

Open *Doors*

MAGAZINE | November/December 2023



**A brighter
future?**

Help persecuted
Christian children
this Christmas



OpenDoors

Prayer Webinar

CHRISTMAS SPECIAL

7 DECEMBER | 8PM | ONLINE

How does persecution affect children around the world? In a special Christmas webinar, you're invited to join with other Open Doors supporters to pray for persecuted Christian children – both for today and for the future of the church. Why not invite your small group to join this time of prayer?

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OPEN DOORS

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STANDING STRONG // 2024



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Aimed at children aged 7-11.

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Open Doors is an international ministry serving persecuted Christians and churches worldwide.

Open Doors supplies Bibles, leadership training, literacy programmes, livelihood support and advocacy services. We also mobilise the church in the UK and Ireland to serve Christians living under religious persecution.

If you have any questions about the work of Open Doors, or would like to reprint any of the articles in this magazine, please do get in touch.

Contact us:

England and Wales
PO Box 6, Witney
Oxon OX29 6WG
T 01993 460015

Ireland
PO Box 873
Belfast BT15 1WZ
T 02890 751080

Scotland
T 01292 800006

E contact@opendoorsuk.org

Find us on:

opendoorsuk.org



Open Doors UK & I

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COVER: Elnura (name changed) is a deaf Christian from Central Asia; she experiences rejection from society but your support shows her God's love

Letter from Henrietta

Do not be afraid

“Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom.” LUKE 12:32

What do Mary, Joseph, Zechariah and the shepherds have in common? All of these key figures in the Christmas story were told by messengers of God: “Do not be afraid.” It’s a message that Jesus spoke to His followers, and that God continues to speak to His children all these centuries later.

Choosing not to fear is often costly and hard – and so is choosing to 'love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you' (Matthew 5:44). I'm so inspired by a community in southern Ethiopia that are doing just that (p6). These courageous Christians experience truly shocking persecution from extremists in their Muslim-majority community – violent attacks on men, women and children, and even an attack on their church's Christmas Day service.

These believers have every reason to be afraid. But, with the help of Open Doors local partners, they started a school in their church compound – and opened it up to children of all faith backgrounds. Pastor Yohannes* says: “Loving our enemies is biblical, and it's the truth. Doing good to the community that is persecuting us – that's the only way we can change the community.”

Isn't that extraordinary? What a challenging and beautiful thing for us to remember this Christmas. They are choosing love over fear. And the gifts and prayers of Open Doors supporters are giving them the means to be salt and light to those around them.

You can see other examples of life-changing impact, thanks to people like you (p12). I'm so grateful that God continues to provide this help through Open Doors supporters, particularly in a year that has been difficult for many.

I hope you and your loved ones have a blessed and joyful Christmas,



Henrietta

Henrietta Blyth
CEO, Open Doors UK&I

P.S. You will have found, with your magazine, a tear-off to invite your MP to the World Watch List parliamentary launch in January. It's a crucial opportunity to ask those in power to hear the voices of the persecuted church. We know MPs respond when many constituents raise an issue, so perhaps you could ask your church to send invitations too, through opendoorsuk.org/advocacy?

*Name changed for security reasons

World Watch News

NIGERIA

Student killed after rectory set ablaze



In another awful attack in Nigeria, a 25-year-old student has been killed after Fulani militants set light to a church building in the northern state of Kaduna.

The incident happened when Fulani militants arrived at the rectory of St Raphael's Catholic Church to kidnap the priest. After being unable to enter the building, they set it ablaze. Most people escaped. However, Na'aman Stephen Danlami (PICTURED) suffered severe burns and died of asphyxiation (deprivation of oxygen).

In Nigeria, kidnapping for ransom is rife, especially in the Middle Belt and the north of the country. It affects both Christians and Muslims, but the former are especially vulnerable to such incidents.

It's part of the escalating violence facing Christians in Nigeria and across sub-Saharan Africa, and is why Open Doors' *Arise Africa* campaign – which began earlier this year – is crucial in raising prayer, awareness and support.

Please pray that all those affected by this incident will be upheld by God's comfort.

PAKISTAN

Handyman helps Christians hit by violence

Thank you to all of you who have given in response to the violent attacks on Christians in Jaranwala, Pakistan. The impact of your support is already being felt – including through the help of a local handyman.

In August, thousands of Muslim extremists attacked more than 20 churches and almost a hundred homes in Jaranwala in response to allegations that two believers had desecrated the Quran. Threats are ongoing, leaving Christians fearful of further incidents.

Azlan* – who is part of the HOPE Community, an Open Doors local partner – is a handyman as well as a Christian worker, and able to help rebuild damaged homes. This includes installing windows for Hameeda* and her family, which will block out some of the antagonism from people nearby. "The neighbours play

their threatening sermons and I cannot sleep most nights," says the son. "Thank you for coming and being with us."

Despite encountering opposition whilst helping, Azlan hopes to keep visiting the believers in Jaranwala. He offers not just practical assistance but fellowship and hope. Your prayers do that too – thank you for keeping this vulnerable community in your prayers.



ABOVE Pakistan: Scarred ruins; affected believers gather for a service after the attack

AFGHANISTAN

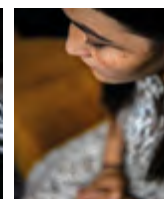
A future without fear for three courageous women

Three young women from Afghanistan can look ahead to a bright future without fear after they were given refugee status with the help of Open Doors local partners.

After completing their diplomas at university in a safe country, Narges*, Maryam* and Sitara* were at risk of being deported to Afghanistan. Grave consequences would likely have awaited them, given that the Taliban have banned women from university education.

But the fear of returning home has been alleviated, since all three have been given official refugee status and an allowance from the state. "They are so grateful to God for all He has done for them," reports a local partner. "They know this would not have been possible without the support of Open Doors."

Please pray that Narges, Maryam and Sitara will be given the desires of their hearts and have their plans succeed (Psalm 20:4).



(L-R) Maryam, Narges and Sitara are enormously grateful for your support

AZERBAIJAN

Believers ask for prayer as thousands flee following ceasefire

Church leaders have requested prayer as thousands of Armenians flee the disputed Nagorno-Karabakh breakaway region.

In September, a military offensive in the region by Azerbaijan led to a truce, under which ethnic-Armenian forces had to disarm. This complex geo-ethnic situation has been rumbling on since the Soviet Union – of which both Azerbaijan and Armenia were a part – began disintegrating in the 1980s. Over the years, thousands have been killed and over a million people displaced, with atrocities committed by both sides.

Following the ceasefire, more than ten thousand people are estimated to have crossed

the border into Armenia, believing they'll be unsafe under Azerbaijan rule – despite assurances by the government of a peaceful reintegration. Others have decided to remain.

Christians are affected on both sides. "We need to pray for peace so that the Lord will stop the war," said a pastor from Azerbaijan. Another added, "There are a lot of victims; pray for these families, so that the Lord will comfort them."

Azerbaijan is number 58 on the World Watch List, with restrictions and monitoring showing why the Christian community in Nagorno-Karabakh fears coming under Azerbaijani control.

*Names changed for security reasons

UK 30 peaks for 30 years!

With her milestone 30th birthday nearing, an Open Doors supporter saw an opportunity to set herself a truly mountainous challenge – all whilst raising funds for our persecuted family.

"I was inspired by Adrian Smith, another Open Doors fundraiser, who did 60 challenges for his 60th birthday," says Rebecca Coatsworth from Shropshire (PICTURED BELOW).

Beginning with Snowdon and ending with Ben Nevis, Rebecca hit the summits of 30 mountains in Snowdonia (also known as Eryri), the Brecon Beacons (Bannau Brycheiniog), the Lake District, Yorkshire and Scotland. It took a year, with the final peak reached in September – just two months before turning 30.

"In the moments where I got tired and just wanted to go home, it was a joy to be able to turn to prayer and to the stories of persecuted Christians who have persevered in much tougher situations," says Rebecca.

Are you feeling inspired to fundraise for our persecuted family? Go to opendoorsuk.org/fundraise for all you need to get started.



> For the latest news and stories of courageous faith, visit opendoorsuk.org/news

This Christmas, Fasil and Ezana

are asking for a brighter future

During a Christmas service, you expect to sing songs together. You expect to remember the birth of Jesus joyfully with fellow believers. You don't expect your church to come under attack during the celebration.

That's what happened to the church young Fasil and Ezana Tadesse* (PICTURED) attend in southern Ethiopia. These twin boys are very normal seven-year-olds in many ways – they love playing football together, can be quite shy with new people and, like many twins, have a special connection and bond. They also live in a community where Christians are a persecuted minority.

TARGETED PERSECUTION

"There is huge oppression targeting evangelical Christians in the area," says Pastor Yohannes*, the leader of the Tadesse family's local church. "When a person converts from another religion to follow Jesus Christ, there is intimidation and threats of killing. They write on a piece of paper, 'If you don't denounce this God, we will slaughter you in three or four days,' and leave the paper outside the converts' doors."

"UNTIL THEY CAME HOME EACH DAY, WE WOULD BE WORRIED ABOUT THE RISK."

Persecution against Christians comes from different groups in different parts of Ethiopia. In this village, Christians mostly face persecution and pressure from

CHILDREN AT CHRISTMAS APPEAL

the Muslim-majority population – even on Christmas Day.

“As we gathered to celebrate the birth of Christ, extremists were sent,” remembers Pastor Yohannes. “They started throwing stones at the church’s roof.” These persecutors came to disrupt the service on one of the most special days of the Christian calendar. Thankfully, on that occasion, nobody was hurt. But that hasn’t always been the case.

“We have prayer meetings on Fridays, and these extremists climbed the church wall and saw that we were praying,” says Pastor Yohannes. “They started throwing stones.” Two members of the congregation were hit in the head.

DISGRACEFUL ATTACK

Most distressing of all are the violent attacks that have happened recently.

“We went out to spread the gospel, and to invite the non-believers to believe,” Pastor Yohannes says. “People from the community came at us at once, some with weapons in their hands, and surrounded us.” The men were beaten. The women



ABOVE Ermias shares Bible stories with his young sons; BELOW Pastor Yohannes courageously shepherds his congregation

were dragged to the ground by their hair, then urinated on by the attackers.

“PEOPLE FROM THE COMMUNITY CAME AT US AT ONCE, SOME WITH WEAPONS IN THEIR HANDS.”



“It is a huge psychological scar for our sisters,” Yohannes says. “It’s hard to believe a person who is born from a woman would do such a thing to a woman, but they did.” After this horrifying assault, some of the Christians were so afraid that they hid in the forest for three days before they were able to finally get home.

DENIED PROPER EDUCATION

It’s a hard place for Fasil and Ezana to grow up. Children like them should be protected, provided for and given an education to give them hope for the future – but that hasn’t

always been their experience. Even at school, they are vulnerable to being persecuted for their faith.

Ermias*, the twins’ father, is an evangelist in the community and has experienced this persecution first-hand throughout his life. He knows his children are vulnerable too. “Because of the persecution, we’re in a difficult situation,” he says. “Even in the schools, there are pressures. They would refuse to give them their deserved grades – they would lower our children’s test scores.”

He was worried about their safety too: “We would be sending our children to school because they need to be educated – but until they came home each day, we would be worried about the risk.”

Ermias considered sending Fasil and Ezana to private school, where there is a lot less persecution for Christians, but it wasn’t a realistic option for their family. “I wanted this for them, and though I thought about it a lot, I could not afford to send them there,” he says.

But because of Open Doors supporters, that wasn’t the end of the story for Fasil and Ezana.

A SCHOOL FOR ALL

One of Jesus’ most radical teachings is to ‘love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you’ (Matthew 5:44). In the twins’ village, the Christian community wanted to reach out to groups who had persecuted them and find points of connection. That’s where ‘bridging’ projects, run by Open Doors partners, stepped in. These projects create a ‘bridge’ between the Christian community and the surrounding neighbourhood.

In Fasil and Ezana’s town, one of these projects is a school. The building is owned by Pastor Yohannes’s church and used for church activities like Sunday school, but as a school it is open to children of all faith backgrounds. It provides safe,

fair education to all children from the community – the schooling is secular, rather than faith-based, but believers see the provision as a way to show God’s love. “It has created a platform for us to show Jesus is a Saviour,” Ermias says. “Parents of the children and the staff have a good impression of us, and of the church.”

“Loving our enemies is biblical, and it’s the truth,” says Pastor Yohannes. “We will be the first people to be there in their time of need: even if they hate us, we love them. Doing good to the community that is persecuting us – that’s the only way we can change the community.”

BRIGHTER FUTURE FOR THE TWINS

You can see how relieved Ermias is when you hear him speak about Fasil and Ezana now. “I am no longer worried about their safety,” he

says. “They go there and learn and come back with freedom as they wish. The school is in the church’s compound; it’s a familiar place for the children – it has created a home environment where the children are educated with freedom.” Ermias is overjoyed that the boys have been able to excel and grow academically.

The boys love it, too. “I love going to school; I love playing with my friends,” Fasil says. “I get education from my teachers, and I really like learning.”

A new school offers a safe education to children of all faiths in Fasil and Ezana’s village



“EVEN IF THEY HATE US, WE LOVE THEM.”

CHILDREN AT CHRISTMAS APPEAL

CHANGING PERCEPTIONS

Perceptions of Christians like Ermias and his family are already being altered by this school. "After Open Doors built this school in our area, we had big changes," Yohannes says. "The community started acknowledging our school, and the hatred toward us gradually started changing. On top of that, they liked the fact that we were offering free education for the poor who couldn't afford to educate their children. It changed the hatred they had towards us; they started liking us."

"IT CHANGED THE HATRED THEY HAD TOWARDS US; THEY STARTED LIKING US."

And by God's grace, the school has even changed the hearts of the persecutors themselves. "The families who used to throw stones at the church have now

started sending their children to this school. They feel a sense of belonging," Yohannes says. "The people who used to give us side-eyes as we were walking by now greet us on the streets. The hurt we felt before is evaporating from us. I am really happy that the people who once hated us are now coming to the church compound."

Ermias has hopes that this acceptance will go further – that the school will be a way to evangelise to the community. "I hope they will one day join us in being God's children—that makes me happy," he says.

A DIFFERENT CHRISTMAS

Christmas this year is looking much more hopeful than previous years. There are still dangers in their community – but Pastor Yohannes's church looks forward to celebrating the birth of Jesus in peace. Fasil and Ezana's family are going to use the opportunity to share their faith.

"As a family, we show visitors some form of drama about the birth of Christ," says Ermias. Previously they sent festive food and drinks to their neighbours

who wouldn't come to their house. "But now it's like our home is theirs," says Ermias. "The holiday season is one of our platforms for showing Christ. We think of the new life we got, and this is our big testimony in the season."

Fasil and Ezana are young, but they already know the most important thing about Christmas: "We tell them that it's about Christ's birth, and show them as well," Ermias says. "Since they are children, they only focus on the games and the food we prepare, but we don't stop telling them. They talk about the birth of Christ in our local language."

NEXT GENERATION

Ermias continues, thinking about all the Christian classmates alongside Fasil and Ezana too: "They are the next generation for the gospel; they are the ones who are going to continue the works of God. They are the hope for the church to continue, and for that to happen they need to understand Christ's light."

It's clearly starting to work already: Fasil says, "I would be glad if everyone would celebrate Christmas with us." The boys love singing a song together with a chorus repeating "God's love is so wonderful". The school is really changing their young lives.

"I want to thank [Open Doors supporters]," Pastor Yohannes says. "This school is helping children recover from their psychological abuse. Many have recovered from persecution, and many who are still persecuted are receiving help from the organisation [Open Doors partners]. They stood by them as they passed through many troubles and helped them forget their sufferings."



"Children are a gift from God in regard to the church, so pray for them to grow in the grace of God so they can change their generation and change the world."

FUTURE AMBITIONS

This school is helping bridge the gap between different groups in this community – but it's not the end of the project. The school is in dire need of expansion. As community acceptance has grown, so has the number of students enrolled in the school – from 30 students in 2019 to more than 100 now. It also only covers a few years of primary education, currently.

"If it is possible, and if God helps us, it would be much better for our children to continue their education in this school," Ermias says. "Fasil and Ezana are now going to graduate from this school, and would transfer into the other government-funded school, with increased risks. I

This year, Ermias, Fasil and Ezana have hope for a brighter future

worry about the future. It would be really nice if my children could continue studying in this school."

"I HOPE THEY WILL ONE DAY JOIN US IN BEING GOD'S CHILDREN."

Across Ethiopia, and in other countries around the world where Open Doors partners are running bridge projects, there are opportunities to create brighter futures for courageous children like Fasil and Ezana. You can bring these young children safety, education and hope – helping ensure they can excel today and be a strong generation of risk-taking Christ-followers in the future. Your Christmas gifts and prayers today can help the church continue to shine brightly in the darkest places.

PLEASE PRAY

You can join a prayer webinar on 7 December (see p2), as well as finding prayer points for children in Ethiopia and around the world in your prayer diary.

- For Fasil and Ezana to grow in love and knowledge of the Lord
- For courage and protection for Ermias and Pastor Yohannes this Christmas as they shine the light of Christ brightly in their community
- For the expansion of Open Doors bridge projects across sub-Saharan Africa, and that they would show Jesus' love to those who persecute believers.

PLEASE GIVE

Every £20 could help give trauma counselling to a persecuted Christian child, offering hope and healing.

Every £30 could give a month's education to five children impacted by persecution, helping them have a brighter future.

Every £68 could give vital food and practical aid to four children and their families and help them start rebuilding their lives.

You can make a gift to help persecuted children at opendoorsuk.org

*Names changed for security reasons

Christmas is an opportunity for the church in the village to share the gospel



Above and beyond

THE IMPACT OF YOUR EXTRAORDINARY SUPPORT
HAS BEEN FELT DEEPLY AND WIDELY IN 2023

"The words thank you are too little," says Farah, reflecting on your role in helping her to rebuild her life in the Nineveh Plains in Iraq. This deep gratitude is felt worldwide as you continue to respond to different needs, during a difficult year. And this year, with emergencies like the Turkey/Syria earthquake and violence affecting Christians in Manipur, India, you've gone above and beyond to care for our persecuted family. Thank you! Here's a further glimpse into the difference you're making...

IRAN TO THE NATIONS

Sahar clearly remembers the moment she felt God calling her to be a blessing among nations. "My response was, 'God, I am just a woman, how can it be?'" Coming from Iran – which is ruled by an increasingly strict Islamic regime that devalues women – it was an understandable question to ask.



"But now, after 18 years, I look back and see how God transformed my life and is using it according to His purposes and promises," continues Sahar, who featured in Open Doors' *See Change* campaign earlier this year.

Sahar now lives in Turkey after her Christian activities made it impossible to remain in Iran. There remain challenges – not least the devastating earthquakes that struck earlier this year – but she treasures her role as leader of her church's women's ministry. This involves coming alongside women, mostly from Iran and Afghanistan, to show them how loved and valued they are by God. "Seeing that

God is using me to bless others is very precious to me," she says.

"But now, after 18 years, I look back and see how God transformed my life and is using it according to His purposes and promises."

Sahar's journey beautifully encapsulates the heart and impact of the *See Change* campaign, now in its fifth year, which is only able to transform lives, like Sahar's, because of your generosity and prayers. Thank you!

ABOVE Sahar asks for prayer that God will 'open new doors for ministry'; RIGHT "I am so happy to have a new Bible that I can call my own!" says one of the more than 130 young people in northern Nigeria given a Bible by local partners earlier this year. "To me, this Bible is a weapon to overcome and win the battle in life."

"Christian women and girls have a lot of needs," adds Sahar in a recent message to Open Door supporters. "They need to be heard, they need prayer, they need to feel loved, they need counselling, teaching and resources. I want to do as much as I can. God gave me a vision, and I am pursuing it."

As she does so, Sahar needs your continued prayers.

"Listening to the stories of pain, persecution and difficulties that women in Iran and Afghanistan go through every day is very heavy. Sometimes this becomes too overwhelming – I believe they call this 'secondary trauma'. But God restores me daily, and this is how I am able to continue doing what I do."

PRAYER, PRESENCE AND NO PROBLEMS

In January 2021, Ajara from north Cameroon suddenly became the mother and provider for 11 children. An attack by Boko Haram killed her husband and several of her neighbours. It left Ajara not only responsible for her six children, but five left orphaned after their mother was killed.



ABOVE Your presence and prayers have blessed Ajara

Last year, a group of Open Doors supporters met Ajara and other women affected by ongoing violence in the region. They sat with her and listened, and prayed for her health and responsibilities, as well as her grinding mill business that means she can provide for her children.

It was a simple gesture – and it's made the world of difference. "During that time, I could barely see anything, I was sick every day," Ajara told Open Doors local partners on a recent visit to see how she's doing. "But after you prayed for me, everything is moving on very, very well with me. My body is fine. I have no other problems. At first, I did not have money to send the children to school and nobody

helped me. Now, I have sent my children to school, I have bought uniforms for them, sandals, socks, exercise books and other books. Now, no problem, God is guarding me."

The attacks by Boko Haram in Cameroon have spilt over from neighbouring Nigeria, the epicentre of rising Islamic violence in sub-Saharan Africa that is having a catastrophic impact on millions of Christians. The care given to people like Ajara is one of the many ways in which the Open Doors' *Arise Africa* campaign – which began this summer in response to the escalating persecution – is providing crucial support for our sisters and brothers.

Other support includes emergency relief and livelihood support, as well as trauma care, which is where Ayuba* – whom you might remember from earlier this year – learnt to forgive the man who gave his father's name to Boko Haram militants before they killed him.



EMERGENCY EARTHQUAKE SUPPORT

After the earthquakes first hit Syria on 6 February, a church in Latakia was so full of people needing emergency accommodation that Samer, one of the leaders, had to sleep in his car. It speaks to how the church has been an anchor of hope in the community, helped by your incredible generosity in response to our emergency appeal.

"I would like to thank Open Doors very much, because it has truly been the helping hand for people," says Samer. "We were able to reach out to more than 1,000 families in Latakia. We helped them in all possible ways: food, healthcare, rent and home restorations.

"The aid that you gave got the attention of the people," adds Samer. "They thought, 'A church this size is giving aid to people from different backgrounds, without asking for anything in return?' And this caused them to wonder: 'Why are these people different from the others?'"

"People are coming to the church and they are listening to the

Word of God," he continues. "They are hearing something new. There are a lot of people

"People are coming to the church and they are listening to the Word of God."

who are changing spiritually, and there are people who believed [for the first time] in the Lord Jesus Christ as their personal Saviour!"

Meanwhile, in Aleppo, your support meant that 12,300 people received help in the immediate aftermath of the earthquake. According to Ibrahim, an Open Doors partner, more than 70% of the total needs of Christian families in the city following the disaster have been met by Open Doors.

MEETING NEEDS IN MANIPUR AND JARANWALA

The earthquakes were not the only emergency crisis you responded to. In Manipur, India, where this year Christians have

been impacted by devastating violence, your gifts have equipped local partners to deliver emergency aid and walk alongside believers traumatised by the conflict. "Thank you for coming and listening to my struggle," says Hycinthe*, who received a food kit.

"As I'm speaking on behalf of the people from Manipur, I have seen how happy they were, how grateful they were, and how thankful they were," says Anjali*, a local partner. "It is truly God who is doing this through you.

"It is truly God who is doing this through you."

"Even if you are not here, we know that your prayers and your support are with the people, which means a lot. It is not just



physical or material support, it is a strength. It is a support to their faith."

You've also come to the aid of Christians in Jaranwala, Pakistan, after homes and churches were attacked by an angry Muslim mob in August. "We are here because we never left; we will remain here with our people – serving God and washing their feet," says a partner in Pakistan.

HOW ELSE HAVE YOU STOOD WITH YOUR PERSECUTED FAMILY?

This year, Standing Strong has gone regional to enable more of you to meet your persecuted family and hear their stories, ask them questions and pray with them. At the time of writing, seven of nine events have taken place. More than 1,000 have joined us, with speakers including Hea Woo* from North Korea and Abraham* and Eti*



from South East Asia.

You've shown up for your persecuted sisters and brothers in other ways, too, including volunteering and fundraising. Meanwhile, thousands of you invited your MP to the first in-person World Watch List parliamentary launch since 2019. More than 90 MPs attended the event, where they heard powerful, first-hand stories from Christians in North Korea, India and East Africa.

"There are no borders, no prison walls, no doors that are closed to us when we pray."

"What always strikes me about [the Open Doors] launch is that lots and lots of MPs get contacted by their constituents who say, 'We really, really want you to come up to the launch of the annual World Watch List,' and, of course, having got that instruction, we all come!" said Stephen Timms MP, who hosted the event. "And it does reflect, I think, the very, very strong support that Open Doors has around the country – the deep, deep commitment of supporters of the organisation to its work."

*Names changed for security reasons

Finally, there is prayer. "Our prayers can go where we cannot," said Brother Andrew. "There are no borders, no prison walls, no doors that are closed to us when we pray." Time and time again, our persecuted family tell us that, whilst their circumstances don't always change, they feel your prayers. Whether using the prayer diary, Prayer News, emails or social media, or hearing about your persecuted family at an event, countless prayers have been raised, the impact of which can never be measured.

THANK YOU!

Thank you for the instrumental support you give your persecuted family. As Paul said in 2 Corinthians 9:12, "This service that you perform is not only supplying the needs of the Lord's people but is also overflowing in many expressions of thanks to God."

Please continue to walk with the persecuted church. Your support remains vital to the immediate needs of our persecuted family as well as the long-term survival of the church. If you don't already, why not consider committing to give regularly or receive weekly emails to inspire you to pray? Find out more at opendoorsuk.org or call 01993 460015.

ABOVE Open Doors supporters at a Standing Strong event pray for John* from Yemen
LEFT Timothy Cho* from North Korea spoke at the parliamentary launch, pictured with Stephen Timms MP



Open Doors partners distribute aid to earthquake survivors in Syria

12,300 PEOPLE
received support in the immediate aftermath of the earthquake.

MORE THAN 70%
of the needs of Christian families in Aleppo have been met by Open Doors.



THIS CHRISTMAS, REDISCOVER THE STORY THROUGH THE EYES OF

HEROD'S SECRET POLICEMAN

"This is a story about something that happened a long time ago, but which is still happening today."

Herod's Secret Policeman is our new Christmas resource for children, families and churches.

It tells the story of Secret Policeman Number 3 (and his toy sheep, Nellie) and how his task of following and spying on the wise men actually changes his life. It's a fresh and funny way to approach the Christmas story and to bring out the reality faced by millions of Christians around the world – that the decision to follow Jesus might mean going into hiding and keeping your faith secret.

ORDER YOUR FREE STORYBOOK

Herod's Secret Policeman is available as a free, full-colour storybook. Ideal for primary-age children, it's a great giveaway for churches at Christmas time.

SHARE THE VIDEO

To accompany the book there is also a video. Great for Advent services, crib services or Christingle.

DOWNLOAD THE NATIVITY SCENE

A fun activity for children of all ages. Make your own nativity scene featuring the characters from the book: Mary, Joseph, Jesus, the shepherds and wise men – and, of course, Secret Policeman Number 3 and Nellie the Sheep!

USE THE TEACHING MATERIALS

To accompany the book there is also a free, downloadable children's teaching session. You could also adapt this for an all-age service.

Herod's Secret Policeman is a fun and thought-provoking way of connecting the truth of the Christmas story with the reality of life of secret Christians today.



HEROD'S SECRET POLICEMAN INCLUDES:

- 24pp full-colour story book for children
- Animated video
- Downloadable activity - colour in your own nativity scene!
- Accompanying teaching and discussion guide
- Great for children's services, Sunday school or family reflections.



Order your free copy and find all the resources at opendoorsuk.org/herod

A new small group resource for 2024

Among the Ashes

Learning to lament with the persecuted church

What do we do when everything falls apart?

How do we pray when God seems distant – or even when it seems like He's not there at all?

Where can we turn when we find ourselves standing among the ashes?

Among the Ashes is a powerful new resource for small groups and churches focusing on the issue of lament.

Presented by members of the Open Doors team (BELOW),

the series uses inspirational testimonies from our persecuted church family, and the scriptural witness of the 'lament' psalms to explore a Christian response to suffering and loss.

The series explores the four 'movements' of lament, beginning with the need for us to be honest with God, then recognising God's presence, relying on His promises and, finally, waiting for a reply.

Certainly the Christian faith celebrates the hope and the ultimate victory of Jesus Christ. But as the lives of our persecuted church family show, following Jesus does not mean we escape times of hardship.

What we learn from their testimony – and, indeed, from the Bible itself – is that it's no shame to find ourselves among the ashes. Indeed, the truth is

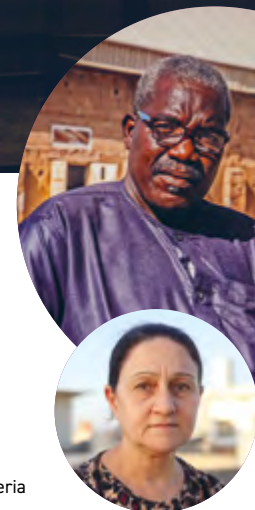
that it is precisely at those times that we can encounter God in a new and powerful way.

RIGHT Pastor Andrew from Nigeria and Sana from Iraq – two of the powerful testimonies from the persecuted church featured in *Among the Ashes*.

Visit opendoorsuk.org/ashes to watch the films and order your free discussion guides.

AMONG THE ASHES

- » Inspirational films featuring stories from India, Egypt, Iraq and Nigeria
- » Free orderable discussion guide
- » Ideal for Lent groups, small groups, prayer evenings or even church services
- » Includes reflections on five lament psalms.



RISK-TAKERS OF THE PERSECUTED CHURCH

Roshan and Devi from India are seeing a brighter future



School is such a precious opportunity for children. As well as learning, it's where they make friends, get to ask questions, and find out who they are. But for some persecuted Christian children like Roshan* in India, the chance to go to school was not an option – until you stepped in.

Roshan, his brother Aarush* and their mum Devi* had their world turned upside down when Roshan's dad abandoned them. But then Devi encountered Jesus for the first time. "I loved to attend the worship and listen to the man sharing about the Bible," Devi remembers. "When I

accepted Christ, my life changed. I received peace and there was even a glow on my face. My children changed too – their lives transformed."

EVICTED AND ISOLATED

But Devi's family – her husband's relatives – were extremely unhappy about her new faith. "We are breaking all bonds with you," her in-laws told her. "You bring shame on the family because of your faith in Christ! Do not call us even if something happens to you and your sons. We won't help you. Let go of your faith or never come back!"

Eventually, even their village rejected them. Devi and her sons searched for a new community – and found an isolated village in

a remote forest. To the family's delight, there were many other Christians living there too! Life was hard – there's no electricity, water, roads or medical facility – but they had community. Devi managed to construct a home from bamboo sticks, and the little money she earned went on food for Roshan and Aarush.

CARED FOR AND INCLUDED

Thanks to your prayers and support, Devi and her children weren't without help for long. When local Open Doors partners heard about the Christians in their village, most of them rejected by other communities, they began to distribute aid, including food and new clothing. But this was just the first step. Open Doors partners

started a 'bridge school' to connect the community and give all children an equal education, regardless of faith or financial status.

"My teacher told me that Jesus loves me, just as my mum says," says Roshan. "Because of this school, I have friends who can play with me. I get to study in school, which I find interesting."

"The Christian life brings me joy despite all the challenges we face"

– DEVI

Devi says, "I am incredibly happy. Because of the bridge school, my children can learn, write and sing. I consider our brothers and sisters who support us as instruments of His blessings and as messengers of God's love.

"The Christian life is quite different. It brings me joy despite all the challenges we face today. I remember my favourite Bible verse which says: 'Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good' (Psalm 106:1). I am learning to give thanks to God in every situation, for He is indeed good. He has done good things for us through Open Doors partners. I can see the changes in my children and myself. Constantly, God is changing my life."

*Names changed for security reasons

PICTURED Roshan loves attending the school in his village, run by Open Doors partners and open to children of all faith backgrounds. Images are from a reenactment of Roshan and Devi's story



HOW YOU CAN PRAY FOR INDIA WORLD WATCH LIST #11

PRAY FOR HEALING

Roshan and Aarush have been through so much at such a young age. Please pray for God's healing for them and all young believers who have been rejected or attacked by their family for their faith, and that they will be 'rooted and established in [God's] love' (Ephesians 3:17).

PRAY FOR PEACE

Ongoing tension and violence are continuing to disproportionately affect Christians in many areas of India, including Manipur. Pray that God will pour out His peace on the region and minister to all those who've suffered violence and trauma.

PRAY FOR BRIDGE SCHOOLS

Open Doors partner Priya Sharma* says, "Through our ministry we currently support 20 bridge schools in India... with more than 600 children attending. We would like to expand the number of bridge schools to 50 or more, to be able to serve more children in the future." Pray with Priya for more bridge schools to strengthen and raise up more children.

WHAT CAN WE LEARN FROM THE PERSECUTED CHURCH?

READ

"Praise the Lord. Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; his love endures forever. Who can proclaim the mighty acts of the Lord or fully declare his praise?" – Psalm 106:1-2

REFLECT

Psalm 106 recounts the Israelites' unfaithfulness to God, but reflects on God's unwavering faithfulness and love to them, bookending the psalm with "Praise the Lord". Have there been times when you've particularly experienced God's faithfulness? How has that impacted your faith?

RESPOND

Devi says, "I am learning to give thanks to God in every situation, for He is indeed good." It's difficult to lift our hearts in gratitude when we're going through trying situations and seasons, but remembering the character of God can help to shift our perspective. What characteristics of God can you choose to dwell on?

WHAT WILL IT TAKE THIS CHRISTMAS FOR PERSECUTED CHILDREN'S FUTURES TO BURN BRIGHTER?



Christian children like seven-year-old twins Fasil* and Ezana* in southern Ethiopia are in danger.

"Even our children receive beatings," says their dad, Ermias*. "Until they came home from school each day, we worried about the risk."

With the help of Open Doors supporters like you, local partners can open schools which offer children like

Fasil and Ezana safe education today and brighter hope for the future.



Every £30 could give a month's education to five children impacted by persecution, helping them have a brighter future.

Visit **opendoorsuk.org** to make your Christmas gift today, return the enclosed envelope or phone **01993 460015**.

*Names changed

CHRISTMAS APPEAL

 **OpenDoors**