

# Open *Doors*

MAGAZINE | March/April 2024



**Seen. Valued.  
Empowered.**

Help persecuted  
Christian women  
see change

## WORLD WATCH LIST 2024 TOP 50

PRAY FOR CHRISTIANS WHO COUNT THE HIGHEST  
COST FOR FOLLOWING JESUS.

You can get inspiring testimonies, expert insight on the  
World Watch List top 50 countries, prayer points and  
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Order today to stand with your persecuted brothers  
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### STANDING STRONG

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17 May / London      15 June / Wales

Check the website for details of autumn/winter events



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  
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to reprint any of the  
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#### COVER:

Simin (name changed) from  
Iran faces persecution for  
her faith and her gender.  
You can watch her video at  
[opendoorsuk.org/seechange](https://opendoorsuk.org/seechange)

### LETTER FROM HENRIETTA

## All things are possible

**“Jesus looked at them and said, ‘With  
man this is impossible, but with God all  
things are possible.’”**

MATTHEW 19:26

**When I read Sara’s story from Iraq (p8), there are two things  
that really grab my attention. One is the remarkable complexity  
of the persecution of Christian women around the world. The  
other is that nothing is impossible for God. No persecution is too  
complex for Him to overcome.**

Why is the persecution of Christian women and girls so complex?  
I think it’s because persecution almost never happens in isolation.  
It’s hard to see persecution if the tools of the persecutor are part  
of the everyday cultural fabric. In some countries, it is sadly not  
unusual for a woman to be controlled by her father, forcibly held  
by her brother or beaten by her husband. That means, when she  
is additionally vulnerable because of her Christian faith, society  
doesn’t notice.

But God notices. In Sara’s story, He intervened in a truly miraculous  
way — I’ll leave you to read exactly how, but it makes me marvel  
afresh at His kindness and the lengths He will go to for His  
children. Sara’s powerful testimony can teach all of us about the  
value of holding on and trusting God.

God sees women like Sara, and we can too. Open Doors’ ongoing  
*See. Change.* campaign aims to peel back those layers of  
complexity and societal norms so that the persecution of Christian  
women and girls is shown for what it is. Only then can we respond  
with prayer, support and speaking out for women like Sara.  
Together, we can see change.

Thank you for seeing your Christian sisters, and please join us  
in continuing to support and pray earnestly for them.



*Henrietta*

Henrietta Blyth  
CEO, Open Doors UK&I

P.S. If you live near Oxfordshire, I’d love to invite you to join me at  
a special *See. Change.* prayer breakfast at the Open Doors office  
on Saturday 13 April. We’ll pray together for persecuted Christian  
women and girls and hear their inspiring stories of courage.  
Visit [opendoorsuk.org/seechange](https://opendoorsuk.org/seechange) for details.

# WORLD WATCH LIST BULLETIN

## MYANMAR

### 17 killed as air strike hits church

At least 17 people, including 11 Christians, were killed when a church was bombed by the military.

St Peter's Baptist Church was hit when a fighter jet dropped three bombs on Kanan, a village in Myanmar's north western Sagaing Division. Believers were in the middle of a worship service at the time.

Children and parents were among those killed. "I am so angry at the injustice, and I also worry for the future of the orphaned children," says Tun Maung\*, an Open Doors local partner.

It's now more than three years since the military coup that's deepened Myanmar's civil war and put its small Christian population in even greater danger.

**PRAY** For comfort, healing and strength for those affected by this tragedy.



ABOVE Open Doors local partners continue to come alongside believers in Myanmar with support including food provision



## DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO (DRC)

### Onlookers 'marvel' at church's response to attack

Last year, CEPAC Church in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) was devastated by a bomb that killed 15 people. But amidst the awful suffering, God has been powerfully at work – including through your support.

Following the attack on the church in Kasindi by the Islamic militant group the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) in January 2023, Open Doors local partners came alongside the church to provide practical, spiritual and emotional support. For many families, collecting relief packages meant returning to the church for the first time since the attack – and it's helped them to keep coming back.

Meanwhile, the gift of a Bible is having a powerful impact on Joys, a mother, whose son Muyisa (11) was amongst those killed. "Since the attack, she has not gone to church," says her husband. "When she saw

the Bible, she was so happy and comforted. She reads the Bible very often now, and I see God's Word gradually comforts her even if she is not yet fully recovered."

Amazingly, the church has increased in number since the attack. "The enemy planned to destroy God's house, but the church has grown," said Pastor Ki Abraham as the church gathered to praise God on the anniversary of the attack.

The celebratory event – which featured singing, dancing and baptisms – astonished onlookers. "They marvelled that, even though God's people were killed and wounded by the ADF, fear did not overpower them," said Pastor Kambale.

"To God be the glory," continues Pastor Ki Abraham. "We continue to thank the brothers and sisters who stayed by our side to accompany us. Thanks to them, we are still alive."

**PRAY** For continued healing for those affected by the attack, and pray that the church will continue to grow in faith and number.

ABOVE Believers dance in worship on the anniversary of the attack

## IRAN

### Simin uses experiences to equip houses churches

It's too dangerous for Simin\* to live in Iran, but with your support, she's still making a difference in the country through an online ministry that's equipping women to lead house churches.

When Simin and her husband, Mohsen\*, began a house church, they took extreme caution to not arouse suspicion – but it wasn't enough. One morning, 12 police officers barged into their house and the whole family, including the couple's two-year-old daughter, was arrested.

After 18 days' imprisonment, the family was released, but the couple were later found guilty of 'propaganda against the regime'; Mohsen was sentenced to a year's penal servitude and Simin was fined. She also lost her job as a nurse. The family made the difficult decision to flee Iran.

ABOVE Simin connects with women from Iran to encourage and equip them in their faith. Image from a reenactment of her story

Watch a video of Simin's extraordinary story [opendoorsuk.org](https://opendoorsuk.org)

In a nearby country, they connected with Open Doors local partners who provided them with training to process their ordeal. "I learned a lot and I could find trust again," she says. "Eventually I began to get better mentally and spiritually. It was a great help when I had no one."

Helped by the partners, the couple now have an online ministry, with Simin teaching the Bible to women in Iran and preparing them to lead house churches. "I understand the pain of these women," she says. "I want to comfort and serve them."

**I experienced persecution a lot, but I always witnessed God at work."**

"In the journey of my life, I experienced persecution a lot," she adds. "But I always witnessed God at work!"

**PRAY** That Simin's ministry will have a powerful impact upon the growth of the church in Iran.

## ERITREA

### At least 30 arrested during birthday party

At least 30 Christian adults, plus an unknown number of children, were arrested as they gathered to celebrate the first birthday of a Christian family's firstborn child.

According to an Open Doors source, whilst believers from the gathering in Asmara, the capital, were taken to a nearby police station, 'unbelievers were sent home'.

Eritrea is number four on the latest World Watch List. It's known as the 'North Korea of Africa' because of its intense authoritarian rule.

**PRAY** That God's Spirit will provide for the persecuted church in Eritrea, and give them wisdom and discernment in everything they do.

## MORE STORIES ONLINE

- One year since the Syria/Turkey earthquake, the church is rebuilding
- Believer shot at in Laos
- Ex-iman rejected by village in Bangladesh

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



\*Names changed for security reasons





# PROMINENCE IN PARLIAMENT

More than 100 MPs heard about the persecuted church at the World Watch List parliamentary launch, bringing our family's voices to the corridors of power. Thank you for your invitations and prayers!

'Profound', 'powerful' and 'unforgettable'. These are the terms used by some of the 101 MPs represented at the parliamentary launch of the World Watch List on 17 January to convey the impact of what they heard about our persecuted family.

"It knocks me over the sheer numbers that we're talking about, hundreds of millions of people," shared Ian Paisley Jr MP. "It really does make you feel very privileged to have freedom in our own country to worship, but also challenges you to do more for these individuals and countries."

"I couldn't really get Pastor Zachariah out of my mind," said Andrew Selous MP, reflecting on the story from Nigeria of a man who lost his wife and child in an attack by Fulani militants. Pastor Zachariah's story featured on a

video of the top ten countries on the World Watch List. "I've asked for 20 of your maps to send out to churches so they can put them up."

"Once again @OpenDoorsUK deliver a powerful Wake Up! call to parliament, indeed to the world, that as the number of autocratic and authoritarian governments continues to grow, so does the persecution of Christians." Brendon O'Hara MP on X (formerly Twitter)

## THE COST OF COLLAPSE AND CONTROL

A key message of the launch was the rising violence against Christians in sub-Saharan Africa as Islamic militancy grows in influence, helped by the fragility of governments that are at risk of collapse. "Militants formally associated with so-called Islamic State, or

taking inspiration from them, are stalking our lands," said a speaker from West Africa. "As a Christian pastor, you go to bed thinking: for how much longer will I be lucky?"

The tightening control of autocratic governments was another feature, with Dabrina sharing her story of persecution in Iran (PICTURED ABOVE). "The growing number of Christians leaving Iran reflects the difficult challenges they confront, leading them to leave their homes, families and loved ones," she said. "The fundamental question remains: Why should practising one's faith come at such a high and unjust cost?"

The launch also featured a pre-recorded interview with a Christian from Manipur, India. "Human words can't express the agony, the pain, the desolation we felt; the sense of despair tens of thousands of tribal Christians are facing," he

said, referring to the violence that broke out last year.

"An incredibly powerful event." Anna Firth MP on X

## "I WANT YOUR MORAL COURAGE"

Each of the speakers made a plea for help. "I do not want the UK Government's money today," said Suleiman\*, the speaker from West Africa. "I want something that will cost you even more than cash. I want your moral courage. I challenge you to risk paying a political price in speaking up for us."

Henrietta Blyth, CEO of Open Doors UK and Ireland, followed these calls for action with three recommendations. The first is to establish the role of Prime Minister's Special Envoy for Freedom of Religion or Belief (currently occupied by

Fiona Bruce MP) permanently in statute. The second is to recognise the needs of religious minorities in places where the UK is helping to bring stability and prevent state failure. And the third is to ensure UK trade strategy promotes freedom of religion or belief and other human rights.

"On Wednesday I joined many others at the @OpenDoorsUK #worldwatchlist event to hear the powerful testimonies and reports of persecuted Christians." Wendy Chamberlain MP on X

"The World Watch List paints a grim picture," she said. "But there is hope. Prayer and action work."

## GROWING AWARENESS

"The information we get from these events is really profound," said Kirsten Oswald MP. She added that she believes active political engagement in freedom of religion or belief is growing, an observation echoed by other



ABOVE Henrietta Blyth with Bishop Philip Mounstephen (Bishop of Winchester and former Bishop of Truro), Archbishop Angaelos (Coptic Orthodox Archbishop of London) and Mervyn Thomas (CEO of CSW)

ABOVE RIGHT Dame Andrea Leadsom MP hosts the event

MPs who attended the launch. Carla Lockhart MP said: "It's become very topical and I think Fiona Bruce and her role has really brought it to the fore."

"I will never forget the words I heard in reference to persecution in West Africa – 'Tell our truth, so we can survive.'" Sarah Owen MP on X

"It's driven by the commitment of constituents," said Sir Stephen Timms MP. "These actions by Open Doors supporters have an impact, building up over a period of years. Inviting their MP to this really makes a difference."

## THANK YOU – AND WHAT NEXT?

The plight of our persecuted family is becoming increasingly prominent in parliament. Thank you for your invaluable contribution by inviting your MP to the parliamentary launch and praying into the event.

As Kirsten Oswald MP said, "The people who are in peril across the world are better served by constituents and politicians speaking with one voice."

Head to [opendoorsuk.org/news](https://opendoorsuk.org/news) to find out if your MP was represented at the launch. If yes, could you email them a note of thanks? If they weren't there, could you send them a copy of the advocacy report at [opendoorsuk.org/advocacy](https://opendoorsuk.org/advocacy)? Thank you!

\*Name changed for security reasons



# SARA'S DAD SAID SHE WAS WORTHLESS.

## YOU CAN HELP HER KNOW HER WORTH IN GOD.

**What's the most shameful thing a woman can do in Iraq?**

In the eyes of the conservative Muslim-majority culture, eloping without your family's permission is high on the list of disgraces. But when Sara\* became a Christian, her father said eloping would have been better in his eyes. "I would have preferred if you ran away with a man to get married, and not done this," he told her.

It's hard for many of us to understand quite what a brutal statement this is. Sara's dad was effectively disowning her — calling her worthless. It was terribly painful for a young woman who

had always enjoyed a close and loving bond with her dad to hear. She says, "I felt very scared and shocked, as my father has always been kind to me."

### **GIVEN A BIBLE**

Sara grew up in a Muslim home, but faith wasn't discussed much. She hadn't expected such a strong response, especially since her father didn't regularly read the Quran or go to the local mosque. While only 0.4% of the current Iraqi population are Christians, Sara grew up in a neighbourhood with many Christian families — before conflict and Islamic extremist violence caused many believers to flee. And Sara has always been curious.



When Sara was 15, she decided to go to church with her Christian best friend – just to find out more. The security guard on the door wouldn't let her in. Muslims weren't allowed. In Iraq, anybody converting from Islam to Christianity is likely to face significant pressure – and anybody encouraging Muslims to convert is equally vulnerable. Sara's presence in the church could have caused them danger. The security guard might even have worried it was a trap.

But Sara's curiosity wasn't thwarted. Her friend gave her a Bible, and she eagerly read it. "I felt confused about what I read," she remembers. "Many questions started building up in my head: how can God have a son? What does it mean that Jesus died for my sins?" She went to her father for answers – but he refused to discuss it. "Leave it, and don't read it anymore," he demanded. But she couldn't stop.

#### HER FATHER'S ANGER

Despite these obstacles, Sara continued to explore Christianity. Her friend taught her the Lord's Prayer, and Sara started praying and

worshipping. Eventually, she decided to give her life to Jesus. It was so transformative that she wanted to share her new faith. She was excited to tell her parents about Jesus. She took a chance during a family dinner.

### "WHAT DOES IT MEAN THAT JESUS DIED FOR MY SINS?"

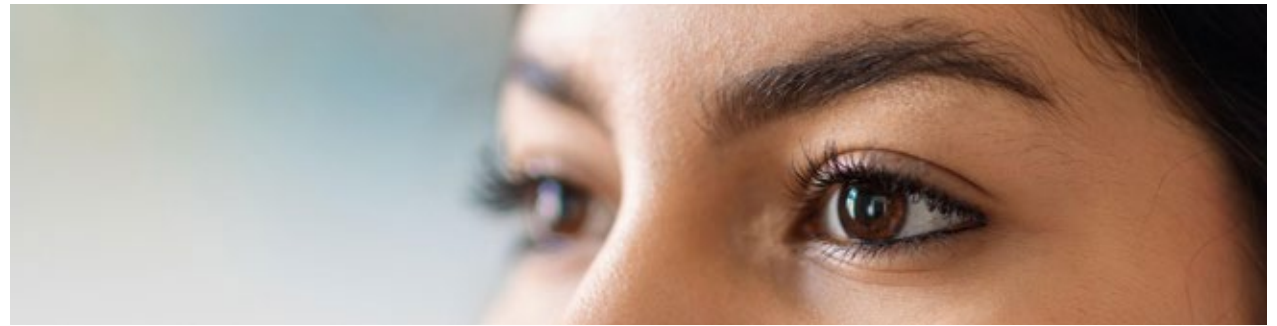
"God loves you, and He wants you to come to Him." Those are the words she shared – and that's when her dad first showed her his anger. He flipped the dinner table over. "All this time you are asking about Christianity, I thought it was just some teenage phase," he shouted. "But apparently I did not raise you right!"

Sara was put under house arrest immediately. Her dad took her phone and locked her in her bedroom without food. "Let's see how your God will get you out," he taunted her. Sara wasn't allowed out for ten days.

#### FORCED MARRIAGE

This punishment sounds extraordinarily cruel to us. In Iraq, it might not have raised much attention. It's common for women and girls to be under the control of their fathers in Iraqi culture, with decisions made for them and discipline meted out as the male relatives see fit. Sara's father took things to extremes, but many people wouldn't question a father's right to force his daughter to stay at home. After ten days, Sara's father told her something even more alarming: "Tomorrow you will marry your stepmother's nephew. I did not raise you right – but maybe he will."

When women and girls have few rights, persecutors can use this as a weapon. The persecution of Christian women is complex, because the methods used are often part of the fabric of a culture. That can include house arrest, violence, forced marriage or



ABOVE © Alamy | Representative image

even so-called 'honour' killings. This faith-based persecution is so blended into the culture's everyday treatment of women that it's unlikely anybody would protest Sara's treatment. Nobody would do anything to rescue her.

Nobody except God.

#### SARA'S MIRACULOUS RESCUE

Though quite new in her faith, Sara wouldn't budge in trusting the Lord. "Even though my situation seemed helpless and impossible, I still had hope and faith in Christ," she says. "Every night, I dreamed I was in a dark place and there was someone reaching for my hand, taking me out to a very bright place."

On the morning that Sara was going to be forcibly married to her Muslim relative, the dream became a reality. "Someone came like a light, held my hand and dragged me out of the

locked room," she says. "I felt like I was in a trance; it was like a dream. He put me in a silver car. That morning, I woke up in a hotel room in a city in north Iraq, hours away from where I lived." She later learned that security cameras at her home had stopped at exactly the time she was rescued.

"At the hotel, a security officer told me, 'Usually, a girl leaves home because she runs away from her father out of fear, or runs away with a man. What's your story?'"

"Yes, I ran away with someone," I said to the officer.

"Who is he and why isn't he here?" the officer asked.

"At that moment, I got courage and said to him, 'He is here with me. He is always with me.'"

"Who is he?" he asked.

"God."

The God who broke Peter out of prison in Acts 12 is the same God who helped Sara escape from her father's prison! After two days, her dad came to get her from the hotel. "All this happened because you challenged

God," Sara told him. "You said, 'Let your God get you out of here' – and He did!"

### "EVEN THOUGH MY SITUATION SEEMED HELPLESS AND IMPOSSIBLE, I STILL HAD HOPE AND FAITH IN CHRIST."

#### HELP IN DESPAIR

Sara's father went back to their home, but Sara stayed where she was. As an unmarried, unprotected woman in Iraq, she faced continual harassment from men who wanted to exploit her – including sexual harassment. It's not always possible to disentangle the persecution a Christian woman faces for her gender and the persecution she faces for her faith, as they are often tightly intertwined. This makes Christian women even more vulnerable.

"I felt very lonely and hopeless – but I kept my faith and kept praying to God," she says. Every time she was targeted by a man, God intervened to help her, enabling her to move to a new job or a new living situation. He never failed to protect His daughter.

## TEARS OF GOLD

You can pray for women who are persecuted for both their gender and their faith with the newly updated *Tears of Gold* resource. Each pack has a set of self-portraits painted by courageous women from Nigeria, who share their stories of persecution and healing. Order yours at [opendoorsuk.org/seechange](https://opendoorsuk.org/seechange).



ABOVE Sara reading her Bible



Tears of Gold portraits on display in Southwark Cathedral

## SEE. CHANGE. HIGHLIGHTS

Open Doors' vision is to ensure that every woman who is persecuted for her faith and gender is seen, valued and empowered to reach her God-given potential. Through the six years of the *See. Change.* campaign so far, your prayers, support and speaking out have helped women and girls across Africa, the Middle East and Asia. Here are just some of the highlights:

- About 2,000 visitors saw the *Tears of Gold* exhibition at Southwark Cathedral in November 2023
- More than 3,000 of you have already prayed at *See. Change.* events or using the *Tears of Gold* resource
- Even more of you continue to pray for women and girls with your Prayer Diary
- Thousands of you have written, asking your MP to recognise faith as a vulnerability in gender-based violence
- More than £2.5 million has already been generously given by Open Doors supporters in the UK and Ireland to support persecuted Christian women.

Praise God that the *See. Change.* campaign is changing the lives of women and girls around the world. There is still so much more to do.

One desperate evening, she shared her story with a local restaurant owner. It turned out that God was guiding her yet again. "You came to the right place," the man told her. "I'm a Christian – from today on, you are my daughter and I will help you."

## "AFTER I FOUND CHRIST, MY LIFE TRANSFORMED COMPLETELY."

"When he said this to me, I felt like it was God talking to me through him," Sara says. He found her a house and paid her rent, and also got her a job. God showed Sara how much He valued her.

### FATHERLY LOVE

Throughout all her ordeals, Sara never stopped believing God would support and comfort her. He has been her true Father, when her earthly father disowned her. She even found out that her father had erased her name from the family record. Losing her family continues to be extraordinarily painful for Sara, but she still knows that choosing to follow Jesus was and is the right decision.

"Before knowing Christ, my life was empty," she says. "I didn't have the joy and peace that I have now in my heart. Yes, in my old life all material things were provided. But I had no real stability.

"After I found Christ, my life transformed completely. I started to know love." Despite what she's experienced, Sara praises God. "I am grateful for all the bad things and experiences I've been through. I got to know Him better, and I was transformed into His



ABOVE Women's ministries at Centres of Hope in Iraq, run by Open Doors partners

image. I have never regretted the decision I made."

### OPEN DOORS SUPPORT

Converting from Islam to Christianity is dangerous for anybody in Iraq – but it's particularly risky for women. Without the support and protection of her family, Sara is extremely vulnerable. Thanks to God, and how He uses the gifts and prayers of Open Doors supporters like you, women and girls like Sara can find help at Centres of Hope. These are run at Iraqi churches by local Open Doors partners and offer women livelihood support, various kinds of training, and biblical teaching – as well as emergency food and aid, where needed.

## "I HAVE NEVER REGRETTED THE DECISION I MADE."

Sara is thriving on a discipleship course for women, and is grateful for the many ministries provided at the Centre of Hope. "My ministry is to taxi drivers," she says. "I talk with them about God and distribute Kurdish Bibles to them." Her prayer is that she'll

be able to change her legal status – a very difficult barrier in Iraq: "My hope and dream is that I get an identity card that says I am a Christian; that I belong to Him in my ID as well."

## Show Sara she's valued today

Sara's future can look more hopeful, thanks to the ongoing support of people like you. She now has a new family – at the Centre of Hope, but also Open Doors supporters around the world. There are countless other women and girls in Iraq and many other countries who need the same help.

People told Sara that she was worthless. There will always be persecutors to tell Christian women that they're worthless. Today, will you show women like Sara that they are valued? Your gifts and prayers can do exactly that.

### PLEASE PRAY

- For Sara's prayers for a new ID card declaring her a Christian to be answered
- That each persecuted Christian woman around the world would be seen, valued

and empowered to reach her God-given potential

- That local Open Doors partners would find strength, joy and wisdom as they offer themselves as Jesus's hands and feet.

You can find more prayer points for persecuted Christian women in your Prayer Diary. You're also invited to join a special *See. Change.* prayer breakfast at the Open Doors office on 13 April – find out more at [opendoorsuk.org/seechange](https://opendoorsuk.org/seechange).

### PLEASE GIVE

You can give to support persecuted Christian women and girls at [opendoorsuk.org](https://opendoorsuk.org).

- **Every £20** could give four women biblical literature to help nurture their faith.
- **Every £30** could help a persecuted woman start a small business, giving her long-term financial security.

- **Every £45** could help train a woman to know her value in Christ and strengthen other women in her community.

\*Name changed for security reasons



# SIX YEARS ON FROM TRAGEDY, THIAGO HAS NEW HOPE



Every day, thanks to your help, shattered lives are put back together. Grieving families are helped to cope. Those walking in darkness are helped towards life and light.

Thiago is a young man, 19 years old and studying industrial design. Thanks to Open Doors supporters he has received care and education. But it has been a long, hard road.

Six years ago, he was living in a village in the El Cauca region of Colombia. He had a brother back then. A twin, Mateo. Because of their Christian faith, his family were frequently discriminated against by local authorities who followed the indigenous religion, with rituals

and spiritual practices which are contrary to Christian beliefs.

For a while, he and Mateo attended a Christian school where his aunt worked. It was a long walk to get there, but the brothers had each other for company. But then the *cabildo*, which is the ruling council of the indigenous community, decided to withdraw government aid to his family because of their refusal to participate in their rituals. Money became tight. Thiago and Mateo had to leave school and find work.

"It was a bit difficult because my younger brother was about one and a half years old, so sometimes [Mateo and I] had to go to work ourselves to get money while my mother worked, or else I stayed behind to take care of my little brother.

It was like that for a long time," Thiago says.

## SPIRITUAL AND PHYSICAL ATTACKS

Then the persecution got worse. First there were increased spiritual attacks, including witchcraft. Then the attacks turned physical. One day, Thiago's mother told him that the *cabildo* went to his aunt's school and kidnapped her and his cousins, taking them away in a truck. His aunt managed to call a friend in the police and the army caught up with them, but clearly things had escalated. The *cabildo* were now collaborating with armed guerrilla groups which targeted young people for forced recruitment.

To keep them safe, Thiago's aunt sent his cousins to the

Open Doors Children's Centre, partly funded by the 'Children at Christmas' appeal and by all Open Doors supporters who regularly give to support children's projects. Thiago's mother decided to do the same, but such was the demand at the time that there were not enough spaces at the centre for both brothers.

In the end, the family decided Thiago would go. He was reluctant, but his mother assured him that it was God who was giving him this opportunity and that he should take it. So, he said goodbye to his family and made the long, 13-hour trip to the Children's Centre.

Tragically, not long after he arrived, Mateo was kidnapped by guerrillas. Weeks went by. Their mother was desperate.

## "I know that God can also do something in the lives of those who persecute..."

"I told her to file a police report and said I would do everything I could to trace his cell phone, even though I knew nothing about it," Thiago remembers.

After nearly a month of being missing, Mateo's body was found.

Thiago returned to be with his grieving family. But even then it was too dangerous for him to stay. The family heard rumours that the guerrillas were talking about the need for another person to join their group. "That person was me," Thiago says.

He was taken back to the Children's Centre as soon as



ABOVE Thiago, praying at the Children's Centre. Thanks to you, this young man has been given hope

possible, where he began the long road to healing and hope.

## CHRISTLIKE FORGIVENESS

The loss of a brother is difficult to bear. The loss of a twin brother perhaps even more so. But, thanks to the work of the Children's Centre and the support of believers around the world, Thiago was able to escape being trapped in bitterness and hatred. And today, he demonstrates a forgiveness that is only possible through the Holy Spirit.

"I would like to tell them that I forgive them in spite of all the evil they did, because maybe they didn't know or hadn't thought about what they were doing," he says. "I know that God can also do something in the lives of those who persecute or recruit."

At the Children's Centre he was helped with study and work opportunities. His dream is to return to the church in Cauca and use his industrial design skills to develop the church building and help his community. He also dreams of creating a soccer school that also promotes the Christian faith.

Colombia is still a troubled country. Six years ago, when this story started, it had dropped to number 50 on the World Watch List. Today it is number 34. But, thanks to Open Doors supporters, Christians in Colombia know that they are not alone.

Every day around the world, your gifts help people like Thiago through times of darkness towards life and light. There are wounds which will never heal, of course, but with your support, there is also a hope which never dies.

You can find out more about all the countries in the World Watch List top 50, how you're making a difference and how you can pray for our courageous family – order your free Open Doors World Watch List Top 50 at [opendoorsuk.org/wwl](https://opendoorsuk.org/wwl)





## WHY I VOLUNTEER: Jerusalem



Every year, Open Doors relies on teams of brilliant volunteers at events, like Spring Harvest and New Wine, to spread the word about the persecuted church and inspire others to support and pray for them. We asked Jerusalem, one of our brilliant volunteers at David's Tent, to share why she gives her time and skills to Open Doors.

### Q: TELL US A BIT ABOUT YOURSELF

**A:** Hi! My name's Jerusalem. I'm a 20-year-old med student currently living in Norwich. I go to a church in Norwich called Servant's Church. When I'm not studying, I enjoy learning how to play the guitar, reading books and hanging out with friends and family.

### Q: WHY DID YOU START VOLUNTEERING WITH OPEN DOORS?

**A:** I used to hear about the persecuted church regularly growing up, however I started to

get passionate after attending an Open Doors *Secret Church* session. Hearing the stories of our family who do not share our freedom stirred me to not just pray with and for them, but also to take practical action.

As a volunteer, I initially did a course with Open Doors, which built my knowledge of persecution in different areas. Volunteering has helped me share that knowledge with others. It's interesting how many people don't know about persecuted Christians. Volunteering helps raise

awareness and encourages the people you talk with to share the persecuted church with others. It's such a blessing to see!

### Q: WHAT DOES YOUR ROLE INVOLVE?

**A:** Volunteering involves being part of a team who are interested in serving the persecuted church in any way possible. This can involve talking to people at an event stand, helping run different seminars/breakout sessions, signposting people to more information about Open Doors

and the persecuted church or telling them about opportunities they can get involved with.

### Q: WHAT'S THE BEST THING ABOUT VOLUNTEERING?

**A:** The sense of community that you have with the team. Serving together was amazing but so was the time we spent together in prayer, reading the Bible and in general fellowship, it was so edifying.

### Q: WHAT DO YOU FIND MOST CHALLENGING?

**A:** Initially building up the courage to speak to people was quite hard, however, as

time went by it became easier to just go for it. When I pushed myself, I had such amazing conversations with people.

### Q: WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE TO OTHERS?

**A:** If you find time in your schedule and you have the opportunity, please do it! I genuinely find volunteering very rewarding, you won't regret it!

If, like Jerusalem, you love talking to people, would you consider volunteering with

the Open Doors Events team? Events Volunteers experience some of the UK and Ireland's top Christian festivals whilst sharing the hope and hardship of Christians counting the cost for Jesus. Accommodation and expenses are included, and we run training days to help you prepare. In 2024 we'll be at lots of events including Big Church Festival, Spring Harvest, New Wine and, of course, David's Tent.

Find out more about this opportunity and apply at [opendoorsuk.org/volunteer](https://opendoorsuk.org/volunteer)

## OTHER VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES

If events volunteering isn't your bag, there are many other ways to serve the persecuted church.

### > ADVOCACY REPS

Could you represent the persecuted church as an Advocacy Rep and encourage your MP to take action? No experience is necessary; your passion and leverage as a constituent are most important for this role.

### > CHURCH REPS

Help us see the persecuted church remembered across the UK and Ireland by becoming a Church Rep. In this role you'll be the go-to person for everything Open Doors, sharing the latest stories, resources and campaigns.

### > PRAYER GROUP LEADERS

Our prayers go where we can't. If you have a heart for mobilising and motivating others to pray for the persecuted church, we'd love you to join us as a Prayer Group Leader.

### > VOLUNTEER SPEAKERS

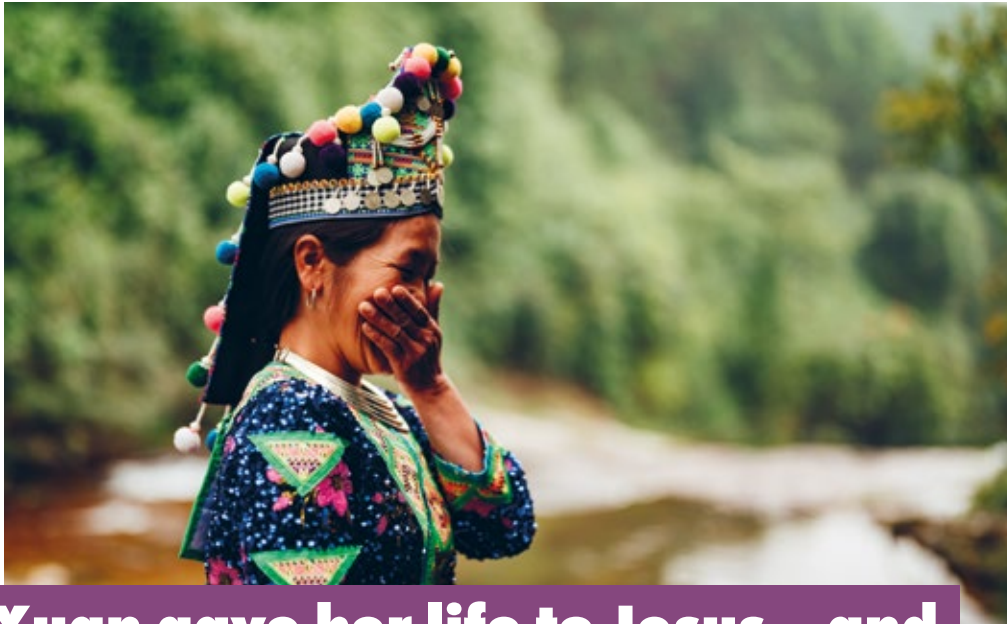
Can you use your voice to inspire others to stand with our persecuted brothers and sisters? We're always on the lookout for Volunteer Speakers who can speak with passion and conviction.

### > OFFICE VOLUNTEERS

Are you a whiz on the computer or do you love a bit of office banter? Our Office Volunteers help with a variety of things at our HQ in Witney and there's usually a slice of cake in it for you too!



Visit [opendoorsuk.org/volunteer](https://opendoorsuk.org/volunteer) to find out more or call us on 01993 460015.



## Xuan gave her life to Jesus – and nothing will make her turn back

Xuan\* lives in a remote tribal village in central Vietnam. There is a church there – not that you'd see it if you visited. "There are Christians in my area, but we worship God in secret, in our homes," she says. "It is impossible for outsiders to visit us in the village because local authorities monitor us."

Xuan's love for Christ shines out in her words and actions – and it's her mission to tell others about Jesus. But this mission comes with a high price. She is known – and begrudgingly tolerated – as a Christian in her village, but the local authorities have forbidden her from evangelising. Not that that stops her.

"I did not follow their demands," she says. "They cannot stop the gospel from being shared. However, I only evangelise in secret. Sometimes, I visit people in their houses at night. In other cases, I set up the time to meet with those who live farther. I drive my motorbike to meet them and gather them in a less suspicious place. I do this because I love them."

### XUAN PERSEVERES – AND THE CHURCH GROWS

Xuan is a member of the Hmong tribe. She became a Christian after God healed her and her child from an illness through the prayers of a Christian man in the village called Tomo\*.

But not long afterwards, Tomo was expelled from the community. Xuan and another woman were the only

Christians who remained. "We were downhearted, yes, but it did not stop us from sharing the gospel," Xuan remembers. "Every day, more and more people came to know Christ."

### "I will not forsake my mission, my calling."

"But the local authorities were also quick. They knew all of those who converted; they tried to punish us. They tried to kick us out of the village, but we were unyielding. We stayed in the village no matter what."

In Xuan's patriarchal community, the authorities punish women who convert to Christianity by first targeting their husbands. "Local authorities employ many ways to persecute us, one of which is forcing our husbands to

leave us. And, if the husbands refuse, all the government subsidies, like food, education and livelihood will be cut."

### "They cannot stop the gospel from being shared."

This is what happened to Xuan and her husband. After the authorities destroyed their source of income, Xuan's husband – despite not being a Christian – stepped in to stop her from being expelled from the village.

### PREPARED TO GIVE HER LIFE FOR THE GOSPEL

Despite the pressure against her, and the danger of her mission, many Christians in her village came to know Christ because of Xuan's perseverance. Her courage is phenomenal. "I will not forsake my mission, my calling," she says. "Even if the authorities catch me, I will let them do everything they can to stop me – even if they kill me. I know I am going to die for the Lord."

Thanks to your prayers and support, Xuan knows that she is not alone. Open Doors local partners in Vietnam help equip believers like Xuan through leadership and biblical training and financial aid.

Xuan will never go back to how things were before she knew Jesus: "I find that my life has already changed so much after allowing Jesus to rule my life. I know that I can directly pray to the Lord and He will answer me. I know that my Lord is alive!"

\*Names changed for security reasons

## PAUSE

### Read Daniel 3:8-30

Xuan's bold confidence in God in the face of persecution echoes Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego's as they face the threat of the furnace.

- Through Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego's trial, Nebuchadnezzar sees that God is present with them. And Xuan's suffering has only made her more determined to tell people about Jesus. How have you – and others – experienced God during difficult times?

## PONDER

- Like Xuan, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego were living in an environment hostile to their faith. Does being a Christian put you in the minority at work, at home, or in your social circles? How does your faith make you stand out?

## PRAY

"We do not know what the local authorities will do to us in the future, but I really desire that we can worship the Lord out in the open," says Xuan. **Pray with her that believers in her village can build a church.**

- Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego – and Xuan – display a willingness to trust in God's goodness and power, even if they end up suffering or being killed. Where do you want your trust in God to grow?

Xuan's husband and children are not yet Christians. She asks: **"Please pray for my husband and two children to become followers of Jesus."**

Violence against Christians in Vietnam has increased this year. **Ask God to protect believers and change the hearts of their persecutors.**



God has strengthened Xuan to remain in her village – and she's drawing more people to Christ

Watch a video of Xuan at [opendoorsuk.org/vietnam](https://www.opendoorsuk.org/vietnam)



# AS A REJECTED DAUGHTER, SARA WOULD VALUE KNOWING SHE HAS YOUR SUPPORT

Sara in Iraq faced house arrest and forced marriage for choosing to follow Jesus. Her father told her she was worthless – but support from Open Doors partners can show Sara she is loved.

Help persecuted Christian women know their value in Christ and see change for the future.

**Your gift of £30** could help a persecuted woman start a small business, giving her long-term financial security.

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

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