



OpenDoors

Finding family

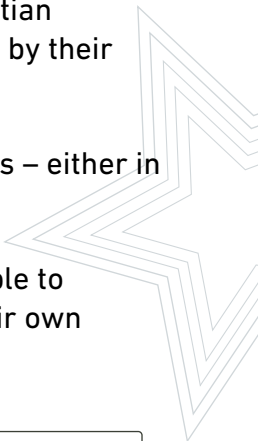
SMALL GROUP GUIDE

This guide accompanies our *Finding Family* Christmas Service sheet which takes participants through the Christmas story, with readings, carols, prayers and reflections.

Finding Family also introduces you to another Christmas story – that of a persecuted Christian family in Bangladesh. Badol*, Maya* and their two children Bijli* and Mohon* face rejection by their community, but are helped to find a place to celebrate.

This small group resource will help you to use *Finding Family* as a session for small groups – either in person or online.

Having spent so much of the year unable to meet together, perhaps this year we will be able to identify, as never before, with Christians who can never openly celebrate Christmas in their own communities.



★ HOW IT WORKS

Finding Family is split into five sections:

Roots - the journey to Bethlehem and the importance of families

Outcasts - the shepherds and how Jesus' birth is good news for marginalised people

Threat - Herod's reaction, and how Jesus' arrival is always a threat to kings and dictators

Joy - the visit of the Magi and how there is joy in the hardest places

Return - the journey back to Nazareth and the reality of sharing the gospel in everyday life

For each section, there is a Bible reading, a carol, a story about the family in Bangladesh, and a brief reflection and prayer.

In this guide you will also find:

- additional information about the Bible passage and the Bangladesh story
- a suggested activity and/or questions for reflection
- video links
- prayer topics and other resources for each of the five sections.

Check out opendoorsuk.org/findingfamily where you can also find the other resources mentioned in this guide.

*names changed for security reasons



★ A CHRISTMAS MEAL WITH A DIFFERENCE – FOR A CHRISTMAS UNLIKE ANY OTHER!

It's going to be a very different Christmas this year for all of us: so why not share a very different Christmas meal?

As we'll see, persecuted Christians in Bangladesh were able to join together for a Christmas dinner of daal, curry and rice. They also shared a birthday cake – to celebrate Jesus' birthday!

So, if it's possible to gather as a small group, why not have a *Finding Family* curry evening. Enjoy your very own Christmas curry, have a slice of Jesus' birthday cake, and use *Finding Family* to pray for your persecuted brothers and sisters around the world.

Of course, it may be that we cannot meet together physically. You can still use this small group outline online. (You can even all share a piece of cake – but it won't be the same, obviously!) All the activities can be done together, or remotely.

★ OH COME ALL YE SOCIALLY DISTANCED FAITHFUL

Finding Family includes the lyrics to several well-known carols. Each carol ties into the theme of the section. But carol singing presents us all with a challenge at the moment, so we'll leave it up to you as to whether you sing, listen to someone singing, or simply read the carols and reflect on the words.



Before you start:

- Make sure that everyone has a copy of *Finding Family*. You can download digital copies, printable pdfs, or order physical copies online.
- Work out which of the activities you are going to do. Some of them require paper and a pen. You might want to download the videos.
- Allocate the Bible readings among the participants if you want. You could also get different people to read out the different parts of the family's story from the service sheet.
- If you are going to share the Bangladeshi Christmas meal together, you will need to organise a curry!
- Similarly, if you are going to share the birthday cake together then you will need a cake. Or if you are meeting online, encourage everyone to have their own slice of cake and a candle.

FINDING FAMILY SMALL GROUP SESSION



★ 1. Finding Family: Roots



On the Service Sheet...

Scripture reading: Luke 2:4-7

Carol: Once in Royal David's City

Story: Read about Badol's family and his roots as a Christian.

FOR DISCUSSION...

Background

Joseph's family roots were the reason why he had to go to Bethlehem. He was descended from King David, and Bethlehem was the town where David had come from. But more importantly, Bethlehem is connected to the messiah – according to Micah 5:2, the messiah would come forth from this little town.

Activity

Get everyone to sketch their family tree on a piece of paper – as far as they know it. Some will know a lot about their 'roots'; others might know only a few family members.

Now ask people to reflect on the role their family has played in their faith history? Have they encouraged their Christian journey? Or have they opposed it?

Reflection

In the west, our family roots are less important than perhaps they used to be. But in many parts of the world your family is everything. It decides your social status, and even determines your job. Your family supports you through hard times and even provides your job. It's what gives you your identity.

So to be excluded from your family is very traumatic.

As Badol's story shows, for many persecuted Christians around the world, their family roots are torn up when they commit to following Jesus. So they need a new family. And not just in a symbolic way: they need their new, Christian family to provide for them, to support them and to give them a home.

Prayer

- Pray for the members of your family. Ask God to be with them wherever they are this Christmas.
- Pray for Christians around the world who are excluded from their families. Ask God to be with them at this time as well.



★ 2. Finding Family: Outcasts



On the Service Sheet...

Scripture: Luke 2:8-12

Carol: While Shepherds Watched Their Flocks

Story: Read about the way that Badol, Maya and their children are viewed within their village.

FOR DISCUSSION...

Background

In the first century world shepherds were seen as impure and unclean. They weren't in the fields just because of the sheep. They were marginalised, gossiped about, subject to rumours. The *Mishnah* – the second century collection of Jewish law – says of herdsmen that 'their trade is the trade of thieves'. Another list from around the same time includes them alongside other disreputable low-lives such as dice-players and tax-collectors. They were deprived of civil and legal rights; under law they could not be called as witnesses.

Activity

Think for a moment about our society. Who do we view as 'toxic' or 'unclean'? What would the good news be for them?

Reflection

The shepherds were outcasts. Yet God invites them to witness this birth. Throughout his teaching, Jesus used images of shepherds and herdsmen in positive ways. Perhaps he was thinking back to the stories of his birth, to the first guests who came through the door of the house where he was born.

Many Christians around the world are viewed with the same level of suspicion and hostility. They often find themselves forced to do the lowest level jobs in society. In Pakistan, for example, Christians are the sewage workers, forced to go down into the stinking drains. Or they are the brickmakers, working in little better than slave conditions.

But one of the amazing surprises of the Christmas story is that all the wrong people get to hear the good news first.

Prayer

- In a moment of silence let us remember all those who we are taught to view with suspicion.
- Let us pray God's blessing on the despised, the easy targets, the outsiders.



★ 3. Finding Family: Threat



On the Service Sheet...

Scripture: Matthew 2:1-2, 7-8

Song: We Three Kings

Story: Read about how Bijli is bullied at school, and the fear felt by the family.

FOR DISCUSSION...

Background

There is darkness in the Christmas story as well. And it comes in the form of a dying dictator.

Herod was a client-king: he was only in charge because he was useful to the Romans. He had played this diplomatic relationship skilfully throughout his life. But at the time of Jesus' birth, Herod was in the last months of his life. The historical accounts of his last days show him as ill, paranoid and even delusional at times. He suspected everyone. And he was not afraid to lash out and use his power in terrible ways to protect his legacy.

Activity

Who today would consider the message of Christmas a threat?

See if people can suggest modern-day 'Herods' around the world. Maybe they know the names of leaders or dictators who have set themselves against Christians.

Or maybe they can think of other 'types' of people who are a threat: religious extremists, local military leaders, people in authority.

What is it that scares them about Christianity?

Reflection

For persecuted Christians around the world the 'Herods' come in many forms. Some of these are doctors and national leaders. But much more often it is local leaders – village elders, tribal chiefs, policemen – who form the most potent threat. While for children, playground bullying and ostracism by their teachers make life very painful.

This is the reality for Bijli. She is bullied at school and the teachers ignore the situation.

Prayer

- Pray for all those who feel threatened today. Ask that God may grant them courage and strength.
- Jesus called on us to love our enemies and to pray for the persecutors. So pray also for the 'Herods'. Ask especially that the witness of Christians would change their hearts.

★ 4. Finding Family: Joy



On the Service Sheet...

Scripture: Matthew 2:9-12

Song: Oh Come All Ye Faithful

Story: Read about how the family joined with others to celebrate Jesus' birth.

FOR DISCUSSION...

Background

The Magi who visited Jesus are only described as coming 'from the east'. Although today they are known as the three kings, the Bible doesn't say how many there were, nor are they described as kings. Probably they came from the area that is modern-day Iran. They certainly faced a long journey: travelling hundreds of miles to this tiny backwater town in the middle of nowhere.

And when they reached their destination, they were overjoyed, and they knelt and worshipped.

Activity

Watch the video 'Finding Family'. You can find it at opendoorsuk.org/christmas. This shows Badol, Maya and the family travelling to their Christmas celebration last year.

Reflection

Have you ever made a long journey to celebrate Christmas with others? Perhaps this year travel restrictions will make long journeys impossible. Perhaps we will be unable to get together with those we love. Sometimes the journey to joy is long and difficult and even dangerous.

Many persecuted Christians routinely have to make difficult, risky journeys to meet and worship with others. For some, it might mean risking a visit to a secret house-church in another city; for others trekking into the mountains to meet up with other believers in a remote place. Often persecuted believers will travel for many days to gather together at Open Doors-supported training and worship events.

Badol and his family travelled to a Christmas celebration organised by Open Doors last year to meet with many other believers. It is the only place they can meet safely. Sadly, due to Coronavirus, the celebrations cannot take place this year.

Prayer

- Pray for the safety of believers who will risk gathering together to worship this Christmas.
- Pray that Badol and other believers in Bangladesh will not feel disheartened this Christmas, and that in 2021 they will be able to celebrate even more vibrantly and colourfully.

★ 5. Finding Family: Return



On the Service Sheet...

Scripture: Luke 2:16-20

Song: Hark! The Herald Angels Sing

Story: Read about Badol's determination to return and not to hide his faith.

FOR DISCUSSION...

Background

The return from Bethlehem was not easy. First, the family had to escape from Herod – fleeing over the border into Egypt and waiting until the old tyrant was dead. Then it was back to Nazareth, where, perhaps, the 'scandal' of the birth still lingered.

But as the gospel stories make clear, the birth is just the beginning. More people need to hear the good news.

Activity

What situation must you return to after Christmas? Are there plans you have been unable to do? Are there things that you need God's help to achieve? Perhaps there are difficulties to be overcome. Write down your hopes for the next year.

Reflection

Sometimes returning home is difficult.

For Badol and family, life back in the village became even harder. During lockdown, Badol lost his job. "We live from hand to mouth, so no work means no food," says Badol.

Because of his faith, he and his family were overlooked when government aid was distributed in their village. Thankfully, his Open Doors family stepped in to provide the family with emergency aid.

And the message of that Christmas celebration remains true for all of us: God is with us, and has promised never to leave us. Despite the difficulties and the danger, millions of persecuted Christians around the world still dare to follow Jesus. The child laid in the manger is much more dangerous than we realise. How far are we prepared to go to be identified as a follower of Jesus?

Prayer

- Look at the hopes you have written down. Offer them up to God. Remember that, whatever we face, God is with us.
- Ask God to be with our persecuted church family. Remember especially children like Bijli and Mohon, growing up in areas of persecution and discrimination.

★ And in conclusion... CAKE!

Maya says, "I love the songs, cutting the cake, I love everything! When we come here we have joy and peace, we sing songs and dance. We do not get to celebrate like this in the village."

Bijli says, "I like the songs, dancing and celebrating Jesus' birthday."

As a final act of thankfulness, why not share a piece of birthday cake?

Blow out a candle, enjoy the cake, and give thanks that Badol, Maya and their children were able to celebrate with others.



TAKING IT FURTHER

The fact that the family were able to get together with others was a wonderful gift – made possible by the prayers and support of many Open Doors supporters around the world. Persecuted believers in Bangladesh won't be able to gather in the same way this year, but they and other families around the world will receive help in other ways.

Find out more about how you can support our family around the world at opendoorsuk.org.

For persecuted Christians around the world, 'family' isn't just a nice metaphor; it's a living reality. They need a new family. They need people to care for them, support them, pray for them, celebrate with them.

At Christmas, we all need to find our family.