

Open *Doors*

MAGAZINE | May/June 2021



Strengthening secret believers

What would you do if the secret police
demanded names?

OpenDoors

STANDING STRONG TOGETHER

BOOK TODAY

Join us in September for an amazing evening of worship, prayer and stories of courageous faith as we celebrate Standing Strong Together online!

SATURDAY
25 SEPTEMBER 2021
8PM

Book your place today at opendoorsuk.org/standingstrong

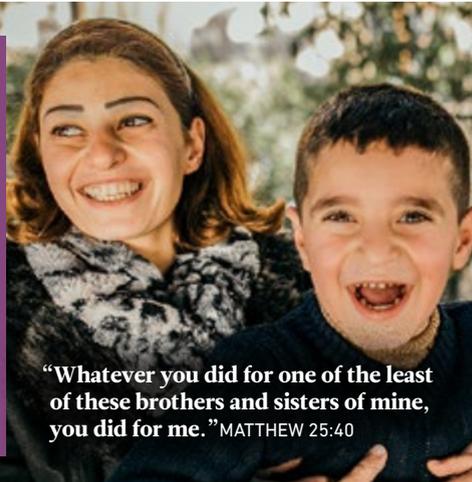


Leave a legacy of hope

You can give your persecuted family hope of a brighter future by including a gift to Open Doors in your Will. Your gift will mean a lifetime of support for those who suffer for following Jesus.

If you have not yet made a Will, you can make a Will for FREE using our partner *Farewill*.

To find out more go to opendoorsuk.org/legacy or phone 01993 777338.



“Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.” MATTHEW 25:40

OpenDoors

STANDING STRONG LIVE

Prayer without borders

13 MAY | 8.15PM

Join Open Doors' May webinar to hear courageous testimonies from secret believers in the Middle East. You'll be able to listen to their stories, pray for them and find out how you can show your persecuted family that they are not alone.

Find out more and register today at opendoorsuk.org



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 image:

Taher (name changed) was arrested by the secret police and ruthlessly interrogated - because of his faith

Letter from Henrietta

Truth proclaimers

“They never stopped teaching and proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the Messiah.” ACTS 5:42

I've only attended church in person twice in the last year. Every Sunday, my husband and I sit in front of the laptop and watch our church's online service – perhaps you've been doing the same. Last summer when it was hot, we had the windows open, and I said, “Should we close them, so our singing doesn't disturb our neighbours?” That's when it really struck me. Many of our brothers and sisters are worried about keeping the windows closed for a far riskier reason. Being overheard wouldn't just annoy the neighbours – they could be sent to prison, or even killed.

If online community has been important during lockdown to you and me, just imagine what a difference it makes to isolated secret believers in places like the Middle East. So often people who convert to Christianity are rejected by their families and communities. Many have been isolated more than ever by the pandemic, as secret house churches can no longer meet. Fellowship and discipleship online are critical to keeping faith and hope alive.

In this magazine, you'll find the story of an extraordinary couple called Taher* and Donya* (see p.9). As secret believers in a closed country in the Middle East, they knew the risks involved in meeting with other Christians. Their home was raided by the secret service, and Taher was arrested and relentlessly interrogated. Even after all that, he still continued to speak about Jesus to his friends and neighbours – like the disciples in Acts 5, who kept sharing the gospel after they were miraculously released from prison. Taher's faith and passion for sharing Jesus in the face of persecution are a profound challenge and encouragement to me.

Together, we can stand with our church family in countries where openly following Jesus is so difficult and so dangerous. Let's keep being people who proclaim the truth: the truth of the gospel, and the truth about the persecution and discrimination our persecuted family face. Through prayer, support and speaking out, you can make sure your brothers and sisters are never alone.



Henrietta

Henrietta Blyth
CEO, Open Doors UK&I

*names changed for security reasons

World Watch News

VENEZUELA

Four Christians forced to eat Bibles



Four Christian men were marked with Xs and forced to eat sheets of the Bible in a shocking incident in Venezuela. The perpetrators

are believed to oppose the work of Restoration House, a church-led drug rehabilitation programme which the four victims had joined.

Threats had been made prior to the attack, and just days before the incident the attackers asked the pastor who runs the home for a list of people in the rehabilitation centre. The pastor refused.

In Latin America, the church often speaks out against drug gangs and tries to stop people joining them. This can lead to retaliation from the gangs, and may explain this incident in Venezuela.

Please lift up in prayer the four men as they recover from this horrific ordeal and for protection of Restoration House as it seeks to continue its ministry.

INDONESIA

Local partners visit church bombed on Palm Sunday

Within days of their church being bombed on Palm Sunday, injured and traumatised members of Makassar church, Indonesia, were visited by Ari* and Agung*, local Open Doors partners.

"Thank you so much for praying for us. Thank you for sharing our story with our brothers and sisters around the world," Father Tulak, who leads the church in Makassar that was bombed, shared. The bomb exploded after the church's second service of the day, which 150 people had attended. Nine church-goers were amongst those injured, but thankfully none of the congregation were killed in the attack.



ABOVE Open Doors local partners visit Cosmas in hospital

The partners were taken to hospital to visit Cosmas, the guard who stopped the bombers from entering the church. He suffered from burns that will require surgery.

"We're here to let you know that we are standing with you in this situation – you are not alone," Ari shared. "Many believers around the world right now are praying for you." Financial help was offered to Cosmas and his wife, which they were grateful to accept.

"Through this bombing, we have a testimony to share to the world that God protects us," Father Tulak added. "He always protects us. One of the guards was only one metre from the bomber, but he did not die, he was only injured. This is amazing protection from the Lord."

Please pray for Ari, Agung and other local partners as they seek to continue helping all those affected by this awful attack.

*names changed for security reasons

EGYPT

Three Christians killed in two separate incidents

Please pray for two Christian families in Egypt grieving the murders of loved ones in two separate tragic incidents.

In March, 32-year-old Girgis Nan Yacoub was sadly found dead a month after being kidnapped. He served as a deacon at his church.

Over the Easter weekend, Mariam Mossa Yacoub, aged 35, was with her two children when an extremist Muslim tuk-tuk driver known for his hostility towards Christians began harassing her, seemingly because she was

not wearing Islamic dress. Mariam rebuked him, saying she would report him to the police. The man got angry and attacked Mariam and her son, Karas, killing them instantly. Her six-year-old daughter managed to escape.

The past six months has seen a marked rise in the kidnap of Christians in Egypt (63) compared to the previous 12 months (53). The harassment of women for not wearing Islamic dress is sadly also very common, and in most cases those wearing different clothing are Christian.

NIGERIA

Anna sings a song for you

Anna's story is an all too familiar one in Nigeria. In February 2020, Fulani militants attacked her Christian village. Anna and her children fled and moved in with relatives who could offer them shelter but not food. To feed her family, Anna foraged food from the forest. It was often bitter and potentially harmful. During the rainy season, the family ate leaves.

"You brought us food. Now I can feed my children and myself."

Thankfully, your support has provided urgent food aid for 10,000 families in Nigeria, including Anna's. Whilst local governments have given out



ABOVE Anna received food aid, thanks to you

aid during the pandemic, many Christians have been overlooked in the distribution of this.

Whilst cooking a nutritious meal, Anna stirs rhythmically and sings. "The reason I sing this song is that we were living in severe hunger," she explains. "But God sent His children. You brought us food. Now I can feed my children and myself. That's why I am so happy. May God bless you richly. That is the meaning behind my song."

Jemima's bravery inspires donations

Her friends said it was a 'pretty wild idea' and she shouldn't go ahead with it – but that only made Jemima from Bristol more determined.

So, what did Jemima do? She had her hair shaved off!

Friends, friends of friends, teachers and family were so impressed with Jemima's bravery that they chipped in with donations for two chosen charities – one being Open Doors, receiving an amazing £792.

Jemima has been struck by the persecution facing Christians around the world, simply for believing in Jesus, and wanted to do something to help her brothers and sisters.

Thank you, Jemima – you are an inspiration!



ABOVE Jemima raised nearly £800 for persecuted Christians by having her hair shaved off

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

You spoke and 61 MPs listened – will you now pray to see change?

You have spoken up for persecuted Christian women to those in power – now it's time to see change.

Your voice has power and your MPs have been listening! Thank you to all of you who, as part of Open Doors' ongoing See Change campaign, have spoken out on behalf of millions of persecuted Christian women. They are often doubly vulnerable to persecution meaning they can face discrimination for both their gender and for their faith.



"We have the opportunity both in terms of freedom and resources to get involved where people are suffering inexplicable and indescribable atrocities."

TIM FARRON MP

SIGNED AND SENT

In total, 48 MPs signed a letter asking the Minister of Women and Equalities Liz Truss MP and the Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab MP to ensure that the double vulnerability of women is recognised and effectively included in policy. A further 13 MPs unable to sign the letter due to parliamentary protocol contacted the Ministers directly, backing the campaign further.



The recommendations include acknowledging that religion can make women vulnerable to things like sexual violence, abduction and forced marriage and ensuring that when women experience these issues, they are supported practically. If put into practice, these changes would make an enormous difference to the lives of your persecuted sisters – thank you!

VOICES IN THE COMMONS

International Women's Day on 8 March offered a precious opportunity to further promote this issue. This included a week-long series of conversations on Facebook Live with five MPs from across the political spectrum, together garnering over 10,000 views, looking at the hidden, complex and violent persecution specifically experienced by Christian women.

"I will take back and ask the government to recognise the double vulnerability of faith and gender, because the action plan at the moment doesn't gear itself up towards religion," Flick Drummond MP said during one of the chats.

And encouragingly, during the general debate in the House of Commons to mark International Women's Day, Open Doors' research was used by Janet Daby MP and Flick Drummond MP to highlight the plight of our persecuted sisters. The Prime Minister's Special Envoy for

Freedom of Religion or Belief, Fiona Bruce MP, also spoke about the need for more to be done to help women who face persecution for their faith and gender.



"Make sure you raise issues like the double vulnerability of faith and gender. Tell your MP how crucial they are to your community."

DR LISA CAMERON MP

You can catch up on the Facebook live conversations at opendoorsuk.org/seechange

WILL YOU PRAY?

Now the letter has been delivered, please pray:

- For the full implementation of all three recommendations
- For the Lord to equip, empower and encourage Fiona Bruce MP in her Special Envoy role
- That our persecuted sisters will continue to see change in their lives.

OpenDoors

STANDING STRONG TOGETHER

You are invited to join us for another amazing evening of worship, prayer, and stories of courageous faith and hope as we celebrate Standing Strong Together online!

Following on from the success of last year, Standing Strong 2021 will be online again this year. While we won't be gathering as one body, we can still come together to watch, pray, and worship – as family, friends, churches and small

groups. This is a freedom that millions of our persecuted church family do not have. We will stand with them in solidarity, so that, as Christ's body, we 'may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith' (Romans 1:12). This is a wonderful opportunity to hear first-hand stories of the hope we all share in Christ from our persecuted church family.

This year, for the first time ever, young people and youth leaders will also be able to attend their own special Standing Strong event and get

inspired by the courage and perseverance of the persecuted church. Don't miss out!

"You've broadened my view of church, deepened my appreciation of Jesus and given me the opportunity to stand with my persecuted family."

ATTENDEE,
STANDING STRONG ONLINE 2020

STANDING STRONG TOGETHER
Saturday 25 September 2021, 8pm

STANDING STRONG YOUTH EVENT
Friday 24 September 2021, 7pm



Scan to book your place today!

"I long to see you so that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to make you strong – that is, that you and I may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith." ROMANS 1:11-12





STRENGTHENING SECRET BELIEVERS

The secret police wanted names. Taher wouldn't give them.

When the man came to Taher and Donya's door, only Donya was in. The man said he was a postal worker. Donya knew he wasn't, but by then it was too late.

"When I opened the door, he put his foot down so I couldn't close it," she remembers. He was from the secret police. And others were behind him. They ruthlessly ransacked the home shared by Taher, Donya and their daughters Farah and Arezoo (all names changed for security reasons). They were looking for any evidence of the family's Christian faith.

"In our house church, we used to sing 'I Surrender All,'" Donya says, "and we always asked each other, 'Are you ready and willing to surrender everything to Jesus?'" As the secret police tore through her house, Donya told the Lord: "I'm ready to surrender everything."

In many countries in the Middle East, worshipping in public or sharing your faith openly is dangerous. So many Christians choose to keep their faith secret and worship in isolation. That's particularly true of Christians from a Muslim background, like Taher and his family. If their faith is discovered, they

IMAGE Taher was interrogated ruthlessly by the secret service

are likely to receive long prison sentences for 'crimes against national security'.

ARRESTED

Taher was at his job in a textile factory while the raid was happening. He got a call from the secret service: "Taher, you need to come home, now." When Taher got home, they put him in handcuffs, blindfolded him and made him get in their car. It was terrifying – but Taher wasn't alone: "Right then and there, I felt Jesus beside me."

AS THE SECRET POLICE TORE THROUGH HER HOUSE, DONYA TOLD THE LORD: "I'M READY TO SURRENDER EVERYTHING."

This raid wasn't a total surprise. Taher knew that the secret service were targeting Christians. He was aware of the risk – but believed it was worth it, in order to tell others about Jesus and to disciple new believers. So he continued to meet secretly with other Christians, and to share his faith with his friends and co-workers.

He did all this, knowing what might follow.

The day Taher was taken away was the first of many long, terrible days of interrogation. The secret police questioned Taher ruthlessly for many hours, day and night. They wanted to know what he did with other Christians, where he got money from. Most of all, they wanted Taher to write down the names of the other Christians he knew. They put a pen down before him and waited. Taher's courage is astonishing: he refused to write down a single name.

SCRIBBLING SCRIPTURE IN HIS CELL

Taher did secretly take the pen

back to his cell, though. Rather than betray the believers he knew, he wanted to use the pen to encourage believers he didn't know. On the wall, in a corner of his prison cell, he wrote a version of Matthew 7:7: "Ask, seek, knock and it will be given to you."

Taher desperately hoped these words would encourage Christians just like him – believers who would be arrested and find themselves in this same 3x6 foot cell. Perhaps these faint messages would give others courage to stay strong in the face of their interrogators.

The secret police didn't just interrogate Taher. They threatened his family – taking him

to a cell block which housed murderers, rapists and other dangerous criminals, asking: "Is this where you want your kids to go? In here with them? This is where they'll end up if you don't cooperate and give us the names of the Christians you know – now!" Taher remembers it as the greatest test of his faith. Of course, he wanted to protect his family. But he recalled the words of the same song that Donya had recalled: "I surrender all". Despite everything, his faith stayed strong and he didn't betray his friends.

RELIVING ACTS

The secret service eventually released Taher on bail. During his sentencing, Taher was given one condition for his release: that he stop telling other people about Jesus. The judge told Taher that he wouldn't get such leniency a second time – that, if he were arrested again, he would be executed.

You might remember the apostles' miraculous escape from prison in Acts 5. Peter and others had been arrested

and put in the public jail – "But during the night, an angel of the Lord opened the doors of the jail and brought them out" (Acts 5:19). As soon as they were released, the apostles once again began preaching about Jesus in the temple courts. When he was challenged, Peter said "We must obey God rather than human beings!" (Acts 5:29).

Taher's response was exactly the same. What did he do when he was released by the judge? "I went back home and started ministering and evangelising again," he says. Amazingly, he has also forgiven the interrogators who persecuted him so relentlessly: "The time that I had with Jesus in prison was the real freedom for me."

HOW TAHER FOUND JESUS

Spending time with Jesus isn't something Taher always longed for. Growing up as a strict Muslim, he felt something was missing but had never really considered Jesus – until his daughter Farah was ten and became very seriously ill.

"THE TIME THAT I HAD WITH JESUS IN PRISON WAS THE REAL FREEDOM FOR ME."

Taher and Donya took Farah to many Muslim leaders for prayer and healing, but nothing happened. In desperation, Donya asked for prayer from some Christian friends, who courageously had not kept their faith completely secret. Shortly after this special gathering, God miraculously healed Farah!

Donya decided to follow Jesus, but Taher took a while

IMAGE Donya, Taher and their children Arzoo and Farah (left to right) are now refugees in Turkey



to be convinced. When he did eventually put his faith in Jesus, he felt an instantaneous change: "It was like that burden came off my shoulders," Taher says. "The burden I thought I would have – to give an account for my sins when I died – came off. It felt like I was flying. It was the most beautiful moment of my life."

It was the most beautiful decision Taher ever made – and perhaps the most dangerous. Since then, he has known a deep and personal relationship with Jesus, but he has also had to leave the country he loves. After his release from prison, the secret service followed Taher and his family everywhere. He couldn't find a job and the regular harassment became overwhelming. Eventually, they decided to leave. Now the family are refugees in Turkey – though they hope to return home one day, to keep telling their community the good news of Jesus.

"JESUS IS WORTH EVERYTHING. IN MY OPINION, WE HAVE NOT PAID ANY PRICE YET."

For now, life is difficult in Turkey. They are grateful to be a little safer, but refugees have almost no rights, work is hard to find and their future is uncertain. But Taher, Donya and their children are still sure of the joy of Christ. When asked if everything they've experienced is worth it – losing their home, their work, friends, family and material possessions – Donya doesn't hesitate: "Jesus is worth everything. In my opinion, we have not paid any price yet."

What is life like for secret believers?

Open Doors fieldworkers Rashid, Jonathan and Peter (all names changed) explain what secret believers experience in the Middle East.

How are secret believers persecuted in the Middle East?

Jonathan: "Men are beaten and may lose their job. Women are locked up or sexually abused. Because converting from Islam to another religion is illegal, they can't just go to the police."

Rashid: "The police might even persecute them. Raids on house churches are common and many Christians are imprisoned."

Peter: "Twenty years ago, some thought they were the only believer in their country. When they find out that there are more believers in their city, and get connected, they feel more comfortable."

How has Covid-19 changed the situation?

Peter: "For secret believers, especially when there is strict confinement, life gets harder. It is more difficult to hide their faith. There are more incidents because of them being close to their potential persecutors the whole time. More secret believers were discovered. On the other hand, the number of secret believers engaging in our online programmes has doubled!"

How do Open Doors partners' projects help secret believers?

Jonathan: "Community really is the key word here. Having others to share faith with helps to endure persecution."

Rashid: "Apart from supporting the believers themselves with relief goods, leadership training and trauma care, we also help the church 'love their neighbour' by providing care in this crisis. This was a calling strongly felt by local Christians."

Jonathan: "While one might expect practical help to be valued most, it's not always the case. Recently, a group of believers in a bad economic situation told me they were happy with their food packages, but valued the discipleship material even more."

What can Open Doors supporters do?

Rashid: "We need supporters to help the church to find hope amid persecution. We need to continue equipping them to grow in discipleship and disciple making. This growing church will need to develop its emerging leaders and look after its suffering members."

Jonathan: "Most importantly, we need our supporters to not cease their prayers. Even though we don't speak their language and can't put an arm around them – nobody should face persecution alone."

Read the full interview at opendoorsuk.org/news



IMAGE Taher and his family praying. Watch an interview with Taher at opendoorsuk.org

LET THEM KNOW THEY'RE NOT ALONE

No believer should face persecution alone – and, thanks to people like you, Open Doors is meeting secret believers in the Middle East at every stage of their journey. Open Doors partners help people hear about Jesus online, offer discipleship and leadership training, give practical and spiritual support and provide a safe place for believers who've had to flee as refugees to a neighbouring country. Without a Christian community, it is really difficult for an isolated, secret believer to grow in their faith – and to withstand the pressure to return to Islam. Your support can show your brothers and sisters in the Middle East that they are not alone, and help them persevere, stand firm in their faith and be bold witnesses to their community.

PLEASE PRAY

- That all secret believers would know that they are not alone, and that God would enable them to find fellowship and discipleship
- For Christian refugees to find safety, community and hope
- That Open Doors fieldworkers would be equipped to serve secret and isolated believers.

PLEASE WRITE

You can write a letter of encouragement to Taher and Donya! They would love to hear from their worldwide Christian family, and to know that you are standing with them as they follow Jesus no matter the cost. Find out how to write to them at opendoorsuk.org/write

PLEASE GIVE

- **Every £25** could help 50 people learn about Jesus through social media, in countries where sharing the gospel openly is very difficult.
- **Every £48** could provide online training for ten secret church leaders to develop their leadership skills, so they can better disciple their churches.
- **Every £68** can provide two secret believers, who've fled to a neighbouring country, with practical and spiritual support at a Christian community centre.

You can make a gift at opendoorsuk.org

HOPE THAT REACHES FROM EAST TO WEST

Your prayers and support are bringing vital help to Christians across sub-Saharan Africa.

When this year's World Watch List was revealed, one of the most alarming trends was the rise in violence against Christians across sub-Saharan Africa – which has only increased during the Covid-19 pandemic. But your prayers and support mean that our persecuted brothers and sisters affected by the trend, like Isaiah* from Burkina Faso and Felismina from northern Mozambique, are being provided with their daily needs and strengthened in their faith.

ISAIAH FROM BURKINA FASO MAKING A LIFE-OR-DEATH DECISION

Isaiah is a husband and father of four girls. He and his family used to farm to provide for their needs – until the day the jihadists came to his village. He was faced with a choice – leave everything he'd ever known or stay and lose his life.

"The jihadists surrounded us with guns," he recalls. "They wore masks on their faces so no one could recognise them. They told us to convert to Islam - then they left. We were all very afraid because they didn't go far."

The following Sunday, the jihadists came back while Isaiah and his family were at church.

"We left the church and hid, because they had said if we

continue to worship and don't convert to Islam, they would kill us."

That same Sunday, Isaiah and his family left their home, their farm and their livelihood and arrived in Kaya, northeast Burkina Faso. They found a small room to rent – not easy living for a family of six.

"On our arrival, we had nothing. But God's people had compassion on us. The leaders of the church helped us with food. There are many people who have fled. Unless someone helps you, what can you do?"

INTERNALLY DISPLACED IN A PANDEMIC

Extremist attacks have steadily increased in Burkina Faso since 2015. The country is on the World Watch List for the third year running. Many Christians like Isaiah have ended up in internally displaced people camps – particularly hard places to be during Covid-19.

"Even masks are difficult to get because there were no more jobs, so we couldn't get money to buy them," says Isaiah. "There was no money to buy soap. It was very hard. We suffered greatly during lockdown."

But thanks to you, Isaiah and his family received enough food to support him and his family for three months.

"We are so grateful, and we pray that God will bless you. We will always remember you."

"We want to thank God so much," he says. "We have received a great gift. This food will help us a lot. I received rice, maize, beans, oil, tomato, sugar, spaghetti and salt. This is a very important gift because I couldn't work for more than three months."

Thanks to your prayers and generosity, Open Doors local partners in Burkina Faso have been able to distribute much-needed food aid to 1,000 displaced families like Isaiah's.

He says, "As the Bible says to mourn with those who mourn and laugh with those who laugh, you came through this gift to mourn with us. We are so grateful, and we pray that God will bless you. We will always remember you."

YOUR SUPPORT REACHES FROM WEST TO EAST

You have not just come to the aid of Christians in Burkina Faso on the west coast of Africa – your support has stretched across to northern Mozambique on the east coast, where Felismina and her family received aid. Originally from the troubled province of Cabo Delgado, which is suffering from increasing attacks by Islamic extremists, Felismina and her family fled to escape the violence.



IMAGE Isaiah received food to support his family for three months, thanks to you

They found a small home to rent in a neighbouring province, but were without food and other essentials – until you stepped in. "I'm very thankful for this help since we didn't have blankets or utensils," Felismina shares. "I left running and didn't bring anything with me. I am really grateful!" The family is one of 327 families in the area given vital aid.

"WE ASK YOU ALL TO PRAY AND INTERCEDE"

Please continue to pray for our persecuted family in sub-

Saharan Africa who are living with the continued threat of violence, and who are suffering as a result of it. The situation is desperate.

"You had compassion and came to show us your love with this support."

"Where we came from, all the Christians have fled," Isaiah says. "We ask you all, our brothers and sisters all around the world, to pray and intercede – that the enemy that rose against the Christians and forced them to flee and leave the churches be stopped."

PRAY

- That God would strengthen and sustain Christians who have been displaced because of the Islamic insurgency across sub-Saharan Africa
- That there would be an end to the violence and that God's love would transform the hearts and lives of the persecutors
- For Open Doors partners in sub-Saharan Africa as they continue to reach believers with vital aid.

*Name changed for security reasons



Q WHAT IF

your church looked more like the persecuted church?

WHAT IS A CHURCH? WHAT DOES IT LOOK LIKE? WHAT IF EVERYTHING WAS TAKEN AWAY?

In recent times, we have all been forced to rethink our idea of what constitutes church.

With Covid, many of us lost the use of our church buildings – at least for a time. Not only that, we entered a world where church leaders needed to interpret government regulations, and where services had to be streamed online.



A world where, when people could gather physically at all, it took a lot of thought and planning.

It was a different, much more challenging world.

It was, in a way, the world of the underground church.

'LIKE WATER IN A RIVER'
What if? is a six-part resource which uses inspiring stories from persecuted believers to explore what church is and how practices like prayer, worship, teaching and community might look if we faced the same obstacles that they encounter – even if for very different reasons.

Because for millions of Christians around the world 'lockdown' isn't a temporary state. They live in places where Christianity is forbidden – or, at the very least, viewed with

hostility and suspicion. They cannot meet openly at any time, never mind in a pandemic. There is much they can teach us about how to overcome obstacles and still 'do church' effectively.

In these places, the church is constantly re-shaping itself. In China, for example, the church has found itself facing increased regulation and oppressive surveillance. So, many of the big churches have splintered into smaller, less visible, more mobile house churches.

As one of their church leaders, Caleb*, says: "Many house churches are like water in a river. Whenever an obstacle is encountered, they will not fight it. Instead, they stream past the obstacles and change course, but still continue to flow towards the big ocean, which is the Great Commission. The ultimate destination never

changes. It is just the way we do church is adjusted or modified, to sustain the continuous growth of the kingdom against all odds."

WHAT IF WE DID THINGS DIFFERENTLY?

At Open Doors, we've been amazed at the way in which churches in the UK and Ireland have adapted during this time, not to mention very thankful for your continued, committed support for your persecuted brothers and sisters. Thank you so much.

Changes might be temporary, but the past year may well have raised difficult questions about what it means to be a church community – and challenging the status quo of many years. *What If?* is a free, downloadable resource that can help your small group answer the sort of questions that may have come up during this period. Questions like:

- **How would we worship together if our church buildings were confiscated?**

- **What does solitary confinement teach you about worship?**
- **How would you read the Bible if you don't have one?**
- **How do you tell the world about Jesus when there are spies everywhere?**

These questions are particularly relevant during Covid-19, as we all have a unique opportunity to reflect and connect with the world of the persecuted church. But *What If?* will work just as well when you're able to all gather in the same room - and, as we look beyond Covid, the experience of the persecuted church can still help us to engage with scripture, worship and prayer like never before.

It can help us to look beyond the boundaries of 'normal' and imagine new ways of doing church.

To ask, in other words, 'What if...?'

*name changed for security purposes

ABOUT Q WHAT IF?



A free six-part PDF resource for small groups



Interactive sessions designed for small groups to be able to do either physically together, or remotely over Zoom or Skype



Discussion questions, background material, activities, Bible reflection



Videos – including actual footage of underground churches



Prayers and reflective practices to engage with during the following week.

To download your free guide today, visit opendoorsuk.org/whatif

#RUN FOR THEIR LIVES



Tim from Wiltshire explains why he's signed up for the virtual London Marathon



I loved running at school – until I finished hopelessly last in a regional 400-metre race. But in recent years I've enjoyed a running renaissance, venturing out regularly, never more so than during the pandemic. Physically and mentally, the benefits have been huge.

Consequently, when I heard that Open Doors had places for the London Marathon which is going outside London this year (half of the runners on the traditional course, and half starting wherever they like) I was keen to step up to the challenge – particularly as I'd been looking to do something to raise money and awareness for the persecuted church.

THE WONDER AND WORTH OF JESUS

The cause of Open Doors has long been close to my heart. In 2011, I went on an encouragement trip to Egypt. I was captivated by the faith of believers who selflessly poured themselves out for Jesus, despite tremendous challenges. I still see it across the world today. It never fails to touch me.

There's something else that excites me. Many of my friends and family aren't Christian. When they hear about the challenge, they'll see that around the world people are willing to suffer, even die, for their faith. What does this

say about the wonder and worth of Jesus?

WILL YOU RUN FOR THEIR LIVES TOO?

Whether a seasoned runner or a beginner, going solo or with a group, walking or running, serious or fun – whatever your capability and preference, you can join Tim in tackling the virtual Virgin Money London Marathon on **Sunday 3 October** to raise support for persecuted Christians.

You'll get an app to connect you to the live event in London, including commentary from famous people, and once completed, you'll be given a medal. All Open Doors asks is that you have a fundraising target of £500.

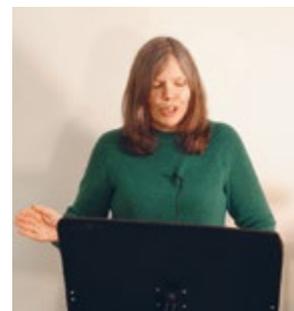
AND DID YOU KNOW...

As one of 100,000 participants, you'll be part of the biggest marathon ever staged anywhere in the world. You'll be part of history!

Apply for a place at opendoorsuk.org/run

CAN I HAVE A VOLUNTEER?

There are many ways to use your time, passion and gifts to serve the persecuted church. We caught up with three volunteers who are doing just that...



DR KATHY TILL, LIVERPOOL: SPEAKER AND PRAYER GROUP LEADER

What inspired you?

The faith of persecuted Christians! Having seen the difference that standing alongside them made, I felt compelled to share their stories where they could not, and in doing so inspire others to walk with them, too.

What is most rewarding?

Seeing people's faith challenged by what our persecuted family teaches us about God, including perseverance, steadfastness and forgiveness. With the prayer group, I love seeing how God inspires us to pray big and then answers those prayers in ways that we could never have imagined.

Sum up your experiences in three words

Inspiring. Rewarding. Challenging.



VICTORIA COLLINS, WEST LOTHIAN: ACTIVIST (YOUTH STREAM)

What inspired you?

Five years ago, God broke my heart for the persecuted church and young people. I initially signed up for a year but God has showed that He still has more in store for me. My primary role is organising youth events for my church. Each year I have been on the Activists team I've been overwhelmed at how God has blessed us.

What is most rewarding?

Doing this journey with my best friends. We meet twice a year for training, fellowship and prayer. We're a big family with a shared passion for God and young people. There is always someone available to chat and pray with. We strengthen and challenge each other.

Sum up your experiences in three words

Transforming. Blessed. Joyful.



JOHN GILLETT, IPSWICH: SPEAKER AND PRAYER GROUP LEADER

What inspired you?

At an Open Doors conference we were asked: "What more could you do?" This was followed by someone talking about the volunteer speaker role. I felt this was a definite nudge from God and was excited by the prospect of being a voice for our persecuted family.

What is most rewarding?

When someone says that it's the first time they've heard about the persecuted church, or a church saying that they will be more proactive in supporting Open Doors.

Sum up your experiences in three words

Humbling. Faith-building. Connecting.

WILL YOU VOLUNTEER?

Are you feeling stirred to be a speaker, activist or prayer group leader? And these aren't the only things you can do.

Head to opendoorsuk.org/volunteer to explore the different opportunities to volunteer. We'd love to hear from you!





Secret police demanded Taher* write down the names of Christians he knew. He bravely left the page blank.

Like many Christians from a Muslim background in the Middle East, Taher's faith made him a target in his country. He was arrested and pressured to give up his friends' names.

He courageously refused, stayed strong in his faith, and was miraculously released and escaped to Turkey.

Every £68 can provide two secret believers who have fled to a neighbouring country with practical and spiritual support at a Christian community centre.

To make your gift, return the enclosed envelope, phone **01993 460015** or visit **opendoorsuk.org**.

*name changed for security reasons