photo of something to represent your secret church experience and share it with friends.
- To the right is a picture of secret believers' shoes, outside their secret church meeting. Perhaps you could take a photo of your shoes outside your secret meeting place and share it as a **#secretchurchselfie**

Whilst we know that the lockdown is temporary for us in the UK & Ireland, for many persecuted believers, isolation, fear, lack and exclusion are normal. As a global family we need to continue to pray for and support them. If you would like to raise money, as a family, for persecuted Christians, please visit our website for more information: **www.opendoorsuk.org**

Every £10 could mean five people are reached by the church through social media. Every £19 could provide vital Bibles for 15 believers from a Muslim background.