

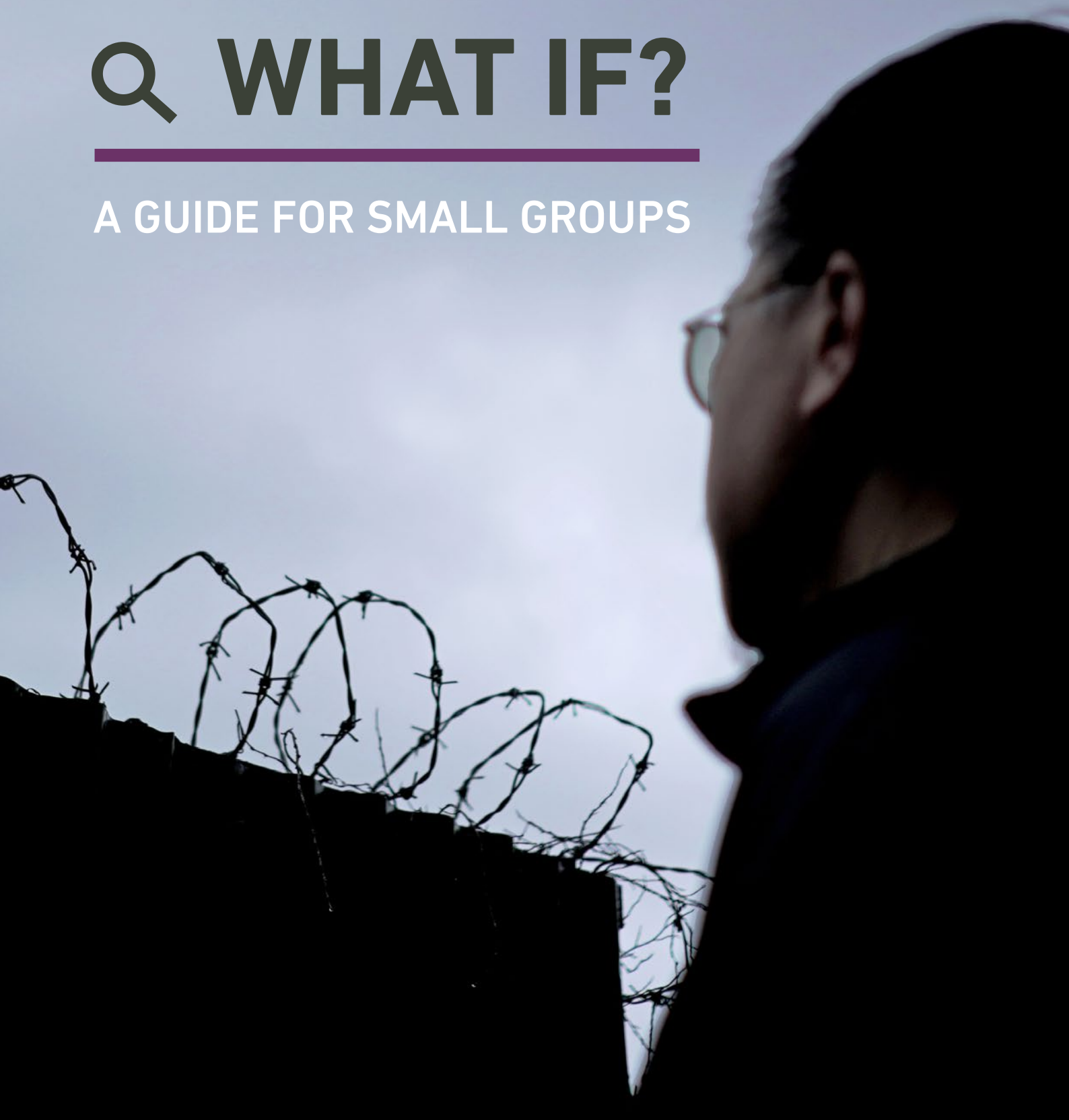


**WORLD  
WATCH  
LIST**  
2021

# Q WHAT IF?

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A GUIDE FOR SMALL GROUPS



## Q WHAT IS A CHURCH?

## Q WHAT DOES IT LOOK LIKE?

## Q WHAT IF EVERYTHING WAS TAKEN AWAY?

**During the pandemic, we have all been forced to rethink our idea of what constitutes church.**

**As the saying goes: 'Church isn't the building. Church is what is left when the building disappears.' And this is true: the church is community. But let's be honest: no-one really thought the buildings would disappear.**

And then they did. Sort of.

With Covid, we all lost the use of our church buildings – at least for a time. And church had to find a new shape, and very quickly.

We entered a world where church leaders needed to interpret government regulations and where services had to be streamed online. A world where, when people could gather physically at all, it took a lot of thought and planning. And, even then, services took place in unusual locations: in gardens, in car parks, out on walks. This year, for our Christmas services, some of us even had to book places!

We entered a different, much more challenging world.

And, in a way, we entered the world of the underground church.

Millions of Christians around the world cannot meet openly at any time, never mind in a pandemic. They live in places where Christianity is forbidden – or, at the very least, viewed with hostility and suspicion. They are always having to dodge regulations and laws.

In such places, the church is constantly re-shaping

itself. In recent years, the church in China has found itself facing increased regulation and oppressive surveillance. So many of the big churches have splintered into smaller, less visible house churches. As one of their church leaders, Caleb, says:

*"Many house churches are like water in a river. Whenever an obstacle is encountered, they will not fight it. Instead, they stream past the obstacles and change course, but still continue to flow towards the big ocean, which is the Great Commission. The ultimate destination never changes. It is just the way we do church is adjusted or modified, to sustain the continuous growth of the kingdom against all odds."*

This resource looks at the ways in which the church around the world flows around different obstacles.

What does a worship service look like when it happens in secret?

What does solitary confinement teach you about prayer?

How do you read the Bible if you don't have one?

How do you tell the world about Jesus when there are spies everywhere?

What does it cost us to be disciples of Christ?

In exploring the answers to these questions, we shall also have a chance to reflect on how we act as a gathered Christian community, both during Covid and beyond.



# ABOUT THIS RESOURCE

There are six questions we will be exploring in this resource:

- 🔍 **Session 1: What if your church was closed down?**
- 🔍 **Session 2: What if you had to follow Christ on your own?**
- 🔍 **Session 3: What if you couldn't own a Bible?**
- 🔍 **Session 4: What if family members turned against you because of your faith?**
- 🔍 **Session 5: What if you could not talk openly about Jesus?**
- 🔍 **Session 6: What if following Jesus meant making sacrifices?**

- The sessions have been designed for small groups to be able to do either physically together, or remotely over Zoom or Skype.
- For each session there is an outline plan with discussion questions, activities, videos and Bible reflection
- There is also a takeaway set of prayers and a reflective practice to engage with during the following week
- For leaders there are extra stories, information about the persecuted church and biblical background material which can be shared as necessary
- There is also a set of powerpoint slides to accompany the activities, discussions and reflections. You will see this icon in the guide where there is an accompanying slide. Download the powerpoint at [opendoorsuk.org/whatif](https://opendoorsuk.org/whatif).



## PRAYING WITH THE WORLD WATCH LIST

- In each session there is an opportunity to use the Open Doors World Watch List Top 50 booklet to pray for persecuted Christians. You can order copies of these at [opendoorsuk.org](https://opendoorsuk.org). It would be good if you could encourage each member of your group to order a free copy.
- If you do not have a copy, you can still pray using the World Watch List by visiting the relevant pages on the Open Doors website. You will find them at [opendoorsuk.org/persecution](https://opendoorsuk.org/persecution).



## THANK YOU

We've been amazed at the way in which churches have adapted during this time, not to mention very thankful for your continued, committed support of your persecuted brothers and sisters. It's been a challenging time for us all. But it is also a unique opportunity for us to reflect on how our experiences help us to understand the world of the persecuted church. And, along the way, to think again about how we are, in Caleb's words, sustaining 'the continuous growth of the kingdom against all odds'.



## Q SESSION 1

### Q WHAT IF YOUR CHURCH WAS CLOSED DOWN?

#### 1.1 INTRODUCTION

There was a time when questions like these were hypothetical! But, of course, during the pandemic our churches have been closed. (And even before Covid, churches in some more remote, rural areas faced a struggle in keeping the doors open.) But lockdown has focused our minds on what church looks like without a building. It has created enormous challenges – and enormous opportunities.

##### DISCUSS



- **What has been your experience of church during lockdown?**
- **What have been the difficulties? Has it brought new opportunities?**

Whatever our experiences of lockdown, it has also given us a little taste of what life is like for many persecuted Christians around the world.

#### 1.2 THE WORLD OF THE PERSECUTED CHURCH

For many Christians in the countries in the World Watch List Top 50, meeting in a designated church building is simply not an option.

This might be for a number of reasons:

**Building churches is not allowed.** In places where Christianity is forbidden, it would be completely

impossible to build a church. There are no church buildings in Afghanistan, for example. Even in places where the persecution is less intense, like Bhutan, Christians are simply not allowed to build a church.

**It's dangerous to identify yourself as a Christian.**

Daniel, a young believer from North Africa, has to meet covertly with others. "We cannot show ourselves to society," he says. "When we meet in a house, we need security. People cannot all come at the same time or via the same route. We can't park a lot of cars close to a house." He also meets with groups of two or three in cafés. They cannot do anything that identifies them as Christians. No Bibles on the table. No praying with their eyes closed. They read their Bibles on mobile phones.

**Churches have been closed by the government or local authorities.**

In recent years, the government in Algeria has closed about a dozen churches. In Egypt, churches have been closed on the grounds that they have been built illegally.

**Churches have been violently attacked.** In places like sub-Saharan Africa, church buildings have been targeted and destroyed by extremists. Many people have been driven from their homes into camps for internally displaced people.

**It's impossible to meet without surveillance.** To go to church is to identify yourself as a Christian. In China, the government is increasingly putting surveillance measures inside the churches. Those identified as Christians might face problems with their employment or education. They might be 'visited' by officials. So more and more churches are choosing to meet elsewhere.



### 1.3 VIDEO: HOW DO CHRISTIANS RESPOND IN THESE PLACES?

In all these cases, Christians have not given up meeting.

They meet in houses or apartments. They gather on remote mountainsides, or deep in the jungle. They disguise their meetings so that services look like simple meals or baptisms look like swimming parties.

#### WATCH

Go to [opendoorsuk.org/whatif](https://opendoorsuk.org/whatif)

Share these videos:



- **A secret baptism in Bangladesh**



- **Indigenous believers in Colombia worshipping in a secret jungle location**



- **China: No under-18s allowed**

The first two videos are short snippets of actual underground church services. The third video – ‘China: No under-18s allowed’ – shows how Christians in China are responding to increasing restrictions on meeting.

*“All these young people can rise to be a better, stronger, more faithful Christian when they have gone through this persecution.”*

#### RESPOND

- **What impacts you most from these videos?**
- **How have the Christians in China responded to the shutting down of their church?**
- **Using the information and prayer points in your World Watch List Top 50 booklet, spend some time praying for Christians in China.**

### 1.4 BIBLE: A VISIT TO TROAS

#### READ



- **Acts 20:7–12**

In Acts 20, there is the only depiction of an actual church meeting in the New Testament. (Paul gives us hints in his letters about what their services contained, but this is the only time we see a church meeting in action.) Obviously the miraculous nature of the story is pretty impressive! But let’s focus on the setting and the style of the meeting.

#### REFLECT



- **When did the meeting take place?**
- **Where did the meeting take place?**
- **Who was there?**
- **What kinds of things did they do in the meeting?**

The historical and social context tells us a little bit more about what was going on.

**When:** Luke says that it was ‘on the first day of the week’ – he means ‘the first of the Sabbath’, the same phrase Luke uses to describe the day of the resurrection (Luke 24:1). So we are talking about a Sunday. And probably in the evening, since the torches were lit. Sunday was not a day off – it didn’t become so until AD 321. This was a working day.

**Where:** On the third floor of a building. This was in one of the *insulae*, which were Roman apartment blocks. The poorer people lived on the third and uppermost floors of these apartments, which were often shoddily built. So the church at Troas was small enough to meet in a third-floor apartment. It was not until Christianity became legally approved within the Roman Empire in AD 315 that church buildings became the norm. And in many societies around the world, the situation is exactly the same today as it was within the Roman Empire in Paul’s day. You cannot have an ‘official’ church building. You have to meet elsewhere.

**Who:** The only two people mentioned in the text are Paul and a young man called Eutychus. The key thing is that ‘Eutychus’ is a slave’s name. Ironically, given what happens to him, it means ‘lucky’! Eutychus would have been working all day, so it was no surprise that in a room lit only with oil lamps, he dozed off. One of the things about the early church which shocked the society around them was that women and slaves were given equal weight in proceedings. This is a community of radical equality.

**What:** In most versions of the Bible, you will find Paul 'speaking to them' or 'addressing them' or 'preaching until midnight' (Acts 20:7). It gives the impression that Paul's sermon went on and on, until the young man was literally bored to death. But the Greek word is *dialogomai*, which means 'discussion' (and from which we get our word 'dialogue'). This was not a sermon as we would imagine it, but a discussion.

They also broke bread together. The implication is that they shared the thanksgiving meal (20:11), but communion meals for the early church were also proper meals.

What we have here is much closer to a house group meeting or even a church supper than a modern church service.

## 1.5 WHAT IF THEY CLOSED DOWN YOUR CHURCH?

As we said at the start, we have all been exiled from our church at one time or another in recent months. But what if that change were permanent? What if, even after Covid, we couldn't go back?

Where would you go?

Distribute this message to all members of the group. If you are on Zoom, you can put it into the chat. Or you could send it to the group via email or text.

### BY ORDER OF THE PEOPLE

According to Regulation 4.42 of the revised Penal Code all unregistered places of worship must close. Similarly, all buildings built without the required permissions will be confiscated.

Your church is unregistered. It has therefore been closed with immediate notice.

We also note that, as no planning approval, deed of ownership or building regulations have ever been lodged at the local Land Agency, the building is now confiscated and is the official property of the Party. Any attempt to continue use of the premises will be considered a criminal offence.

There is no appeal.

By order  
Deputy Director of Religious Affairs

## ACTIVITY



The church building has been closed. But you decide you are going to continue meeting.

As a group, come up with a plan for next week's church meeting.

- **You can't use your church, so where are you going to meet?**
- **Are there any places near you that suggest themselves? Or even places that might actually enhance the experience and say something about God?**
- **What will the service look like?**
- **How will you let people know where to gather?**
- **How will you pray together? Or read the Bible? What would the teaching look like?**

Once you've suggested a place consider:

- **What would be the major challenges?**
- **What new opportunities would it create?**

## 1.6 YOUR 'WHAT IF?' CHALLENGE

What if you held a service exactly like the one you've described?

**If you've come up with a great idea for an alternative church service – and an unusual a place to hold it - why not plan to actually do it?**

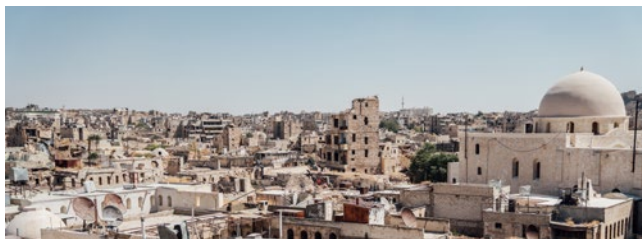
You may be surprised at the results. There is no doubt that Christians around the world desperately wish to have the freedom to gather together for worship. But they also have found that there are other ways to be a church. And these ways can be surprisingly powerful.

### WHAT IF YOU COULD MAKE A DIFFERENCE?

In northern Syria, Rajan shared how persecution actually led to a different form of church and a wider audience.

*"Our church in Sheikh Maksoud [a part of the city of Aleppo] was closed by the Kurdish party," he said. "This made many new Kurds join the church out of curiosity as they wanted to know what those people of the closed church believe. Therefore, I learned something and that was exceedingly reassuring to me - that God uses every single act of persecution for His glory."*

This week, visit [opendoorsuk.org](https://opendoorsuk.org) to find out how your prayers and support can help Christians who cannot meet openly.



## 1.7 TAKEAWAY: ONE ACTION - SEVEN PRAYERS

### ONE ACTION

If possible, why not go to the place that you decided on for your church and pray there? Maybe it will be possible for you to meet as a group, but, if not, go alone.

### SEVEN PRAYERS

**This week, pray for Christians who are denied the right to worship freely.**

**Day 1:** Pray for those in countries where Christians must remain hidden. Guide them so that they find others to worship with.

**Day 2:** Pray for those who are denied the right to build churches. May the laws be reformed and justice prevail.

**Day 3:** Pray for those whose churches have been destroyed and who have been driven from their homes. Lord, please help them to rebuild their church, wherever they find themselves.

**Day 4:** Pray for those who are scared to extend church because of surveillance. May they find new places to worship and Christians with whom to share.

**Day 5:** Pray for those who must travel far to find a safe space to worship. Keep them safe from detection.

**Day 6:** Pray for church leaders who have to find new ways to meet with their flock. May they be courageous and clever in their approach.

**Day 7:** Give thanks for the faithfulness of our persecuted brothers and sisters. Thank you, Lord, that the church cannot be constrained within a building, but that everywhere, Christians are finding new ways to be part of the kingdom of God.



## Q SESSION 2

### Q WHAT IF YOU HAD TO FOLLOW CHRIST ON YOUR OWN?

## 2.1 INTRODUCTION

How do you keep fit?

Do you exercise regularly? Go to the gym? Play sports?

For many of us, one of the challenges of lockdown is keeping fit. Some people have tried new things: online fitness classes or pilates by Zoom. Others have walked more, or taken up cycling.

### DISCUSS



- **How have you kept fit during lockdown?**
- **Have you found it hard having to exercise on your own?**

What about our spiritual fitness regime? How has that been going?

One of the most important benefits of gathering together in church is that it keeps us all more motivated. In the Bible, the writer of Hebrews exhorts his readers and listeners to 'consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another...' (Hebrews 10:24-25).

Perhaps the single biggest challenge for persecuted Christians around the world is isolation. In countries where you must keep your faith hidden, or where you are thrown into prison for following Jesus, spending time with other believers is almost impossible. They cannot meet together. For them, the spiritual 'gyms' are always closed and they are always running alone.

## 2.2 THE WORLD OF THE PERSECUTED CHURCH

Isolation is a common experience for persecuted Christians. For untold thousands of Christians around the world, theirs is a solitary faith.

They might be on their own for a number of reasons:

### **It is too dangerous to tell anyone else of your faith.**

Sharing with your family might mean expulsion or punishment. Or it might be too risky. In North Korea it is not uncommon for Christian parents to hide their faith from their children, or even to hide their faith from each other.

**You are hidden from sight.** Sometimes people can be confined within their own homes, by their own families. In many Muslim cultures, becoming a Christian brings shame on the family. Those who do so are often hidden away.

**You are imprisoned.** Many Christians find themselves imprisoned for their faith. Sometimes they are forbidden to talk to others, often they are in solitary confinement.

**There are hardly any Christians in the country.** In Libya, for example, there are probably only 150 Libyan Christians in the entire country.





## 2.3 VIDEO: HOW DO CHRISTIANS RESPOND IN THESE PLACES?



### WATCH

- Go to [opendoorsuk.org/whatif](https://opendoorsuk.org/whatif)
- **Share the video of Islèm\*, a secret believer from North Africa.**

Islèm has to hide her faith. Even her own father doesn't know she is a Christian. When she was trying to find out about Jesus there was no-one to ask. And when she became a Christian, she thought she was the only one.

*"I thought there were no Christians in North Africa. I thought I was the first person who might become a Christian in North Africa."*

\*Name changed for security purposes

### RESPOND

- **What impacts you most from this video?**
- **Why is being part of a community so important to Islèm?**
- **Using the information and prayer points in your World Watch List Top 50 booklet, spend some time praying for Christians in North African countries such as Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia and Libya,**

## 2.4 BIBLE: ON THE TRAINING GROUND

Several times in the New Testament the Christian life is likened to training or learning.

To be a disciple is to be an apprentice or a trainee – that's really what the word means. Which is why Jesus says: "The student is not above the teacher, but everyone who is fully trained will be like their teacher." (Luke 6:40) The goal of church is to train us all to be more Christlike.

Paul, and other New Testament writers, used the metaphor of training. Sometimes Christians are trained by our own practice and habits, other times the 'training' comes from external events, from the things that happen to us.

### READ



- **1 Corinthians 9:24–27**
- **1 Timothy 4:7–10**
- **Hebrews 12:7–11**

### REFLECT



- **What kinds of things do you think Paul did as part of his 'training regime'?**
- **When the writer of Hebrews talks about hardship 'training' us, what do you think he means? And how might it produce 'peace' and 'righteousness'?**
- **How might we train to be godly?**

## 2.5 ACTIVITY: WHAT IS YOUR CHRISTIAN TRAINING REGIME?

The challenge continually faced by the persecuted church is 'How do we train on our own?'

For those who have to keep their faith secret, and for those who have been identified and placed into solitary confinement, the challenge is the same: How do you live out your faith in solitary confinement, where it's just you and God?

What if we were in the same position? What if we could not meet with others to train in godliness? How would we do it?

### ACTIVITY



Imagine that you are excluded from seeing others and practicing the faith together. Maybe, like many of our brothers and sisters around the world you under house arrest, or in solitary confinement. Or, perhaps, like Islèm in the video, you simply do not know of other Christians.

- **Draw up a list of spiritual exercises which people could do on their own to train in Christlikeness – ways of praying, learning, worshipping which can be done as individuals.**

Perhaps there are some that you are already doing – a daily time or prayer or Bible reading for example. But there might be others which you would want to add in as well. Perhaps something which you have always wanted to try?

## SHARE THIS STORY

### Build yourself a cell

*When Chinese pastor Wang Ming Dao was finally released from prison in 1980, he had spent 23 years behind bars. By then he was 80, very frail, nearly blind and all-but-deaf.*

*Amazingly, he called those years his 'honeymoon with Jesus'.*

*Ron Boyd-Macmillan, Director of Strategic Research at Open Doors International, met Wang Ming Dao a few years before his death and talked to him about his experiences.*

*"At first, he was devastated to be in the cell, wishing to write, publish, preach and even make records with his fine singing voice. All this was taken from him, and he said, 'I had to just learn to love Jesus'. He explained it this way, 'Persecution is not great in itself; it's what it does that brings a benefit, and its benefit is to strip away life's distractions so that it is just you, and Christ, and nothing else. The nurturing of that relationship then becomes the priority – that's why a cell works so well.'"*

*Ron believes that the challenge from Wang Ming Dao is to 'build ourselves a cell'.*

*"A cell," he says, "is any situation where distractions are ruthlessly minimised, so that the focus can fall squarely on the knowing and enjoyment of Jesus."*

## 2.6 YOUR 'WHAT IF?' CHALLENGE

What if you put your new regime into practice?

**Your challenge this week is to take one of the spiritual exercises suggested in your group – something new to you, maybe – and try it out on your own.** (You can do more if you like, but trying out one new thing is enough to start with!)

Or, to put it another way, to build yourself a cell and spend some time there.

It may be that you find this difficult or unwelcome. Maybe, even for those who enjoy solitude, lockdown has given us more than enough of being on our own, thank you very much.

But this is training for beyond lockdown. Even when life returns, perhaps the challenge to us all is to build a cell, because those daily rituals of spending time with God are a crucial part of our training in discipleship.

## WHAT IF YOU COULD MAKE A DIFFERENCE?

Around the world, many Christians feel isolated, alone and forgotten. But you can let them know that they are not on their own. What if, this week, you sent a message of encouragement and support to a persecuted Christian?

Find out about our latest letter-writing campaigns at [opendoorsuk.org/act/letter](https://opendoorsuk.org/act/letter)

## 2.7 TAKEAWAY: ONE ACTION - SEVEN PRAYERS

### ONE ACTION

**Take one item from your solo spiritual training ideas and try it out.** Commit to doing it every day if you can. Reflect – has it helped? What have you learnt? Will it become part of your spiritual training programme going forward?

### SEVEN PRAYERS

**This week, pray for Christians who have to follow Christ alone.**

**Day 1:** Pray for those seeking answers about Jesus in countries where Christian material is hard to find. May they find the answers to their questions.

**Day 2:** Pray for those who have to keep their faith secret from their own families. May they know that there is a greater family to which they belong.

**Day 3:** Pray for those who believe that they are the only Christians for miles around. May they safely and securely make contact with others.

**Day 4:** Pray for those Christians who are in solitary confinement in prisons. Lord, please bring them comfort and peace.

**Day 5:** Pray for those who provide online support to isolated Christians everywhere. Give them wisdom and inventiveness in communicating the truth

**Day 6:** Pray for those who have been locked away by their own families because of their faith. Keep them strong, Lord, in following you.

**Day 7:** Give thanks for the courage and endurance of witnesses like Isl  m and Wang Ming Dao. Thank you, Lord, that everywhere Christians are discovering that, however separated they are from their Christian family, they can never be separated from You.



### 3.1 INTRODUCTION

Owning a Bible. It's part of the Christian life. In fact, many of us own more than one.

#### DISCUSS



- **How many Bibles do you have in your house?**
- **Do you have more than one? More than five? Why?**
- **What is your favourite Bible passage?**

In our society Bibles are easy to buy and read. But in other parts of the world, a Bible is a dangerous object. It is a book that changes lives.

### 3.2 THE WORLD OF THE PERSECUTED CHURCH

Many Christians living in the countries on the World Watch List find it hard, if not impossible, to get hold of the Bible.

This might be for a number of reasons:

**The Bible is illegal.** In North Korea it's a crime to own a Bible. If you are discovered with a Bible in your house you will be arrested or even killed. So most Bibles are hidden, even buried underground.

**The Bible is heavily restricted.** In most countries on the World Watch List there is no overt statement that says the Bible is legally banned. Instead, they effectively ban the Bible in other ways. Brunei, for example, has an import ban on Bibles. In China they have banned the

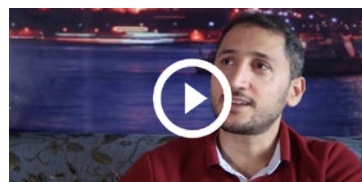
sale of Bibles online. Other countries ban its translation into local languages.

**Owning a Bible is dangerous.** Far more frequently it doesn't matter what the law says, or what the regulations are. In places where the family or tribe is all-powerful, if you are found possessing a Bible, you can get beaten, fined, arrested. Even in India, Christians have had their Bibles taken from them and burned.

Even when owning a Bible is technically 'legal', it is still a dangerous substance. It can be taken at any time, and the owners arrested.

And yet, the desire – the need to own a copy of the Bible remains.

### 3.3 VIDEO: MOJTABA'S STORY



#### WATCH

- Go to [opendoorsuk.org/whatif](https://opendoorsuk.org/whatif)
- Share the story of Mojtaba, a persecuted Christian from Iran.

Mojtaba was arrested for leading a secret house church and incarcerated in the Adel-Abaad Prison, in a city called Shiraz, for over three years.

The one thing he really wanted was a Bible. How could anyone bring one into the prison? But, as you'll see in the video, God had the most unusual solution...

*"We don't want anything. Just a Bible."*

#### RESPOND

- What impacts you most from this video?
- Why do you think a Bible was the one thing Mojtaba wanted?
- Using the information and prayer points in your World Watch List Top 50 booklet, spend some time praying for Christians in Iran.

### 3.4 BIBLE: PASS IT ON

If you became a follower of Jesus in the first few years after His death and resurrection, what resources would you have? You didn't have any books about 'being an early Christian' – people were still working out what that was all about. There were the Jewish scriptures, of course – what we call the Old Testament – but most people would only hear those read out in the synagogue. And the New Testament hadn't been written.

What you had were the stories. And your memory.

#### READ



- 1 Corinthians 15:1–8
- Philippians 2:5–11
- Romans 15:3–4

#### REFLECT



- Paul 'passed on' to the church at Corinth what he received. But where might he have got these stories from?
- The passage from Philippians is probably an early church creed or hymn. Why do you think the early church needed to remember things like this?
- What, according to Paul, is the use of 'everything that was written in the past'?

We don't know who taught Paul what he is passing on here. Perhaps it was Ananias and the disciples in Damascus where he was first converted (Acts 9:10–20).

Whoever it was, it was important to him to pass it on accurately.

Most early Christians could not read or write. But non-literate cultures tend to have very good ways of memorising and recalling stories, sayings and history. One of the best ways to remember is through music which may be why the early church put such an emphasis on hymns.

Today, Open Doors supports many literacy programmes which help Christians to read their Bibles. But we also train persecuted Christians to memorise the Bible – which is vital in cultures where owning a Bible puts you at risk.



### 3.5 WHAT IF YOU WEREN'T ALLOWED TO OWN A BIBLE?

Back to the story of Mojtaba. Mojtaba tells the story of how he asked a friendly Imam to bring him a Bible. Bringing in a whole Bible was too dangerous, but he brought in portions of the Bible in English. The guards thought they were just English lessons.

With the help of a friend, Mojtaba translated them, and shared them with other prisoners. Through these smuggled snippets of scripture, more and more prisoners gave their lives to Jesus.

What if, this week, all you have are smuggled snippets of scripture?

#### ACTIVITY



Imagine that you are in prison with Mojtaba. You do not have a Bible.

- At the beginning of this session, you shared your favourite Bible story, or verses. Now take a piece of scrap paper and write down that passage or story on it. (You can look it up or do it from memory.)
- Spend a few moments in silence reading the passage quietly to yourself.



### 3.6 VIDEO: AMINA'S STORY

#### WATCH

- If you have time, go to [opendoorsuk.org/whatif](https://opendoorsuk.org/whatif)

NB: This video does have some images which people might find upsetting.

There you can watch the story of Amina and her sons in Nigeria. When they were attacked by Boko Haram, they remembered verses from the Bible.



#### RESPOND

- What impacts you most from this video?
- How did remembering Bible verses help Amina and her sons in this situation?
- Using the information and prayer points in your World Watch List Top 50 booklet, spend some time praying for Christians in Nigeria.

### 3.6 YOUR 'WHAT IF?' CHALLENGE

What if you only had your hand-written piece of scripture? What if that was the only Bible you were allowed?

For the next week, these bits of paper will be the only Bible that you read.

During the week your challenge is to do two things.

- **Carry your bit of Bible with you.** Treat it as precious, as precious as the scraps of scripture which were smuggled in to Mojtaba and his friends in prison. Read it as often as you can. Maybe you want to try to learn it.
- **Smuggle these scriptures to your fellow 'prisoners'.** Find a way to share your chosen scripture around with the others in your group. In prison, Mojtaba and his friends would translate the scriptures and then pass them around. Could you text a photo of your piece of paper to someone else in your group? Could you write a copy out and post it to them?

Above all, ask God to speak to you this week through this simple piece of scripture. Whatever passage you have chosen, have faith that God will speak to you through the stories.

#### WHAT IF YOU COULD MAKE A DIFFERENCE?

Millions of Christians around the world are denied freedom to worship or to own a Bible. Your voice can make a difference. What if you used your freedom to write to your MP about these basic issues of freedom? Go to [opendoorsuk.org/about/how-we-help/advocacy/](https://opendoorsuk.org/about/how-we-help/advocacy/) to find out about our latest advocacy campaigns.

### 3.7 TAKEAWAY: ONE ACTION-SEVEN PRAYERS

#### ONE ACTION

**Keep your handwritten piece of the Bible with you this week.** Meditate on it. Maybe even learn it. Listen for God speaking through it. Share it with others as you can.

#### SEVEN PRAYERS

**This week, pray for Christians who are denied the right to own a Bible.**

**Day 1:** Pray for Christians who have to hide their Bibles from the authorities. Lord, may these precious scriptures remain hidden.

**Day 2:** Pray for those who smuggle Bibles into countries where scriptures are forbidden. Grant them courage, Lord, and protect them from discovery.

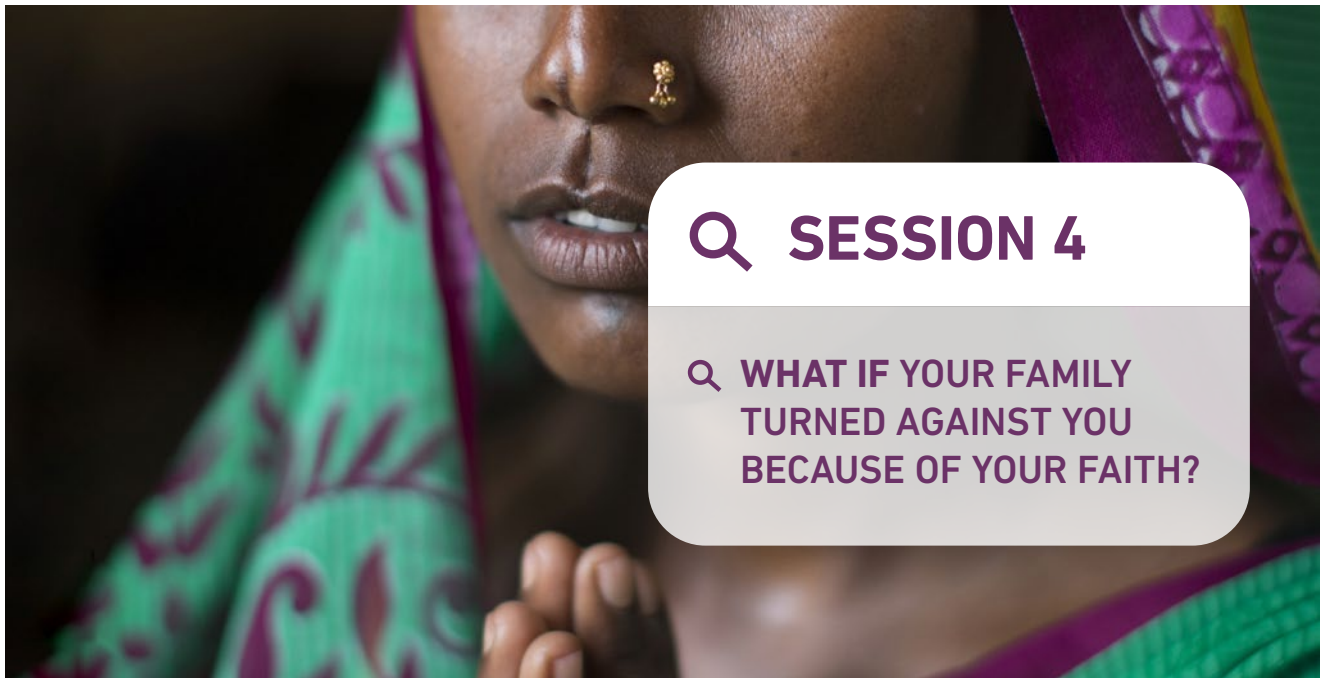
**Day 3:** Pray for those who are denied Bibles in prison. May they find ways to read the Bible and to remember the stories.

**Day 4:** Pray for those who translate the Bible into other languages. Give them wisdom Lord, and creativity to find the right words and images.

**Day 5:** Pray for those who try to ban the Bible. Holy Spirit, please challenge them to change their hearts, and may they pass laws which allow for more freedom.

**Day 6:** Pray for those who provide the Bible in other ways - through audio or digital means. May more and more Christians access these materials and encounter You on the internet or on their phones.

**Day 7:** Give thanks for the power of the Bible to change lives. Help us Lord, to provide the scriptures for those around the world who desperately want them. Let us not take for granted the power of Your word to bring order into chaos, light into darkness, and hope out of despair.



## Q SESSION 4

### Q WHAT IF YOUR FAMILY TURNED AGAINST YOU BECAUSE OF YOUR FAITH?

### 3.1 INTRODUCTION

What defines you? What gives you your identity?

#### ACTIVITY



Prove your identity!

- **Ask people to find, or list, different ways of proving their identity.**

**If you are doing this via Zoom**, and people are at home, give people five minutes to gather as many documents as they can which prove their identity. Reassure them that they don't have to post pictures or share details! Just ask them to gather things like:

- proof of address
- family background
- educational qualifications
- job title
- any other means of identification!

**If you are doing this in person in another venue**, then ask people to list as many of these types of document as they can. Perhaps they have some items in their purse or wallet which might prove their ID.



#### DISCUSS



**What do these documents show about**

- **your family background**
- **your education**
- **your right to live where you do**
- **your entitlement to things like health care or insurance**
- **your job**

Our identity is very important. As citizens we have certain rights and entitlements. Our family or educational background means a lot. These can't be easily taken away from us.

But for Christians in the persecuted church, identity is a lot more complicated. For them the most important thing is family.

In virtually all the countries on the World Watch List the family – and its wider extension in terms of a tribe or clan – decides everything for you. It decides your social status, your job, who you will marry, what kind of education you will get and where you will live. It will look after you when you are sick or old. When you are in need, your family is who you turn to.

But when you become a Christian all that can disappear.

As a Central Asian Christian once said, "Our family is our papers: our passport, our social security – everything. So, if that is taken away, what do we have?"

## 4.2 THE WORLD OF THE PERSECUTED CHURCH

Many Christians find themselves ostracised, rejected or even attacked and killed by their families when they make the choice to follow Jesus.

This might be for a number of reasons:

**Becoming a Christian is seen as betraying your heritage.** To change your religion is to betray your family's history and traditions. When Tashi\* from Bhutan became a Christian, his relatives shouted, "What wasn't enough for you that you left our ancestral gods?" Tashi says "Our own relatives spat on us and the people in our village scorned us." \*Name changed for security purposes

**Becoming a Christian is seen as shameful.** Becoming a Christian is perceived as bringing dishonour and shame on a family or clan. "If you are born into a Muslim family and you become a follower of Jesus, then you bring shame on your father, your brother, and the whole family," says Aizah from North Africa. "You've left your roots; you've taken on a strange thing. It means you don't follow the path of your ancestors - you reject your family and your roots. You hurt your family and dishonour them. That is how they feel about your conversion, and they will tell you that you're an infidel, you bring us shame."

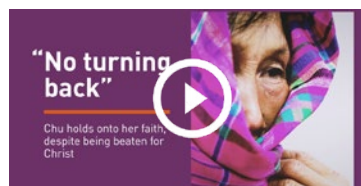
**Becoming a Christian brings pressure from other families.** Sometimes the immediate family members might face pressure themselves. They might be more accommodating to an individual's choice of belief, but pressure from their extended family and community will force them to act.



### Women and girls face extra pressure

*The pressure entered by families is particularly acute for women and girls, who generally have much less power and status in these societies. Female converts can find themselves confined to the home – hidden away under virtual house arrest. Or even forced to marry against their will. Christian wives may be forced to leave their husbands and their homes and have their children taken away – especially their sons. If she is left with the children, she may find that their father refuses financial support, leaving her destitute and with the responsibility of care for young lives.*

## 4.3 VIDEO: HOW DO CHRISTIANS RESPOND IN THESE PLACES?



### WATCH

- Go to [opendoorsuk.org/whatif](https://opendoorsuk.org/whatif)
- Share the video 'Vietnam: No turning back'

Chu is a courageous Christian woman in Vietnam whose husband tried to force her to deny Jesus.

*"My relatives and also the local government authorities said, "You are the first one in the village to believe in Christ. If you continue to believe, your children might also become followers of Christ. You will become a trouble to us and cost us our positions in the government."*

### RESPOND

- What impacts you most from this video?
- What sacrifices has Chu had to make for following Jesus?
- Using the information and prayer points in your World Watch List Top 50 booklet, spend some time praying for Christians in Vietnam.

## 4.4 BIBLE: THE FAMILY OF BELIEVERS

The family was the defining social structure of the New Testament world, just as it is for today's persecuted church.

In Jesus' time, the family provided you with a home. Many families lived together in what are known as 'clan-dwellings' - a series of houses built around a central courtyard. You lived together and cooked together. You married within your extended family. And, of course, you worked together in the family business. Jesus followed his father Joseph into the building trade. John and James were fishermen like their father, Zebedee.

And yet Jesus knew that discipleship was a disruptive force.

**READ**

- Luke 12:51–53
- Mark 3:31–35

**REFLECT**

- Who does Jesus say are His family?
- Why might Jesus' audience have been shocked by these comments?
- Why don't we find them so shocking today?

In a society where everything was defined by the kinship structure, Jesus was suggesting a radical break with tradition.

That is one reason why 'family' becomes such a powerful idea for the early church. The first Christians talked about themselves as a social unit, as brothers and sisters, part of a new family of God. Jesus is referred to as being 'the firstborn among many brothers and sisters' (Romans 8:29) and Paul talks of being adopted into the family of God (Romans 8:15)

**READ**

- Hebrews 2:11
- Galatians 6:9–10

**REFLECT**

- Why do you think the first Christians talked about family so much?

The reason this idea was so important to the early church is exactly the same reason why it is important to the persecuted church today: everyone needs the support of their family. So when we talk of persecuted Christians as our family, it's not just a metaphor. That is what they truly are. Their own family has disowned them. Where are they going to find the help they need if not from their new family – us?



## 4.5 VIDEO: KHALID'S STORY

**WATCH**

- Go to [opendoorsuk.org/whatif](https://opendoorsuk.org/whatif)
- Share the video of Khalid. Khalid is a believer from Ethiopia who was excluded from his family because of his faith.

*"They told me that I defiled the culture. In fact, they said that I betrayed them and their faith. They forced me to leave the house. They refused to give me food and shelter. They even threatened to kill me."*

**RESPOND**

- What impacts you most from this video?
- How did Khalid's Christian family respond?

## 4.6 WHAT IF YOUR FAMILY TURNED AGAINST YOU BECAUSE OF YOUR FAITH?

For persecuted Christians 'church' is more than an occasion on the Sunday morning. It's a community which supports one another, prays for one another, encourages one another even cries with one another. In other words, it's a family.

Think about all those identification documents that you listed or collected at the beginning.

What if they were all taken away?

Why if suddenly you lost your house, or your job?

What if your own family disowned you?

Who would you turn to?

And in both the world of the persecuted church, and our world, churches which thrive are those where there is a strong sense of family and community, where people feel as though they belong and have a home.

**DISCUSS**

- Is your church like that? How does your church behave like a family?



## ACTIVITY



Draw up a new family tree.

We're going to draw up a new list of your relatives.

**Get two pieces of paper.** On the top of one write 'Christian Parents'. On the top of the other write 'Christian Brothers and Sisters'.

**List your parents.** On the first piece of paper list all those who have influenced your walk with God. Perhaps they are people you know, for example the people who brought you to faith. Maybe they include your own parents or grandparents.

But think of others as well. Maybe authors or speakers who have really shaped your faith. Or church leaders who have helped you along the journey.

When you have listed these, spend a few moments giving thanks for all your parents in faith.

**List your brothers and sisters.** On the second piece of paper write down the names of as many of your brothers and sisters as you wish. These are your Christian brothers and sisters, who are walking beside you. Maybe you want to list people from your church, or from home group, or Christian friends and family.

Don't worry, it's not a test, you don't have to list them all and no-one else has to see this list!

When you have listed these, give thanks for this family of believers, for the role they play in your life.

## 4.8 YOUR 'WHAT IF?' CHALLENGE

What if you supported your family?

Think about the list of all those family members. Are there any who particularly need support right now? Think about how you can show your love and support for them this week.

Obviously you can pray for them. Perhaps you want to carry the list with you. Maybe they need to hear from you – how about sending a note or a text of appreciation and encouragement to one or two people on your list.

### WHAT IF YOU COULD MAKE A DIFFERENCE?

And think about the *other* family we've heard about: our persecuted brothers and sisters.

What if you could support them as well? On our

website you can find out how your gifts mean so much to the persecuted church. For Christians denied help from family or community, your gift will show them that their other family has not forgotten them. Go to [opendoorsuk.org](http://opendoorsuk.org) to find out more.

## 4.9 TAKEAWAY: ONE ACTION - SEVEN PRAYERS

### ONE ACTION

Look at your list of brothers and sisters that you drew up. Choose one (or however many you like) and do something to show that they are part of the family. Send them a card. Give them a call. Do something gloriously Christlike and kind for them this week!

### SEVEN PRAYERS

**This week, pray for Christians who are exiled from their family or community.**

**Day 1:** Pray for Christians who are persecuted by their own family. May their courageous, faithful witness speak the truth about the freedom of following Jesus.

**Day 2:** Pray for Christians who lose jobs or education because of their faith. Help us to do all that we can to help them find new hope for the future.

**Day 3:** Pray for Christians who are thrown out of their own communities. Lord, lead them to a new home and may they find the help they need to start a new life.

**Day 4:** Pray for women and girls who are persecuted and oppressed. May they know that You are with them, Lord, and may they be protected from harm.

**Day 5:** Pray for those under pressure to punish Christians in their family. Holy Spirit, help them to do the right thing and resist the pressure to persecute other family members for following You.

**Day 6:** Pray for the church family around the world. Lord Jesus, help us all to be a real family to persecuted believers, offering love, acceptance and support.

**Day 7:** Give thanks for the church family in the countries of the World Watch List. Thank You, Lord, that, even in the darkest places, Christians are finding a new home and family to which to belong. May we, too, be an active part of that family. Help us to support our brothers and sisters in need, wherever they are.



## Q SESSION 5

### Q WHAT IF YOU COULD NOT TALK OPENLY ABOUT JESUS?

#### 5.1 INTRODUCTION

Free speech is a hot issue at the moment. From some countries we hear complaints that there is no free speech, with authorities clamping down on any signs of dissent. From other countries we hear worries that there is too much free speech, with discussion and debate about what you should and shouldn't allow.

Whatever the complexities of the debate, the fact is that we are still free to talk about our faith.

The question is, though, do we?



#### DISCUSS



- **When was the last time you talked with a non-Christian about your faith?**
- **Was it someone in your family? A friend? A conversation in a cafe?**
- **How did the conversation go?**

For Christians in the countries on the World Watch List, talking openly to *anyone* – friends, family, strangers – is something they can only dream about.

#### 5.2 THE WORLD OF THE PERSECUTED CHURCH

Many Christians find it impossible to talk openly about their faith. This might be for a number of reasons:

**It will land you in trouble.** In a lot of countries, revealing that you are a Christian is simply a dangerous thing to do. In countries like North Korea it will result in arrest. In other countries you could be beaten or exiled from your family or clan.

**It is illegal to try to convert others.** Many countries put laws in place to stop evangelism, or to 'protect' certain groups. In China, there are laws against teaching Christianity to anyone under 18. In some countries 'anti-conversion laws' have been passed, making it illegal to convert someone from one religion to another. Often these laws are widely abused and are simply a pretext to stop Christians sharing their faith. In India, Open Doors partner Sabita\* says, "We have anti-conversion laws in certain states and now the central government wants to make them nationwide. An anti-conversion law means that if you share your faith you can be punished, because it's in the law. You can be imprisoned."

**It can be seen as blasphemy.** Christians can easily find themselves accused of blasphemy. No matter how carefully they talk of their faith, accusations of blasphemy can easily whip up a frenzy. There are numerous cases of Christians being taken into custody on trumped up charges of blasphemy.

**It simply brings too much attention.** Even in countries where it is not technically illegal to be a Christian, open evangelising would simply attract unwanted attention

\*Name changed for security purposes

from other religious leaders or from the police or security forces.

And yet the amazing thing is that, despite these difficulties, the church is growing in many parts of the world where it is persecuted. In India, for example, Hindu extremists have declared the goal of driving Christians out of India by the end of 2021. Yet there are 70 million believers in India – and the church is growing.

And in China, where the church has been put under increased surveillance, they have turned to meeting in small groups, and using digital technology to speak about Jesus.

### 5.3 VIDEO: HOW DO CHRISTIANS RESPOND IN THESE PLACES?



#### WATCH

- Go to [opendoorsuk.org/whatif](https://opendoorsuk.org/whatif)
- Share the video of Xiang, a church leader from China who has seen his church come under increased surveillance.

*"We are so united together like never before. We have a revival in our church and a lot of our brothers and sisters are so encouraged by this experience, even in the severe persecution."*

#### RESPOND

- What impacts you most from this video?
- How are Christians in China being stopped from speaking openly about Jesus?
- Why do you think it has united the church?
- Using the information and prayer points in your World Watch List Top 50 booklet, spend some time praying for Christians in China.

### 5.4 BIBLE: EMBODYING THE FAITH

Suppressing Christian voices doesn't mean that they stop telling people about Jesus. It just means that they go about it a different way.

This is a lesson that was learned very early on by the first followers of Jesus. They understood that the faith had to be embodied, because sometimes you couldn't talk about it.

#### READ



- **Romans 12:9-21**

#### REFLECT



Out of this passage, draw up a list of things which Paul says Christians should do.

- Which of these are uniquely characteristic of Christianity?
- Which of these attitudes and actions would be most surprising to the society around them?
- What do they demonstrate about the Christian faith?

One of the biggest mysteries in church history – well, in all history, really – is how a small, marginal movement of predominantly lower-class individuals, grew so far and so fast that by the fourth century AD it became one of the official religions of the Roman Empire.

It's especially challenging for historians, because, for most of the first three centuries, the church lived largely under cover. It was very much in the background of Greco-Roman society. Christians could not preach the gospel openly and, on the whole, society viewed Christians with suspicion, and sometimes outright hostility. Christians knew that they could be informed on by their neighbours, denied privileges, discriminated against. Sometimes, where the persecution was particularly bad, they could even be killed for their faith.

And they couldn't allow non-Christians into their services either. After Christians suffered a cruel persecution at the hands of emperor Nero in AD 68, house churches throughout the empire largely closed their doors. By the end of the second century most outsiders were barred from entering Christian worship services, and Christians were wary of even discussing what went on with others.

So given all that how did they evangelise? How did they share the gospel? How did the church grow?

The answer is that they *lived* the faith. In the words of Cyprian of Carthage, writing in AD 256:

*"[We] are philosophers not in words but in deeds; we exhibit our wisdom not by our dress, but by truth; we know virtues by their practice rather than through*

*boasting of them; we do not speak great things but we live them."*

As historian Alan Kreider writes:

*"This, at its heart, meant embodying the Christian good news, bearing it in their bodies and actions, living the message visibly and faithfully so that outsiders would see what the Christians were about and, ideally, would be attracted to join them."*



## 5.5 VIDEO: INTERVIEW RON BOYD-MACMILLAN

WATCH

- Go to [opendoorsuk.org/whatif](https://opendoorsuk.org/whatif)
- Share the interview with Ron Boyd-Macmillan for more background on what is happening in China and how the church is responding.

RESPOND

- What impacts you most from this video?
- How is the Chinese church viewing this as an evangelistic opportunity?

### Caring for the couriers in Wuhan

*In Wuhan, China, Pastor Huang's church was closed when the epidemic broke out. But the surveillance had already prepared them for this. "Well before the pandemic, we had begun posting services online to counter the tightening of control over religion by the government," says Pastor Huang. "So, we already had online services and prayer meetings well before the coronavirus."*

*But the church also discovered the power of serving their community.*

*"During this period, we have realised that we need to be intentionally proactive in loving others through action," says Pastor Huang. "Especially caring for our neighbours. We've tried many different ways to practice this during this period, especially helping poor families."*

*His church began to look after the couriers who were keeping the city functioning during the lockdown. "We discovered they were not being given food at work so for about two months we provided meals for them every day. They were overwhelmed by our generosity."*

## 5.6 WHAT IF YOU COULD NOT TALK OPENLY ABOUT JESUS?

In places where words are dangerous, or where preaching the gospel is not permitted, the persecuted church is still growing. And it is doing so because Christians have to live out the faith.

DISCUSS



- Think about your church. Are there ways in which it has lived out the faith during the pandemic?
- What is there which is distinctive in its behaviour?

ACTIVITY



How would we talk about Jesus without words?

Read this message, or send it around via text or chat.

*"Urgent! You are being watched. You cannot talk openly about Jesus. Keep all mentions of church and Christianity out of your messages or social media. Don't put it on your phone."*

*Don't stop spreading the good news! Just do it differently...*

*Remember - you are being watched."*

Imagine that you are being spied on. So you can't speak openly about Jesus.

- How would you let anyone know that you were a Christian?
- What could you do to share God's love for them?

**Draw up a plan for sharing the gospel without words.** With Paul's list in mind, and the example of the persecuted church before us, what could you and your church do to demonstrate the Christian faith?





## 5.7 WHAT IF? CHALLENGE

What if you acted in a way that embodied the Christian faith?

Imagine that Paul is writing not to some ancient house church in Rome, but to your church today – to you, in fact. Look at that list of characteristic Christian activities. Are you showing them in your life?

Is there one thing in Paul's list of characteristic Christian behaviour that leaps out at you?

Perhaps, this week, you are being called to be more joyful? Or more patient or hopeful, or maybe more faithful in prayer? Is there anyone you need to forgive?

Perhaps you can even offer hospitality to someone – difficult though it might be at the moment?

How can you overcome evil with good this week?

**Think of one action which you are going to do this week which will embody the message of Jesus.**

### WHAT IF YOU COULD MAKE A DIFFERENCE?

All around the world our persecuted brothers and sisters are denied the rights to share their faith openly and without fear. But we don't have that problem!

Can you let other people know about the persecuted church? What if, this week, you shared something from this session with friends? Perhaps you could share a video on social media. Or something from their stories that has challenged or inspired you. They have to keep quiet, but we don't – so let the world know.

## 5.8 TAKEAWAY: ONE ACTION - SEVEN PRAYERS

### ONE ACTION

**What will you do this week to embody the love of Christ?**

### SEVEN PRAYERS

**This week, pray for Christians who cannot talk openly about Jesus.**

**Day 1:** Pray for Christians who have to keep their faith secret, even from their family. May their lives demonstrate the good news of Jesus Christ.

**Day 2:** Pray for Christians who want to tell others about Jesus but who don't know who to trust. Holy Spirit, please guide them with wisdom and insight.

**Day 3:** Pray for Christians who have been treated unfairly in the distribution of aid. May they receive help, and may they have the strength to meet injustice with forgiveness and love.

**Day 4:** Pray for Christians who are being prosecuted under unjust anti-conversion laws. May they be treated fairly, and may these laws be repealed.

**Day 5:** Pray for Christian leaders who are under surveillance all the time. Protect them from gossip and malicious lies. Show them how best to serve You under such pressure.

**Day 6:** Pray for Christians who are seeking different ways to serve their communities. Encourage them, Lord with a good response and show them where the needs are.

**Day 7:** Give thanks for the sacrificial, Christlike love of the persecuted church. Lord, may we, too, learn to forgive, to love and to serve those around us more and more.



## Q SESSION 6

### Q WHAT IF FOLLOWING JESUS MEANT MAKING SACRIFICES?

## 6.1 INTRODUCTION

During the pandemic, we have all had to make sacrifices. Some of us have made big financial sacrifices. Others have had to work under very difficult circumstances. We have been unable to see our friends or even hug our families. Celebrations have been cancelled, or have taken place in a very reduced way. Tragically, some people have not even been able to say goodbye properly to loved ones.

### DISCUSS



- **What have you had to sacrifice during this time?**
- **What has been the most difficult sacrifice you have had to make?**

It's been very hard. But perhaps it highlights how unused we are to going without anything. We live in a society which is not used to making sacrifices. On the contrary, we're used to having everything we want as quickly and as cheaply as we can.

And, if we're honest, the same is true of our faith. Christianity in our country is a low-cost option.

The same is obviously not true of life for persecuted Christians. For Christians in the countries on the World Watch List, however, following Jesus might cost them everything.

## 6.2 THE WORLD OF THE PERSECUTED CHURCH

For many Christians in the countries in the World Watch List Top 50, making the choice to follow Jesus is a costly decision. This might be for a number of reasons:

**It might cost them their freedom.** In some countries, Christians are physically locked up. Christians in Eritrea, for example, face imprisonment in terrible conditions.

**It might cost them their home.** Many Christians find themselves ostracised by their family or their community. Where becoming a Christian is seen as shameful, or as a betrayal of the traditional values, Christians can be thrown out of their homes and villages.

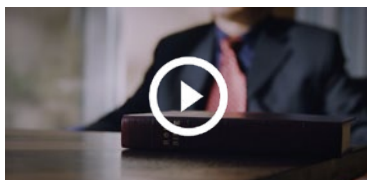
**It might cost them their career.** In many countries Christians are second-class citizens. Central Asia. They have a financial cost to becoming a Christian. It can also affect your education. In many countries, Christians are denied the same educational opportunities as others. They might be bullied or mocked at school – even having their work marked more harshly.

**It might cost them their life.** Most tragically, there are societies where becoming a Christian costs you your life. In places like North Korea, Christianity brings with it imprisonment in labour camps which not many people survive. In places like Afghanistan and Somalia, apostasy – the act of leaving Islam for another faith – is punishable by death. And in far too many other countries, to become a Christian is to make yourself into a target.

Given all this, why do people still become Christians?

Because for all the things that they lose, there are things which we gain. There is a freedom that goes beyond what the world offers, and a treasure that is greater than the world can understand.

## 6.3 VIDEO: HOW DO CHRISTIANS RESPOND IN THESE PLACES?



### WATCH

- Go to [opendoorsuk.org/whatif](https://opendoorsuk.org/whatif)
- Share the video 'Qi Ming's escape'. Qi Ming is a church leader from China. When his church was closed down he was forced to flee for his life.

"Maybe this is the last meal I will have with my family."

### RESPOND

- What impacts you most from this video?
- Qi Ming talks about how following Jesus makes him vulnerable: "Vulnerable? Yes. If you really believe in Jesus this must happen in your life." Where does this idea come from?

## 6.4 BIBLE: THE COST OF DISCIPLESHIP

### READ



- Matthew 16:24-27
- John 15:9-17

### REFLECT



- What does it mean to 'take up their cross'?
- What might it look like for us to 'lay down our life' for our friends?
- How do these images link to the idea of loving one another?

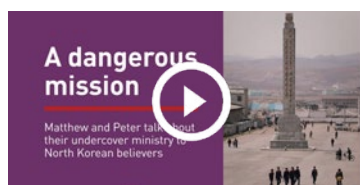
### Taking up your cross

*In Jesus' day there was only one kind of person who 'took up their cross': it was the condemned slave or criminal, who was carrying his crossbeam to a point of crucifixion. Plutarch wrote, 'Every criminal who is executed carries his own cross.' So Jesus is unambiguous here: to be a disciple is to be prepared to die. This is no metaphor. Jesus was preparing His followers to be ridiculed, spat on, beaten, publicly shamed, killed: the common thread is the stain of criminality. Like Jesus himself, any of His followers would have to face the possibility of being viewed as a criminal.*

*This idea – that Jesus' followers would face exactly the same kind of experiences that He did, is woven into Christianity right from the start. We can see it in the early Christian language around baptism. One of the most powerful aspects of baptism was that the Christian was re-enacting Christ's death and resurrection. "We were therefore buried with Him through baptism into death," Paul writes, 'in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.'*

*In the early church, believers would act this out physically as well. In later versions of the rituals dating from the third century AD, new members of the church would take off all their old clothes, go down into the water, come up the other side and be given a new set of clothes. They would then be anointed with oil - a clear reference to Jesus' title – 'Christ' – which means 'anointed'.*

## 6.5 VIDEO: PETER IN NORTH KOREA



### WATCH

- Go to [opendoorsuk.org/whatif](https://opendoorsuk.org/whatif)
- Share the video: 'Interview with secret Open Doors fieldworker'

Open Doors fieldworker Peter\* shares about his courageous undercover ministry to North Korean believers. \*Name changed for security purposes

### RESPOND

- What impacts you most from this video?

- **What has Peter had to sacrifice to look after North Korean Christians?**
- **Using the information and prayer points in your World Watch List Top 50 booklet, spend some time praying for Christians in North Korea.**

## 6.6 WHAT IF FOLLOWING JESUS MEANT MAKING SACRIFICES?

Jesus says we should lay down our lives for our friends.

Open Doors fieldworker Peter asks us to pour out our hearts for believers.

And Qi Ming says that if you really believe in Jesus, then hardship and sacrifice must happen in your life.

### So how do we do that?

First, let's acknowledge that, for us, 'laying down your life' may not mean physically dying. But it certainly means putting our own comfort, our own desires, and even our own needs second to others.

Second, we don't have to feel guilty because we have been born in a free country. Nor do we have to go looking for opportunities to be victimised. Instead, we should give thanks for our freedom. And we should address that question: what are we being called to sacrifice? Is there something which we know we are being asked to hand over to God? Is there something we know we have to do?

### ACTIVITY



- **What will you sacrifice for following Jesus?**

There are many ways in which we can – and should – make sacrifices for our fellow Christians. But in this exercise we are going to concentrate on three areas:

- **Our comfort**
- **Our time**
- **Our money**

1. On a piece of paper draw three big circles. Give each a different heading: Time, Comfort, Money.

2. In the circles write down the sacrifices you are already making. For example, in money, perhaps you could list the causes that you give to; in time, perhaps things you volunteer for; in comfort, ways in which you have to put yourself out for others.

3. Now think about what more you could be doing. Are there any 'gaps' in the areas? Is there more you could be doing?

It's not a competition! You don't have to share these with anyone and you don't have to feel bad about what you are or aren't doing. (You shouldn't feel smug, either!) It's just a way of thinking about how we could lay down some areas of our lives for others.

It's not about scale, either. Maybe God is calling you to sacrifice something big. Or maybe there are smaller sacrifices, which might be no less important in your life.

## 6.6 YOUR 'WHAT IF?' CHALLENGE

What if you gave up something this week in order to follow Jesus more closely?

- **How can you pray more sacrificially?**
- **How can you give more sacrificially?**
- **How can you serve more sacrificially?**

In the circles, write one way in which you are going to make a sacrifice this week. Maybe you could sacrifice the cost of a daily cup of coffee. Maybe you could get up early to pray. Maybe you could do something for others that costs you time and energy.

### WHAT IF YOU COULD MAKE A DIFFERENCE?

Could you sacrifice some time, energy or comfort to raise money for the persecuted church? Our community fundraisers raise thousands of pounds to support their persecuted brothers and sisters around the world. What if you gave up your birthday presents – or even sacrificed your hair! Ride a bike, bake a cake, run a (virtual) marathon. Find out more ideas at [opendoorsuk.org/fundraise](https://opendoorsuk.org/fundraise)





## 6.7 TAKEAWAY: ONE ACTION - SEVEN PRAYERS

### ONE ACTION

If you can, sacrifice some time, money and comfort this week for those around you, and on behalf of those throughout the world whose faith comes at such a cost.

### SEVEN PRAYERS

**This week, pray for Christians who pay a price for following Jesus.**

**Day 1:** Pray for Christians who are imprisoned because of their faith. May they know the comfort and strength of the Holy Spirit.

**Day 2:** Pray for Christians who lose their jobs or are denied employment because they follow Jesus. May they find a way to support their families.

**Day 3:** Pray for Christians who have to flee their homes because of persecution. Holy Spirit, help them to know that they are safe and secure in God's love.

**Day 4:** Pray for Christians who have lost loved ones through violence. Please, Lord, bring comfort to the widows, the orphans and all those who grieve.

**Day 5:** Pray for Christians who live in fear of being found out. Lord God, may they know Your peace and protection.

**Day 6:** Pray for Christian leaders who seek to support the underground church. Give them wisdom to know what to do, and the courage and determination to act in accordance with Your will.

**Day 7:** Give thanks for all those who have paid a price for following Jesus. May their lives be an inspiration and an example to us, and may we all be prepared to 'lay down our lives' for one another.

## 6.8 LOOKING BACK

If you have time it might be good to end by thinking of other Christians you have encountered in these sessions. Are there any whose stories have particularly connected with people?

It might be helpful to go back over some of the stories:

- **Islèm in North Africa who has to hide her faith from her own father**
- **Mojtaba in Iran, who was arrested and put into solitary confinement for running a house church**
- **Amina and her sons in Nigeria, who were brutally attacked because they were Christians**
- **Chu in Vietnam, beaten by her husband for believing in Christ**
- **Khalid from Ethiopia who was thrown out of home because of his faith**
- **Xiang in China, whose church was raided by the police.**

### DISCUSS



- **What sacrifices have they made?**
- **How could you stand with them as they pay such a great price?**

If possible, please direct people to the Open Doors website to find out more ways in which they can support persecuted Christians around the world.

[opendoorsuk.org](https://opendoorsuk.org)