

# Open *Doors*

MAGAZINE | January/February 2024

**What does it  
cost to follow  
Jesus in  
North Korea?**



## WORLD WATCH LIST 2024

### LAUNCH PRAYER EVENING

WESTMINSTER CHAPEL

17 JANUARY 2024 / 7-8PM / ONLINE AND IN-PERSON

Join a special evening of prayer for the launch of the World Watch List. Lift up our courageous brothers and sisters in prayer, and ask that the Lord uses the World Watch List launch powerfully. Come, expecting God to move and lives to change!

Register today for in-person tickets or access to the livestream: [opendoorsuk.org](https://opendoorsuk.org)



## VOLUNTEERS NEEDED

Do you love the persecuted church? Could you use your time, skills and passion to help raise awareness, prayer and support on their behalf? Find out how you can volunteer for Open Doors – we're particularly keen for more marvellous events volunteers.

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



## MAKE YOUR WILL FOR FREE

You can leave a legacy of hope to your persecuted family by including a gift to the work of Open Doors in your Will. Your gift will mean a lifetime of support for those who count the highest cost for following Jesus.

If you haven't made a Will yet, you can make one for FREE using our partner *Farewill*.

You can find out more at [opendoorsuk.org/legacy](https://opendoorsuk.org/legacy) or 01993 460015.



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.

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#### COVER:

Christians in North Korea face appalling persecution for their faith. Image represents Ji Ho's father from a reenactment of Ji Ho's story (p6).

### LETTER FROM HENRIETTA

## Worth the cost

**"When he had found one pearl of great price, [he] went and sold all that he had and bought it."**

MATTHEW 13:46

**Most of us don't have to choose between our safety and our faith. We don't have to decide whether following Jesus is worth the cost of our family, our jobs or even our lives. But there are large numbers of Christians who are making that choice every day – and recognising that Jesus is worth the cost.**

I find stories like Ji Ho's\* in North Korea (p6) so challenging and inspiring. She follows Jesus in a country where any expression of faith could be a death sentence, and she hasn't seen her father since the state police dragged him away for owning a Bible. But hearing Scripture on the radio helped her to stand strong, empowered by truth. She can still say, "Jesus wanted to be my Lord and Saviour – and I wanted to follow Him, in the same way my father had."

When everything is stripped away, what are you left with? The unchanging nature of Jesus is, in the end, the only thing we can stand on. In the West, we don't always get that. But our brothers and sisters in the persecuted church – like Ji Ho – truly understand it. Their wholehearted faith is extraordinary.

Let's continue to stand with them. One way you can do that is by inviting your MP to the World Watch List 2024 parliamentary launch on 17 January (see the enclosed letter, or visit [opendoorsuk.org/advocacy](https://opendoorsuk.org/advocacy)). With a UK election coming up, MPs from both main parties have told me their constituents' views really matter – so let's tell them! Please pray that this event helps change the hearts of people in power in this country – so that they speak out for, and act on behalf of, persecuted Christians like Ji Ho. It's more important now than ever. Thank you.

Every blessing, and happy new year to you and your loved ones,



*Henrietta*

Henrietta Blyth  
CEO, Open Doors UK&I

\*Name changed for security reasons



# WORLD WATCH LIST BULLETIN

## NORTH KOREA

### Christians sent back to extreme danger

Christians are among the 600 refugees that China has recently sent back to North Korea, putting them at grave risk of torture, imprisonment or even death.

"I have personally experienced repatriation once, and I am familiar with the process of imprisonment, torture and punishment that follows," Timothy Cho\* wrote in a letter to MPs, in his role as Co-Secretariat of the UK All-Party Parliamentary Group on North Korea, exhorting them to raise the matter in Parliament.

He believes that China has 'cynically' used the world's focus on Israel and Gaza to make the move without attracting attention.

"Many of these refugees are Christians, women and children, including recently born babies," he adds. "Anyone that has been associated with Christian churches or missionaries while they were in China is likely to be dealt with particularly severely; indeed, many are likely to be executed."

**PRAY** That the UK Parliament will act wisely and compassionately in response to these actions, and that all refugees will be kept from harm.



## UK

### A Saharan adventure

**A 100km walk is arduous enough – but what about doing it in the Sahara Desert? That's the mammoth challenge tackled by Shagass Pam (ABOVE) to raise money for our persecuted family.**

"I've always given to charities supporting other people, people who God loves deeply, but the thought of neglecting to do the same for my own family seemed like something I had been missing," says Shagass from Crawley, who first heard of Open Doors at university.

The five-day trek was concentrated on the north west rim of the desert in Morocco, east of Marrakech. It was undertaken through Charity Challenge and, so far, Shagass has raised more than £1,500! You can donate to him at [justgiving.com/page/trek-1696162270066](https://justgiving.com/page/trek-1696162270066)

If you're feeling inspired to fundraise for your persecuted family, head to [opendoorsuk.org/fundraise](https://opendoorsuk.org/fundraise) for all you need to get started.

## DRC

### Believers in 'despair and disillusionment'

**A Christian community in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) is 'losing hope' following a spate of attacks that killed at least 39 people.**

Armed men stormed Masosi, a Christian neighbourhood in Oicha, North Kivu province. At least 35 bodies, including those of 12 children, were identified. "Many of these people are Christians, they were servants of God, and teachers in our schools," said Reverend Gabriel, a church leader. "It is the church that is under attack."

Two days before, Mumbere Kafukuliro and Mbambu Ndalya – both from the Pastoral School in Oicha – were killed as they were on their way to work at their farm. Earlier that month, two other Christian men – Pastor Mbusa Lisasi and his brother, Kakule – were kidnapped and killed.

"The Christian population of Oicha is in despair and disillusionment," says a field source. "They are losing hope."

These incidents are amongst many in the eastern North Kivu province of DRC, making it a place of extreme danger for Christians to live.

**PRAY** For God's comfort to engulf those grieving, and pray for protection of believers in DRC.

## NIGERIA

### Healing from trauma

"Thank you for allowing God to use you to mend broken hearts," says Bethany\*, a Nigerian Christian who's rediscovering joy after different incidents left her 'heartbroken and hopeless'.

**I dropped everything that made me sad at the feet of Jesus, and I felt peace and joy."**

You may remember Mary\*, whose story we featured last year (Prayer Diary, May-June). In February 2023, shortly after Fulani militants released her from captivity, Mary died from an unrelated illness. For her mother, Bethany, the trauma wasn't over: four months later she was kidnapped by militants and held for a month.

BELOW Bethany, outside her new home, says the trauma centre 'brought joy, hope and reassurance of God's love for me'

Like her daughter, Bethany spent time at the trauma centre run by Open Doors local partners. "I dropped everything that made me sad at the feet of Jesus, and I felt peace and joy," she shares. "If I did not attend, I don't think I would be alive today. But God is not done with me yet. Thank you."

And you weren't done with Bethany either! Before her death, Mary asked that funds given by local partners would go towards a plot of land, so her family could have a new home. Further funds were given to help build the house, the construction of which continued even whilst Bethany was in captivity. After completing the trauma programme, she was taken to her new home. Breaking down in tears, she said, "I lack the best words to say thank you."

**PRAY** That Bethany and her family will find complete peace of mind and heart after everything they've gone through.

> Watch a video of Bethany at [opendoorsuk.org/news](https://opendoorsuk.org/news)



## AFGHANISTAN

### Quake victims receive your help

**Following the devastating earthquakes that hit western Afghanistan in October, our partners reacted quickly with the provision of practical and emotional support.**

More than 2,000 people were killed by earthquakes, which also flattened entire villages and left thousands without food and other necessities. Open Doors partners continue to help those affected.

**PRAY** For the provision of support for all those affected, and for them to experience God's comfort.

ABOVE Rubble caused by earthquakes in Afghanistan

### MORE STORIES:

> **Treasure comes home: last remaining victim of Nigeria school abduction escapes**

> **Susanna Koh from Malaysia has her day in court**

> **Secret storytelling helps young converts learn about Jesus**

Head to [opendoorsuk.org/news](https://opendoorsuk.org/news) or follow us @opendoorsuk for more news and updates



\*Names changed for security reasons



# IN NORTH KOREA, JI HO COUNTS THE COST OF FOLLOWING JESUS EVERY DAY



Representative image of Ji Ho listening to secret radio broadcasts

Ji Ho\* vividly remembers the moment she saw her father for the last time. North Korean security agents had ransacked their house. They didn't find what they were looking for in the house – but they did discover something by digging deep in the garden.

“They found the book, wrapped in plastic,” she remembers. “One of the policemen came inside, holding the book. He kicked over our small table as we cowered in the corner, flinging dishes everywhere, and threw the book down at my father's feet.”

She pauses. The memory is still painful.

**“NORTH KOREAN CHRISTIANS ACTUALLY RISK THEIR PHYSICAL LIVES – NOT ONLY FOR THEMSELVES, BUT FOR THEIR WHOLE FAMILY.”**

## HER FATHER'S SECRET BOOK

Ji Ho never learned precisely where her father went. At the time, she didn't even know what the ‘secret book’ was. “I didn't see what was so bad about it,” she says. “My father loved to read me stories and sayings out of the book – about a wise man who sat on a mountain and began to teach. Why would a lesson about kindness be so dangerous in North Korea?” Only years later did she realise it was a Bible.

\*Names changed for security reasons.

Ji Ho's story is based on several true accounts of life in North Korea, to protect any specific person from being identified.



In some ways, Ji Ho was 'fortunate'. When a Bible is found in the home of a North Korean, it usually means the whole family is in terrible danger. As Open Doors secret fieldworker Brother Simon\* explains, "North Korean Christians actually risk their physical lives – not only for themselves, but for their whole family. Because when they practise their Christian activities and one of them is exposed as a Christian, the whole family gets the same punishment. Sometimes that means a whole family is killed or banished to political camps."

Ji Ho was determined to find out what her father's secret had

been. What had meant so much to him that he was ready to count such a severe cost?

#### JI HO FINDS JESUS ON THE RADIO

But there was one other hidden thing in Ji Ho's house that the police agents hadn't found: her father's radio.

"He wanted to know if there was anywhere that had food," recalls Ji Ho. "He thought maybe China had some to offer, and that he could sneak over the border." After her father was taken, Ji Ho started listening too – hoping to find a source of food. One evening she was turning the dial and found a

new station. She realised, with a start, that they were talking about the same 'wise man' her father had told her about. The one who was in the secret book. They called Him 'Jesus'.

"From then on, I listened to the station every chance I got," she says. "I heard other things about Jesus: 'Man does not live by bread alone', 'The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ' and the most amazing thing of all: 'For God so loved the world, that He gave us His only son, that whoever believes in Him will not perish but will have everlasting life.'"

**"AS I LISTENED,  
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**42%**

of North Koreans are malnourished

**50-70,000**

North Korean Christians are in labour camps

**100,000**

North Korean believers are sustained with vital food and aid, shelter and discipleship training through Open Doors underground networks outside the country

**20+ years**

North Korea has been number one on the World Watch List almost every year since 1992

LEFT Secret radio broadcasts from outside the country help disciple and encourage North Korean believers. Representative image of Ji Ho

"As I listened, I became more and more convinced. This Jesus was the great teacher that my father had been trying to tell me about. Jesus wanted to be my Lord and Saviour – and I wanted to follow Him, in the same way my father had."

#### TAUGHT TO HATE CHRISTIANITY

It can be almost impossible for a parent to teach their child about Jesus in North Korea. It comes with enormous risk. Children are often trained by their teachers to look out for any clues of Christianity, and encouraged to inform on their parents.

"According to the messages sent from North Korean believers, their main concern is how they can pass on their Christian faith to their children, the next generation of the North Korean church," shares Brother Simon. "But it's hard – North Koreans have been taught to hate Christianity their whole lives. They are officially taught that Christians, especially pastors and missionaries, are spies or enemies. Christians are targeted, and must be rooted out and eradicated in North Korea."

This indoctrination has to be unlearned. Ji Ho soon began to see Jesus speaking to her through the verses she heard on the radio – and that, far from being enemies of North Koreans, Christians were called to love their neighbours.

"I'd come home, exhausted from the work in the fields, my heart still hurting at the loss of my father, and I'd think about the poem I'd heard on the radio: 'The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want,'" Ji Ho says. "I'd see a neighbour whom I knew was hungry, and

I heard the words of Jesus: 'Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.'"

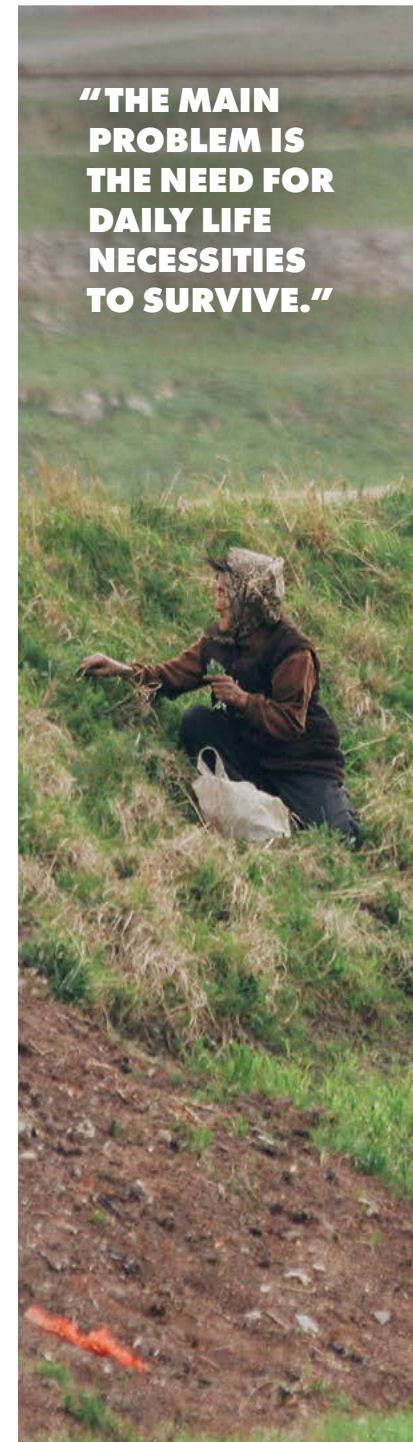
#### FOOD SHORTAGES

These words from Psalm 23 and Matthew 25 are particularly significant to anyone living in North Korea, where extreme poverty threatens huge numbers of people. "The main problem is the need for daily life necessities to survive," says Brother Simon. "Absolute poverty has flourished throughout the country." Any food that does enter the country is given to the elite and the army, leaving ordinary people – particularly those in rural areas – in dire need of food. The UN special rapporteur for human rights in North Korea has estimated that 42% of North Koreans are malnourished due to food shortages.

**"I WAS STILL  
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Many fear a repeat of the 'Arduous March' of the 1990s – a famine in which up to 3.5 million North Koreans died of starvation. While the situation has improved a little since pandemic restrictions were eased, and more food has got into the country through official or unofficial routes, believers are often at the end of the line when it comes to distribution of

**"THE MAIN  
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NECESSITIES  
TO SURVIVE."**



ABOVE Food is in such short supply that some desperate North Koreans are even driven to eating grass



this food. Anyone known to be from a Christian family – if they somehow avoid execution or a prison camp – is treated as a member of the ‘hostile class’. That means they have limited access to food, jobs or homes.

Remembering Jesus’s words about helping her brothers and sisters, Ji Ho has made extraordinary sacrifices. “As I continued to learn more about Jesus, I also found that my life was changing in other ways. I was still hungry, but I started to share my food,” she says. “I knew I could give up some of my food to my neighbours who didn’t have a garden. I hoped this might show them in some way that Jesus loved them.”

### NO FREEDOM

Ji Ho shows Jesus’s love with generosity that comes at great cost, given the dire state of the country – but has to keep her faith secret, in order to survive. Otherwise, she might end up like the tens of thousands of Christians held in labour camps across the country. There is no freedom of religion or belief at all in North Korea. For almost all of the past 20 years, it’s been the place where Christians face the worst persecution in the world.

“I know that it would be dangerous to tell anyone about Jesus,” says Ji Ho. “Our leaders don’t want us to worship



**“BELIEVERS IN NORTH KOREA EVEN WANT TO JOIN IN PRAYER FOR OTHER PERSECUTED CHRISTIANS.”**

> Watch a video of Ji Ho’s extraordinary story at [opendoorsuk.org](https://opendoorsuk.org)

anyone or anything besides them. I’ve realised that’s why my father was taken – they saw he had a Lord that was bigger than our country’s leaders.”

### A GROWING CHURCH

Despite this terrible cost, more and more North Koreans are encountering Jesus and deciding to follow Him. Even in this desperate situation, the church is growing! Some, like Ji Ho, are hearing about Him through Open Doors’ radio ministry. This is operated outside of the country, reaching thousands of secret North Korean believers every day.

North Korea only officially sells radios tuned to state frequencies, so people must find radios on the black market or get radios through Open Doors’ secret networks in another country.

Daily broadcasts include Scripture reading, Bible studies and more. They help disciple and encourage the underground church in North Korea, while sometimes also being the first time someone hears the name of Jesus at all.

Believers in North Korea even want to join in prayer for

ABOVE Representative image of Ji Ho

other persecuted Christians. “They asked us to produce a radio programme about the persecuted church,” shares Brother Simon. “They cannot materially help persecuted churches – but they can join by praying with their brothers and sisters for persecuted churches.”

### DESPERATE NEED

But the North Korean church cannot flourish if it is on the brink of starvation. “The first prayer request is that we help North Korean Christians physically survive,” says Brother Simon. “Through our networks in another country, we distribute food and medicine, especially in wintertime.”

Through these underground networks, Open Doors secret workers are currently sustaining 100,000 North Korean believers with vital food and aid, shelter and discipleship training. That’s only possible with the help and prayers of people like you.

“I’ll continue to learn more about Jesus and how I can follow Him more closely – and I’ll continue to be salt to the people around me,” says Ji Ho. She has so little, but is determined to do what she can to show Jesus’s love to the desperate people around her.

Today, will you show the same kindness and generosity as Ji Ho? Will you help keep believers alive as they count the greatest cost for following Jesus?

**Support those counting the cost**

### PLEASE PRAY

- That God will continue to sustain thousands of North Korean Christians with food and aid through Open Doors secret networks outside the country
- For Ji Ho to have opportunities to share

the love of Christ with her neighbours, and to stay strong in her faith

- For strength, encouragement and even joy for all Christians facing extreme persecution around the world.

You can find more prayer points for North Korea, and other countries where Christians face extreme persecution for their faith, in your January/February prayer diary.

### PLEASE GIVE

You can make a gift to help persecuted Christians who count the cost of following Christ at [opendoorsuk.org](https://opendoorsuk.org).

- **Every £22** could encourage an isolated believer with a regular radio broadcast, supporting them in their walk with Jesus.
- **Every £35** could provide a Bible and discipleship materials to a believer, so they can meet God in His Word.
- **Every £46** could give a Christian family a vital food package to help them survive this winter.

### INVITE YOUR MP

Your MP can hear first-hand from persecuted Christians, and learn how they can respond to escalating persecution, at the World Watch List 2024 parliamentary launch. It’s a vital opportunity to seek change for our global family. Find out more in your enclosed letter, or at [opendoorsuk.org/advocacy](https://opendoorsuk.org/advocacy)

BELOW Every North Korean is expected to worship and obey the Kim family - propaganda is found everywhere in public life





# RAISE YOUR VOICE FOR CHRISTIANS WHO ARE COUNTING THE COST

The World Watch List 2024 will be launched in parliament in January – will you make sure your MP is invited?

When Pastor Zachariah discovered that his wife and child had been killed in an attack on their village, he was devastated and traumatised. “Since this incident, no matter what I am doing, I will always remember what we went through,” he says. “Even when I am praying, I get lost thinking of the incident. That day I cried like never before; it was on that day I knew that death was truly painful.”

Understandably, Zachariah (PICTURED) – a church leader in Mangu, Plateau State, Nigeria – wasn’t sure where God was in this awful situation. “Honestly, when this attack took place, I felt as if God had forsaken me, because I said if God is in control, why would He allow these people to cause this kind of attack on us? Where is He that He will not take charge of the situation?”

Sadly, Pastor Zachariah’s experience is becoming more and more common. Nigeria was number six on the World Watch List 2023. Violence against Christians is increasing – more Christians are killed for their faith in Nigeria than the rest of the world combined.

**“We should rely on God because He is everything we live for.”**

But Pastor Zachariah and his church are not alone. Thanks to your prayers and support, local Open Doors partners were able to come alongside them with trauma healing ministry.

“Your organisation called us for counselling and trauma healing for affected individuals and I learnt a lot,” says Pastor Zachariah. “This teaching has encouraged me greatly because right now I am asking God to forgive our attackers, and for

them to enter the Kingdom of God and not to die in their sins. Had I not come for this counselling, I would not have been living a good life – but since I came for this programme, now my mind is at rest.”

## **INVITE YOUR MP TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE**

Your prayers and support are invaluable to believers like Pastor Zachariah – and so is your voice. On Wednesday 17 January, we’re presenting the Open Doors World Watch List 2024 in parliament. This year, more than ever, we need the government to take notice and take action for our brothers and sisters facing extreme persecution – and you can play your part by inviting your MP to attend on your behalf.

You make a difference! Last year, the event was hosted by the Rt Hon. Sir Stephen Timms MP, who said in his introductory remarks, “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! And it does reflect the very, very strong support that Open Doors has around the country.”

Last year, thanks to your invitations, the event was attended by 95 MPs, who heard first-hand from believers from North Korea, East Africa and India. This year, there will be a representative from Nigeria (alongside believers from Iran and India), sharing about believers like Pastor Zachariah, and how the government can proactively make a difference.

As well as inviting your MP, please pray for the event. Henrietta Blyth, CEO of Open Doors UK and Ireland, says, “Please pray for the World Watch List launch. Pray that God will change the hearts of our government, and governments around the world. We need God to raise

up leaders of integrity and compassion... MPs need to understand that freedom of religion or belief is fundamental to society.”

Your voice, your prayers, your support, truly show our persecuted church family around the world that they are not alone – and, because of you, they can continue to be salt and light in their communities even as they count the cost of following Jesus. “For those who have found themselves in similar situations which we have experienced, my prayer is that we should rely on God because He is everything we live for,” Pastor Zachariah shares. “If we turn our attention away from God, we will see Him as someone who cannot help us, but if we believe He can do all things then we will not be broken.”



> You can watch Pastor Zachariah share his story at [opendoorsuk.org/nigeria](https://opendoorsuk.org/nigeria)

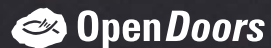
## **INVITE YOUR MP TO THE 2024 LAUNCH**

We’ll be revealing the World Watch List 2024 in parliament on Wednesday 17 January, 4-5pm – and you can make sure your MP is there! They’ll not only hear first-hand from believers in Nigeria, India and Iran, but they’ll be given recommendations as to how they can actively make a difference for our persecuted church family around the world.

Invite your MP today at [opendoorsuk.org/advocacy](https://opendoorsuk.org/advocacy) or using the enclosed letter, and ask them to represent you at the World Watch List launch.







# Meet the risk-takers of the persecuted church

It's a new year, full of fresh and exciting opportunities – and that extends to meeting your persecuted family!



Following the resounding success of events in 2023, **Standing Strong** is again coming to a region near you in 2024, giving you a unique and precious opportunity to meet your persecuted family.

Almost 1,500 of you attended the nine events held last year in England, Wales, Scotland and Ireland, and it's been wonderful to hear the different ways the experience impacted you.

**"A really encouraging and faith-strengthening day,"** - STANDING STRONG ATTENDEE, 2023

"I particularly enjoyed the speaker who brought to life what persecution is really like – the pain, the danger,

the fact that his life might be taken from him at any time, the lost contact with his family," said an attendee at the Cambridge event. "It was so moving, and it's such a pleasure to know that we can pray and give into this wonderful work."

**"A huge encouragement to continue praying and supporting our family,"** - STANDING STRONG ATTENDEE, 2023

## AN IMMERSIVE EXPERIENCE

The events not only involve hearing stories and updates from your persecuted family, including the immeasurable difference made by your prayers and support. They're also an opportunity to worship, pray and deepen

your relationship with the persecuted church, strengthening your faith.

"I was blown away by the idea that we could put ourselves in the place of the oppressed in camps in North Korea by turning off the lights and asking us to write a Bible verse we had memorised on a piece of toilet paper," said a supporter at the event in Birmingham. "It was really effective."

## WHAT NEXT?

Booking details for your nearest event (including venue) will be available in early 2024 at [opendoorsuk.org/standingstrong](https://opendoorsuk.org/standingstrong). We'd love for you to join us!

## STANDING STRONG 2024 – where's your nearest event?

**SCOTLAND** // Saturday 11 May

**LONDON** // Friday 17 May (evening)

**SOUTH WEST** // Saturday 8 June

**WALES** // Saturday 15 June

**NORTHERN IRELAND** // Saturday 5 October

**EAST MIDLANDS** // Saturday 12 October

**WEST MIDLANDS** // Saturday 2 November

**NORTHERN ENGLAND** // Saturday 9 November

# AMONG THE ASHES

## LEARNING LAMENT WITH THE PERSECUTED CHURCH

Ideal for Lent and Easter

*Among the Ashes* is a new, five-part resource for small groups, which focuses on the issue of lament. Using powerful testimony from the persecuted church, the series looks at how certain psalms teach us about the four 'movements' of lament, starting 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.

Lament is not easy to talk about. We naturally prefer to focus on more positive, upbeat subjects. And yet, suffering and loss are universal. Everyone will experience some kind of loss in their lifetime. And the Bible is full of passages which talk about suffering, grief and absence.

So, clearly, all Christians should explore this topic. And what better time than during Lent? What better time to open up what it means to be among the ashes than in the period which begins with Ash Wednesday itself?

*Among the Ashes* comes as five high-quality videos, filmed in evocative locations around Britain and presented by staff and associates of Open Doors. You can also order a free discussion guide for small groups with

questions for reflection and ideas for prayers.

Of course, this resource can be used at any point during the year. But if you are running Lent groups, or if you want to use this period to open up these issues with your church or small groups, then *Among the Ashes* will prove a powerful, memorable and, we hope, transformative experience.

Visit [opendoorsuk.org/ashes](https://opendoorsuk.org/ashes) to watch the films and order your discussion guides.

## AMONG THE ASHES

- Inspirational films featuring stories from India, Egypt, Iraq and Nigeria
- Filmed in a variety of atmospheric locations around the UK
- Free orderable discussion guide
- Ideal for Lent groups, small groups, prayer evenings or even church services
- Includes reflections on five lament psalms.





# DISCOVER THE PERSECUTED CHURCH: WORLD WATCH LIST 2024

Behind every number is a name. Behind every statistic is a story.  
Behind every commitment there is a cost.

Released every January, the **Open Doors World Watch List** ranks the countries where Christians risk the most to follow Christ.

This year, the theme is 'counting the cost'. In a very real sense, this is exactly what the list does: it uses extensive, on-the-ground research to show how many Christians have to pay a price for their faith, and rank the countries where this costs the most.

But the list is more than a set of numbers: it really reflects millions of individual stories. Behind the data are millions of daily decisions, millions of people who have decided to follow Jesus, no matter the cost.

Because every member of the persecuted church pays a price for following Jesus. For some, the price is knowing that they will always be at the end of the

line, always treated unfairly and fighting for justice. For others, the price is paid in bruises and beatings, in prison sentences and pain. Some must give up their home, their family, their security. Others know that they will always be the targets and scapegoats. The cost of discipleship is paid in sleepless nights and days full of fear.

Counting the cost: it's what every persecuted Christian does. And what's really amazing is that they consider it a price worth paying.

**THE PEARL AND THE FIELD**  
In Matthew's Gospel, Jesus describes the Kingdom of God as something beyond value.

"The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which someone found and hid; then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field. Again, the kingdom

of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls; on finding one pearl of great value, he went and sold all that he had and bought it." (Matt. 13:44-46)

When we think about the persecuted church, it's easy to focus on the price, and forget about the pearl. But the point of these parables is that the Kingdom of God is worth the price. It's worth everything. When they decide to follow Jesus, persecuted Christians know that they will have to give everything. But it's worth it, because they have discovered the treasure for which they have been searching all their life.

This, then, is the truth which the World Watch List reveals: that behind the shocking figures, there is a joyful, living faith. As Pastor Zachariah, who features on the cover of the Top 50 says, 'I want to tell people who find themselves in situations

like we have experienced, my prayer for you is that we should rely on God, because He is everything we live for.'

Believers like Zachariah have discovered the truth: the Kingdom of God is real. As real and alive as a field. As thrilling and exciting as

hidden treasure. As solid and beautiful and priceless as a pearl.

OPPOSITE This picture, from a video re-enactment about Christians in Yemen, shows how persecuted followers of Jesus must meet in secret

## WORLD WATCH LIST RESOURCES

Free resources to help you, your family and your church stand with the persecuted church.

### THE WORLD WATCH LIST TOP 50

The comprehensive handbook to the top 50 countries where Christians count the cost of following Christ. It includes:

- detailed information and specific prayer points for each of the 50 countries
- World Watch List map

- inspirational stories and testimonies from persecuted Christians

- 'Counting the Cost' devotionals to help us reflect on our faith
- 'Teach us how to pray' – learning from the prayer life of the persecuted church.



**CHILDREN'S MAP AND PRAYER PASSPORT**  
Bigger than ever! Grab your *Prayer Passport* and head off on a journey of prayer around the World Watch List:



- prayer points to help you pray brave prayers
- a downloadable youth session outline introducing themes of persecution and brave faith.

Along with these core resources, there are many other ways in which you and your church can engage with the World Watch List in 2024:

- 52-page *Prayer Passport* with prayers for each country
- 'Children like me' feature, sharing stories of children from the persecuted church
- Wall map to help children discover more about the world of the persecuted church.

- book an Open Doors speaker for your church – in person or online
- order a poster-sized World Watch List map to put up in your church
- watch and share inspirational and informative videos.

### YOUTH MAP AND SESSION OUTLINE

Interactive and innovative ideas to help young people engage with the persecuted church:

- a world map with the 50 riskiest places to follow Jesus

You can order your free World Watch List resources as soon as the list launches, on **17 January** (for delivery in February) at [opendoorsuk.org/wwl](https://opendoorsuk.org/wwl)





## The 'wanted' Yemeni shunning safety for Jesus

**Sometimes the death threat came as a text message, at other times a phone call. Although Saleh\* from Yemen was used to the risk, this time felt different – and faith more costly than ever.**

### THE PERSON 'WHO KNOWS JESUS'

Courageous faith has been a theme of Saleh's life, ever since he bravely told his father that, whilst studying, he'd been exploring Christianity – only to discover his father was a Christian! He kept his faith hidden, for fear of the dangers if his son accidentally revealed his faith.

After becoming a Christian, and sensing a call to church leadership, Saleh and a friend regularly evangelised outside their local mosque. They became known as the 'crazy guys', such was their boldness. In Yemen, it's illegal to convert

from Islam to Christianity, and accusations of apostasy can lead to the death penalty.

Wherever Saleh went, he told Yemenis about Jesus – including at a refugee camp in a nearby country, after fleeing because of war. "I became known as the person 'who knows Jesus,'" says Saleh. "There were deep conversations and many people came to know Christ."

**"But what kind of Christians would we be if we weren't risking our life for others to know Life?"**

Yemen remained on Saleh's heart, leading to him creating a house church network when he returned. With 70% of believers in Yemen unable to gather, it's

meeting a huge need – but it's costly. "If we sit at home and do nothing, we would be safe," says Saleh. "But what kind of Christians would we be if we weren't risking our life for others to know Life?"

And so it proved for Saleh: he started receiving death threats.

### "GOD DID A MIRACLE"

In 2022, Saleh's brother Issam\*, and friend Mussa\* whom Saleh led to Jesus, wanted to visit an area to baptise believers. However, given his notoriety with the authorities, Saleh didn't go. "They messaged, telling me they had boarded the bus and were en route [to the baptism]," recalls Saleh. "After that text, I lost communication with them."

Police had boarded the bus and arrested Issam and Musa for apostasy. The incident meant the authorities had contact details of other

believers, including Saleh. His name was among those distributed across Yemen, making it dangerous to cross checkpoints and leave the country. Saleh was 'wanted'.

**"It was during those dark times when I felt God's presence with me."**

For two months, Saleh hid in Yemen, fearing for his life as threats were made, whilst trying to get Issam and Mussa released. "There were days when I was hopeful and strong, and other times when I felt weak, guilty and depressed," he shares. "It was during those dark times when I felt God's presence with me."

Saleh and other believers prayed and fasted for Issam and Mussa – and thankfully, after eight weeks, they were released from prison. "God did a miracle," says Saleh. "He changed the heart of a person of influence who initially wanted them dead. He helped them to get out of jail! Afterwards, I realised why God allowed this to happen – God brought several prisoners to Him through them."

Meanwhile, the danger subsided for Saleh and he returned to his home outside Yemen. Today, helped by Open Doors partners, he travels to and from Yemen to serve 70 Christian families in the country, providing support including food, discipleship and training, but risks remain. "The church in Yemen is living in very harsh conditions, but is growing nonetheless!" he says.

\*Names changed for security reasons

## PAUSE

**Read Acts 12:1-19**

There are striking similarities between Peter's story and Issam and Mussa's. All three were detained for their faith, with death a possibility, and all were miraculously released after the fervent prayers of others.

## PRAY

"A wave of people have come to Christ since 2014 when the war began," says Saleh. "Because of extremists, people are horrified by what's being done in the name of 'religion.'" **Ask the Holy Spirit to lead believers to those searching for truth.**

The dangers and isolation of being a Christian can leave believers struggling for hope, causing some to doubt their faith. **Ask God to reassure them of His love and provide them with fellowship.**

Yemen is riddled by armed conflict, economic turmoil and a catastrophic humanitarian crisis. **Pray for peace, provision and protection.**

## PONDER

- The miraculous release of all three followed prolonged and earnest prayer. Let this inspire your own prayer life.
- People were 'astonished' by Peter's 'courage' in Acts 4:13. He's like Saleh, known as the 'madman' for his fearless faith. Where can you be more courageous in your faith?
- The stories of Mussa, Issam and Saleh could well have come from Acts, such is the faith and power displayed. How are you encouraged and challenged by this?



> Watch a video of Saleh at [opendoorsuk.org](https://opendoorsuk.org)



# COUNTING THE COST

This year's World Watch List is launched on 17 January 2024.

Visit [opendoorsuk.org/www](https://opendoorsuk.org/www) to see where Christians count the highest cost.



Re-enactment image

## EVERY DAY, JI HO IN NORTH KOREA COUNTS THE COST OF HER DECISION

After her father was taken by North Korea's state police, Ji Ho\* found herself alone and struggling for food. But she's chosen to continue following Jesus, despite the risks.

The church is growing in North Korea, despite imprisonment or death for anybody found to follow Jesus. Christians like Ji Ho face enormous danger – and starvation too. Today, will you help North Korean Christians to keep going?

**Your gift of £46 could give a Christian family a vital food package to help them survive this winter.**

Visit [opendoorsuk.org](https://opendoorsuk.org) to make a gift today, return the enclosed envelope or phone **01993 460015**. Thank you.

\*Name changed