

Open *Doors*

MAGAZINE | September/October 2023

Who's watching Ming?

Digital surveillance
in China



MEET THE RISK-TAKERS OF THE PERSECUTED CHURCH

STANDING STRONG

Hear inspiring stories first-hand from courageous persecuted Christians and see how you're helping them to stand strong.

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What's it like to be spied on? How do you keep faithfully following Jesus when your every move is being watched? In the September prayer webinar, you can hear how increased surveillance is affecting our brothers and sisters in countries like China – and how they continue to risk everything for Christ. Why not invite your small group to join this time of prayer?

Find out more and register at opendoorsuk.org

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 risk everything for 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 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.

Contact us:

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

Ireland
PO Box 873
Belfast BT15 1WZ
T 02890 751080

Scotland
T 01292 800006
E contact@opendoorsuk.org

Find us on:

opendoorsuk.org



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COVER: Ming (name changed) courageously serves the church in China, despite oppressive surveillance. Image is from a reenactment of his story.

Letter from Henrietta

Technology: friend or foe?

“You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives.” GENESIS 50:20

We've all experienced technology becoming a bigger and bigger part of our lives in recent years. During the pandemic, I found video calls such a blessing to connect me with friends and family – and I know many of you did too. But in some parts of the world, technology has a darker side. In China, for instance, digital surveillance is making life for Christians increasingly dangerous.

As you'll see in Ming's* story (p6), Christians in many parts of China know that their every move could be watched – both through CCTV and online. It's illegal to access the Bible on the internet, and the authorities have demanded that Christian apps and online resources be deleted. And so Ming had to start smuggling physical Bibles, much like Brother Andrew did all those decades ago. Christians in China and the wider region always have to be one step ahead. I'm awed and challenged by the lengths to which they go to make sure they have access to the Word of God, and to share it with others.

While some regimes use digital surveillance to oppress and spy on Christians, we can echo Joseph's words in Genesis: "You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good" (Genesis 50:20). Around the world, vulnerable Christian communities and Open Doors partners are experiencing the blessings of technology. It can help reach and encourage distant believers, spread the gospel, and show persecuted Christians that they are not alone. Though advancing technology can be a weapon in the hands of persecutors, it can also be a valuable tool to connect people who would never otherwise have met.

Please join me in praying Brother Andrew's prayer – that 'seeing eyes would be made blind' – for all online spies who seek to harm Christians. And join me in praying for an increase in all the ways that technology helps Christians to encourage and serve one another across the world.

Every blessing,



Henrietta

Henrietta Blyth
CEO, Open Doors UK&I

*Name changed for security reasons

World Watch News

UGANDA 42 killed in school attack

Open Doors partners are supporting families of children killed in a devastating attack by Islamic militants on a predominantly Christian school in Uganda.

Students at Lhubiruha Secondary School were praising God just before militants from the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) arrived – killing 42 people, mostly children. The school is located two kilometres from the border with the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), where the ADF – which has links to so-called Islamic State (IS) – is responsible for many recent attacks on Christians.

From this awful tragedy, hope has already emerged after a Muslim man became a Christian at the funeral of 15-year-old Amina. “I fear as a human, but I’m trusting Jesus to guide me,” says the man after facing death threats. “For me, even if they kill me, I’ll be in heaven with Amina.”

During a visit to the region to offer support, an Open Doors local partner went to a nearby school where young Christians were singing: “I will continue proclaiming that which concerns Your name Jesus; even if I die, I will resurrect in You.”



RIGHT The funeral of Amina; she and her mother became Christians only last year

SUDAN Christians at greater risk as conflict escalates

The conflict that broke out in April continues to deteriorate – and it’s putting Christians in greater danger.

The crisis has caused the deaths of at least 3,000 people, whilst more than three million have been displaced. Ceasefire attempts by the warring parties – the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF) – have not lasted, and there’s currently little hope of a resolution.



Since April, more than 165 churches have closed and at least 15 have been destroyed. Churches have also reported incidents of rape, kidnap and looting.

“Christians in Sudan are especially vulnerable and on the receiving end in war times,” says Fikiru*, an Open Doors research expert for East Africa. “There are many Christians still present in the war zones today who do not have any means to flee, who are suffering and we cannot reach them.”

Furthermore, Muslim fundamentalists are joining the fight, adding to concerns that the conflict could give Islamists a renewed foothold in Sudan.



LEFT Displaced children queue for food; ABOVE A destroyed church in Khartoum

“We ask that churches worldwide do not grow tired or forget to pray for the situation,” adds Fikiru.

CHINA ‘Love the Communist Party’ sign demanded outside churches

Authorities in Zhejiang Province in eastern China have demanded that all religious venues display signs saying “Love the Communist Party, love the country, and love the religion.”

It follows a directive by the province’s Religious Affairs Bureau and is believed to be a ‘test case’ before potential roll-out elsewhere in China.

“Some believers might get more confused whether they

are going to a church or to a government property,” says Li*, a local Open Doors contact. “Church leaders might also face a greater degree of interference by the authorities, especially in the church’s decision-making.”

Pray that church leaders will be granted wisdom and courage as they navigate these latest demands. (Read more about oppression against Chinese Christians in Ming’s* story on p6.)

EAST AFRICA “Christ and you have helped me”

A Christian widow from East Africa who lost her son and suffered severe burns following an attack by her in-laws says your support means ‘I am not forced to return to Islam for the sake of survival’.

Worke* and her children were thrown out of their home when her in-laws discovered that she’d become a Christian, soon after her husband died. Later, the family sprayed flammable liquid over Worke’s new house. When she returned and started dinner, the house caught fire – it killed her son and left her with third-degree burns.

Worke is thankful for the way Open Doors local partners helped pay medical bills, bought necessities and helped her start a new business so she can be self-sufficient. “That I am here is a miracle,” she says. “I would have been dead by now, but Christ and you have helped me.

“I will hold on to Christ,” she adds. “I want to tell people the gospel and how Jesus helped me through all the difficult situations I have faced.”

Pray that Worke’s new business will flourish and that her in-laws will come to know Jesus.

BELOW “It is God who encourages and strengthens me,” says Worke



IRAN

More than 50 Christians arrested in fresh crackdown

There is a fresh crackdown on Christians in Iran, with more than 50 converts arrested within the space of seven days.

The surge occurred in five cities: Tehran, Karaj, Rasht, Orumiyyeh and Aligoudarz.

At the time of writing, at least 51 remain in detention, whilst others have been released on bail. There are fears that the number of arrests will rise.

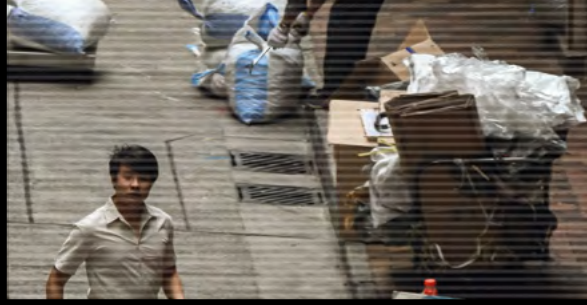
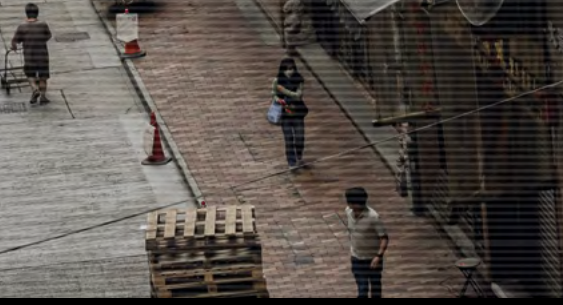
The arrests coincided with the morality police being more visible and aggressive on the streets, having partially withdrawn following the protests that emerged after Mahsa Amini’s death whilst in custody in September 2022.

Meanwhile, Pastor Yousef Nadarkhani – whom many of you have been praying for – has had new charges levelled at him, just months after being released from prison. The unspecified charges have also been made against another convert called Abdolreza (Matthias) Haghnejad.

Pray for the release of all Christian prisoners, and that the authorities will not see believers as a threat.

*Names changed for security reasons

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



WHO'S WATCHING MING?

DIGITAL SURVEILLANCE IN CHINA



Imagine that someone watched you open this magazine. They know where you're sitting, and who you're with. They know the last thing you looked at on your phone, the last thing you searched for online, the last time you went to meet people. Your moves are watched – not just by cameras in the street, but online too.

That's a little like what life is like for Ming* in China. It makes following Jesus and sharing the gospel really hard – but he's determined to do it, no matter the cost.

SMUGGLING BIBLES

The greatest risk Ming has taken is delivering secret Bibles. In parts of China, it's relatively easy to get a physical Bible – but where Ming is from it's much harder, particularly if the Bible is translated into the language of his ethnic group.

*Name changed for security reasons

All images of Ming are from a reenactment of his story

Like Brother Andrew smuggling Bibles into Communist Eastern Europe in the 1950s, Ming has had to go to great lengths to hide his operations. He would load the Bibles into his car in a hidden alley, and send a message to his contacts: "I'm on my way to the old place." 'The old place' is code: he knew that citizens' phones were being monitored. Any wrong word could cost him his freedom.

"I COULD BE ARRESTED, INTERROGATED AND EVEN IMPRISONED."

"I could be arrested, interrogated and even imprisoned," he says. "But I knew that God called me to share the gospel by distributing Bibles."

ARREST

And one day his fears came true. Ming and his friends were arrested. Miraculously, he was



set free – but his friends weren't. To make matters worse, they could no longer use the company that Ming and his fellow believers had worked so hard to set up as a cover for their smuggling.

The arrest put him firmly on the radar of the authorities, and they remain determined to restrict his Christian activities. "I knew

it would be harder to dodge the police and I'd have to live even more cautiously. I'm [officially] not allowed to attend church or even own a Bible anymore," he says. "At first, every one or two months, the police searched my house." They come less often now, but they still regularly search Ming's home.

PERSECUTION AT HOME

Ming has sacrificed a lot for his faith. In China, persecution and level of restriction can look very different from province to province – where Ming lives is among the most restrictive places. Even hearing the gospel can be difficult because the surrounding community has a different faith.

He first heard about Jesus while he was away at college, and eventually chose to follow Him. "I told my father about my faith and hoped he could accept me, but he reported me to the police," says Ming. "I was devastated that we could not reconcile."

Ming was confined to his home for a few months. Even after that, his father prevented him from attending school in their area. So Ming was forced to relocate to a

city in southern China, where he had to start from scratch. It's a city with fewer restrictions, and he was able to go to church. He even married – then he and his wife Hua* had a little girl.

GOD'S CALL TO MING

"I learned much more about Christ and how good God is," he shares. "This was also the turning point for me. Learning about Jesus made me realise that my friends and community back home needed Him, too."

Ming heard the Lord softly speak to him: "Go back to your hometown. Tell people about Me there." Like so many people in the Bible – from Moses to Gideon, Mary to the first disciples – Ming was scared but obedient. He gave up everything to move home – including being with his wife and daughter, which Ming's father-in-law forbade because of his faith. He chose to go back to a place where his every move was observed, catalogued and filed away, to be used against him if necessary. And that's where he started smuggling Bibles.

"GO BACK TO YOUR HOMETOWN. TELL PEOPLE ABOUT ME THERE."

DIGITAL SURVEILLANCE

In many countries where getting a Bible is difficult, Open Doors partners can distribute digital Bibles. In China, the digital world is often even more dangerous than the physical world. To make matters worse, China is exporting its surveillance technology to other countries

WANT TO KNOW MORE ABOUT DIGITAL PERSECUTION? DOWNLOAD REPORT TODAY.

Open Doors' report, *Digital Persecution: The New Frontier for Freedom of Religion or Belief* was launched at a ministerial on freedom of religion or belief. The report, profiled in Parliament, outlines this growing threat to human rights.

Download to learn more about how Christians and other religious minorities increasingly face oppressive surveillance, censorship and disinformation. You'll find detailed research and stories about digital persecution happening today.



around the world – including countries where Christians are persecuted by the authorities, such as Myanmar, India, Iran, Cuba, Turkey and several nations in sub-Saharan Africa.

"We are not allowed to officially purchase a Bible online," shares Moli*, an Open Doors partner supporting the Chinese church. "Last year, a new regulation that restricts and monitors religious online content was rolled out. Right after that, a lot of religious websites and accounts were blocked or removed, and articles disappeared." She adds that there are ways around this, and Christians are still taking risks to share Christian content and messages.

"What is required by the law is an official permit that allows churches to post and share religious content," says another partner, Yangyang*. "Religious content refers to religious videos, Bible verses, religious encouragement and so on. Our partners shared that they received phone calls from authorities warning them to remove their religious content posted online."

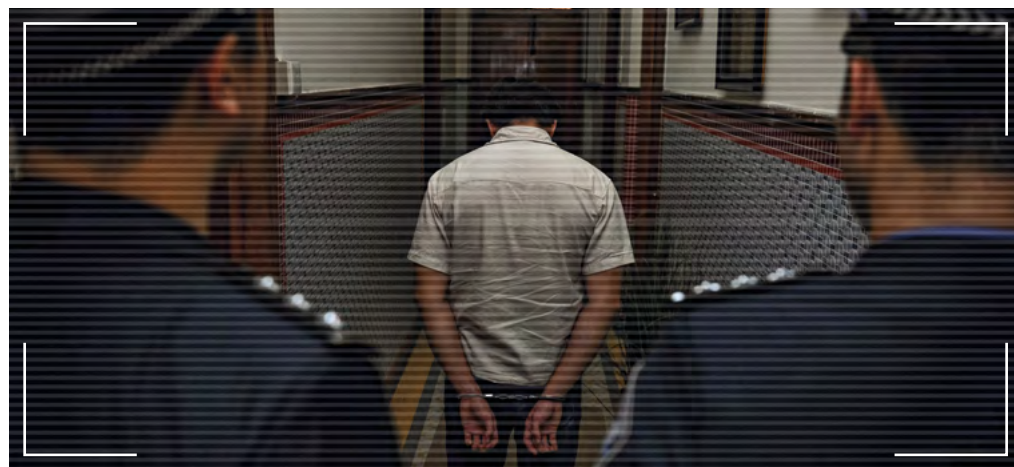
RESTRICTING THE CHURCH

Yangyang continues: "In my opinion, this law hampers the growth [of the church]. First, it could hinder online evangelism. Second, the room for spiritual nourishment has become narrower: some sermons and Christian materials are no longer available. The availability of children's materials in China has also decreased significantly."

BELOW All Christian online content is now illegal without a permit in China



ABOVE, BELOW Ming took enormous risks to smuggle Bibles - and was arrested for it





China is currently number 16 on the World Watch List. Only five years ago, it was at number 43. These new restrictions and pressures are key reasons that it has shot up the list.

Another Open Doors local partner, Yuhua*, has seen this shift: "A few years ago, when I went to interview churches, persecution was not a subject that concerned anyone," she says. "Nowadays, it is totally different. Average believers now feel the pressure, and many of them are not well-equipped."

CCTV IN CHURCHES

Even within the state-approved Three Self Patriotic Movement,

this pressure is very present. Churches and church leaders are rigorously monitored.

"Registered churches have cameras installed," says Moli. "Every week, registered churches must have their sermons reviewed, and adjustments in the content are very likely. Some registered churches are unable to preach the gospel fully."

House churches and small groups – like Ming's – don't have cameras. But that's because they're illegal, and so operate under the radar. "To avoid getting in trouble, house churches divide themselves into small groups," says Moli. "In bigger groups, police might barge in when they receive reports from neighbours."

LEARNING TO TRUST

As Moli suggests, the threat of surveillance doesn't just come directly from the authorities. There's always the danger that

somebody you know will inform on you. After his arrest, Ming struggled with this.

"I KNOW I AM WITH A BROTHER WHO NOURISHES MY RELATIONSHIP WITH THE LORD."

"I had no one to trust," Ming says. "I felt insecure and isolated. I need to make friends cautiously, since there may be spies pretending to be Christians. I need to stay vigilant."

Without the gifts and prayers of people like you, Ming might

have remained in this difficult position. But thanks to Open Doors supporters, he was able to meet Hao Ran* – a local Open Doors partner who is offering discipleship, as well as some financial aid. He is a friend in times of struggle.

"Brother Hao Ran is trustworthy," say Ming. "He is someone I can do life with. At least twice a month, we pray and study the Bible together. We share happy and sorrowful moments together. We have built a bond of trust, and I know I am with a brother who cares, who nourishes my relationship with the Lord."

PERSEVERING FOR GOD

"Ming is strong in faith, but I can tell he's been mentally exhausted in this journey," Hao Ran says. "At the beginning, he was so suspicious that he would trust no one. I believe the Holy Spirit moves in his heart and he has been able to develop trust again. Now, he is starting to lead a small group again."

With your support, Ming can continue to serve God in this difficult region, even as restrictions and dangers increase. At the risk of his own life and freedom, Ming keeps sharing God's Word. "We listen and follow," says Ming. "He will guide our paths."

Psalm 121 says, "He will watch over your life; the Lord will watch over your coming and going both now and for evermore." In a world where every move Ming makes could be tracked by the authorities, experiencing this loving, protective watchfulness brings comfort and strength.

*Names changed for security reasons



HOW CAN I HELP MING?

Life for courageous believers like Ming is likely to get harder, Open Doors partner Yangyang* recognises. "We are definitely entering an era of more restrictions and challenges," she says. "My vision for China is for our brothers and sisters to be well-equipped through our persecution survival training – to shepherd their flock. Many pastors might not know how to respond when faced with persecution, and this makes it so important for our ministry to fill the gap."

We can't all stand next to believers like Ming. But you can make sure that local partners like Han Rao are able to do so – to strengthen and sustain risk-takers experiencing extraordinary digital persecution, yet persevering for God in China and in other countries where this persecution is growing. Today, your gifts and prayers can help the church keep going. You can help ensure that digital persecutors won't win.

PLEASE PRAY

- For Ming to be reconciled with his wife and daughter and wider family

- For God's protection for courageous believers defying surveillance to smuggle Bibles and share the gospel
- That Open Doors local partners would receive the Lord's wise compassion as they serve the church facing digital persecution.

PLEASE GIVE

Every £20 could give Bibles to five believers, so they can meet God in His Word.

Every £32 could help encourage secret believers like Ming with discipleship, so they can be effective witnesses for Christ despite persecution and opposition.

Every £54 could train three Christians so they understand the dangers of being digitally spied on – and remain connected, resilient and fruitful.

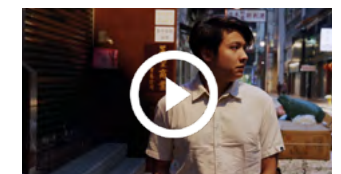
SECRET CHURCH

Ming's story features in the new, updated edition of *Secret Church* – an Open Doors resource which helps worshippers to experience the life of the underground church.



With prayer, worship, Bible readings and communion, it can serve as a prayer event, small group session or even as an interactive church service. Download for free at opendoorsuk.org/secretchurch

> You can watch a video of Ming's story at opendoorsuk.org



BELOW An Open Doors local partner has become a dear friend to Ming, and helped him trust again





Thank you for helping your family in Manipur



PICTURED Your gifts and prayers are bringing much-needed relief and long-term support to Christians in Manipur who have lost everything

In the wake of ethnoreligious violence in Manipur, India - that devastated Christian communities on both sides of the clash - you showed that you were standing by your persecuted church family. Thank you so much for your giving and praying, which are sustaining and encouraging believers facing this crisis.

TENS OF THOUSANDS OF CHRISTIANS AFFECTED

The conflict is very complex, as is the history of the region. It isn't only Christians that are affected - but local sources are clearly seeing that believers from both Kuki and Meitei groups have been disproportionately targeted. Some Hindu extremists have used the violence as a cover for their own agenda, using threats to demand entire villages convert to Hinduism, and destroying churches and other Christian homes and buildings.

More than 120 Christians have been killed, more than 380 churches have been attacked and destroyed and over a thousand Christian homes burned down. More than 50,000 believers have had to flee their homes and are displaced within India, often having lost everything they own.

"It is God who brings people like you to help us."

But these courageous Christians aren't alone. God is with them in this crisis, of course - and so are you, through the hands and feet of Open Doors local partners. Because these partners have served the region for many years, they were ready to offer support immediately. At first, local partners provided

emergency food, medicine and other relief - they've already distributed almost a thousand packages of relief aid, with more in the pipeline. Now this is also transitioning into long-term support as Christians in Manipur begin to rebuild their lives, homes and communities.

TESTIMONIES AND THANKS FROM LOCAL BELIEVERS

"We had to run with our children in the middle of the night to save our lives," says Vaa Kim*, a local Christian. "We hid in the jungle for four days and did not have food. Many of us have been shifted from camp to camp. It is hard to express this situation. Thank you for your help of groceries; with this we can at least feed our children proper food."

"Even if you are not here, we know that your prayers and your support are."

Vaa Kim knows that God is with her family in this difficult time: "It is God who brings people like you even in such a fearful situation, just to help us," she says. "God bless you people who have given this help. Please pray for us - we want peace and a normal life. We want our family back. Your support really means a lot to us."

"YOU TRULY HAVE A HEART FOR PEOPLE"

Michan* is another persecuted believer who lost everything, and cannot afford to travel far from Manipur. "I lost my house, all my goods from the house were stolen and then they burned it. The only thing we could do is escape with our lives," he says. He received emergency food from Open Doors local partners, and sees the love and courage behind this gift. "More than these

groceries, I appreciate your bravery to come here. You truly have a heart for people. But I am very thankful for these groceries. This is indeed a very big help. Thank you everyone who has helped in providing this to us."

"When the attack happened, I was unaware," adds Hycinthe*. "When I came to my room, I saw it was completely destroyed. There were men in the house, and they tried to physically attack us. My friend was beaten very badly. I was then shifted to three different camps where I did not get food for many days. That's why I can say now how much this aid means to me. I am so thankful for this."

THANK YOU - AND KEEP PRAYING

These are just three of the many testimonies that Open Doors local partners are hearing from grateful believers - who are persevering in their faith through this extremely difficult time.

"We are really thankful for the people who have been such a big support," says Anjali*, a local partner. "And as I'm speaking on behalf of the people from Manipur, I have seen how happy they were, how grateful they were, and how thankful they were. And yes, it is truly God who is doing this through you. Even if you are not here, we know that your prayers and your support are with the people, which means a lot. It is not just physical or material support, it is a strength. It is a support to their faith."

Thank you to all of you who responded to Open Doors' appeal for urgent gifts and prayers. As you can see, it is much-needed and cherished. Please keep praying for Christians from Manipur and for peace and unity in the region.

*Names changed for security reasons



**THIS CHRISTMAS,
REDISCOVER THE STORY
THROUGH THE EYES OF**

HEROD'S SECRET POLICEMAN

This is Secret Policeman Number 3. And he – along with his toy sheep Nellie – is the hero of a brand-new Christmas story for children and adults.

As we all know, when Herod the Great met the wise men, he sent them on their way with instructions to return and tell him when they had found Jesus. But what if Herod also sent someone else? Someone to follow them and find out where they went? **What if Herod sent a secret policeman?**

Herod's Secret Policeman tells the tale of Secret Policeman Number 3, of the people he met on the journey, and the way in which the encounter with Jesus, Mary and Joseph changed him forever.

It's a fresh take on the age-old story. But more than that, *Herod's Secret Policeman* will introduce children – in a very gentle way – to the pressures faced by secret believers around the world, many of whom

live under surveillance, or disguise their faith. They might even have to flee for their lives, just as Mary, Joseph and Jesus did. And the journey that Secret Policeman Number 3 goes on is replicated in the real-life experience of modern converts. When they decide to follow Jesus, it often means completely jettisoning their past life.



HEROD - A VERY MODERN DICTATOR

The historical figure of Herod the Great is really similar to many dictators who are ruling today. Sources from the time show an ageing, paranoid ruler desperate to cling on to

power. And he really did have a network of informants. The historian Josephus records that 'there were spies set everywhere, both in the city and in the roads, who watched those that met together'. Josephus even claims that Herod would sometimes disguise himself as an ordinary person and go out to listen to what people were saying about him! Christians live under increasingly oppressive surveillance today – but Herod was doing something similar many centuries ago.

As well as a full-colour children's storybook, there will also be a short animated video version for churches. Great for Advent services, crib services or Christingles. You can also download a colour-in nativity scene featuring characters from the book as well as teaching material.

For all its serious purpose, *Herod's Secret Policeman* is a fun and funny story. It's perfect as a giveaway during Advent, or

even as the focus of a children's Christmas service.

Go undercover this Christmas, and discover the story of Herod's Secret Policeman!

ORDER NOW

24-page, full-colour story book for children, with:

- Animated video
- Downloadable activity - colour in and make your own nativity scene!
- Accompanying teaching and discussion guide
- Great for children's services, Sunday school or family reflections
- Orders will be delivered from the end of October.



GOD'S BIG FAMILY

A new six-part teaching resource for children's church and Sunday school

God's Big Family is a set of six engaging, interactive, fun session outlines for children's church or Sunday school. It's based around the idea that each one of us is a child of God, and that therefore we are all brothers and sisters. That means we all have over two

billion brothers and sisters – a really big family!

Aimed at children aged 7-11, the sessions will introduce the children to their church family in Iran, Colombia, North Korea, Nigeria and Eritrea. Each session outline includes two games, a short teaching outline with questions and a video, a

craft, a prayer and a take-home resource.

God's Big Family is a great resource for Sunday school workers, children and family workers, and could even be adapted for all-age services.

- Six ready-to-use session outlines for Sunday school or children's church
- Each session has games, discussion questions, prayer activities, crafts and videos to watch
- Download your free outline from opendoorsuk.org/children



MEET THE RISK-TAKERS OF THE PERSECUTED CHURCH

You're invited to worship and pray with your persecuted church family around the world at Standing Strong - and this autumn, we're continuing our journey around the UK, coming to a region near you!



Join us to hear first-hand stories from courageous persecuted Christians across the world, and see how your prayers, gifts and actions on their behalf are helping them to stand strong in their faith. As well as times of prayer and worship, there will also be seminars where you can ask questions and pray with our speakers. Invite your friends, family and church to come and be inspired, challenged and encouraged to follow Jesus no matter the cost.

MEET ELIJAH ALI FROM IRAQ

As a young man, Elijah Ali* became a radical Muslim - even founding a Jihadi movement in the refugee camp he grew up in. After he was employed as a personal guard to radical Muslim leaders, he started to feel

restless and unhappy. "I started to shout at God, pointing at God with my AK47, shouting, 'If you created me, why do I have such a life?'" he remembers.

It was great having a time to pray in small groups, worship all together and see this courageous Christian in person

STANDING STRONG ATTENDEE

But when he heard the testimony of a Kurdish Christian, he began searching for Jesus. He found a church where he could ask questions and discovered that it was Jesus who could make him

whole. He became a Christian - and that's when the persecution started...

Join us in Cambridge and Bangor (Northern Ireland) to hear more of Elijah Ali's story. "I believe it is the prayers around the world that bring growth to my ministry," he says. "I have learned to love the people who persecute me."

NORTH KOREA: KIM SANG-HWA'S DEADLY CHOICE

In North Korea, Kim Sang Hwa* didn't know what to do when she discovered her parents' secret Bible. Only 12 years old, she spent two weeks weighing up her options: tell her teachers and the local authorities, like she'd been taught, or tell her parents?

She'd already caught her parents breaking the law, six years earlier - although she didn't realise it at the time: "I remember waking up one night when I was six. Our house was very small, so we all slept in the same room. When I opened my eyes, I saw my father and mother under the blanket, and I could hear the soft noise of the radio. Later I learned they were listening to a broadcast from a Christian radio station."

Standing Strong Scotland was excellent and very informative. It left a deep impression on me. [Persecuted Christians] definitely need our prayers and I will keep praying for them

STANDING STRONG ATTENDEE

Eventually, her curiosity about the God of the Bible she'd found won out, and she told her parents. That was her first step on her journey to courageous faith. Come and hear Sang-Hwa tell the rest of her story - and share how your prayers are making a difference for our persecuted church family in North Korea - at Standing Strong events in November!

Incredibly moving and powerful and encouraging

STANDING STRONG ATTENDEE

*Names changed for security reasons, and image is illustrative

ABOVE RIGHT Kim Sang Hwa will be sharing her remarkable story at Standing Strong events in November



STANDING STRONG COMING TO A REGION NEAR YOU!

ALL EVENTS 10AM - 2.30PM

WITH ELIJAH ALI* FROM IRAQ

30 SEPTEMBER

The C3 Church, Cambridge

07 OCTOBER

Bangor Elim Church, Northern Ireland

WITH KIM SANG HWA* FROM NORTH KOREA

04 NOVEMBER

Bridge Community Church, Leeds

11 NOVEMBER

Trinity (formerly Connect Church), Birmingham



To book your free place, and to find out more about the venues and speakers, go to opendoorsuk.org/standingstrong

RISK-TAKERS OF THE PERSECUTED CHURCH



Ko Aung in Myanmar watched and on the run

Ko Aung* realised he was in danger when his access to not one but two banking apps was suddenly blocked. He tried to open a new bank account, but couldn't. His fears came true when he discovered that his identity card had been flagged by the authorities. This has serious consequences. "It means I am no longer a citizen of Myanmar," he says.

The suspicions against Ko Aung emerged following the military coup in February 2021 and centre around his relationship with a group of tribal believers. Having earlier converted to Christianity from Buddhism, he had got to

know them after returning home at the beginning of the pandemic and, working as an Open Doors local partner, he helped provide practical and spiritual support for them.

"Before the military coup, me helping Christians would not have been a big issue, but now things had changed," says Ko Aung. "They [the military] believed I was against them, working with the youth rebel groups."

CAUTIOUS COMMUNICATION

As surveillance intensified, Ko Aung was fearful of arrest and even death. With the help of Open Doors local partners, he fled to another country, but with the military's increasing use of sophisticated technology

– much of which comes from China – he must tread with extreme caution. Even use of basic technology to communicate with family back home is risky.

"In Myanmar, people are afraid to comment on political issues over the phone," Ko Aung says. "They are afraid that the military might be eavesdropping their phone calls. We also don't normally use Facebook Messenger, because the military checks Facebook messaging apps and phone call lists whenever they check phones."

HOPE AND FORGIVENESS

Since escaping, Ko Aung's heart has softened towards those persecuting him and other Christians. "At first, it was very

hard for me to forgive them, but now I can say that I have forgiven them," he shares. "God taught me through His Word that all things happen for good. Since I have experienced persecution, I can now better understand the pain experienced by Christians suffering for their faith."

"God taught me through His Word that all things happen for good."

He even sees the hope of the gospel in the military coup. "I think that after the coup, the younger generation is now more open to faiths other than Buddhism," he says.

GRATITUDE FOR PRAYERS

Sadly, Ko Aung's mother died after he had escaped. "I was extremely grieved as I didn't have the chance of seeing her one last time," he says. He longs to return home to see his family and continue his calling. "Once the coup ends and the situation is better, I want to go back home and continue to support ethnic Christians in remote areas as an Open Doors partner."

It's a calling strengthened by the support he's received. "Open Doors partners helped me get here and have been supporting me since I got here," he says. "They are always in touch with me and make sure I am okay. They also pray for me; I want to thank them for all the help they have given me and for all the prayers they have prayed for me."

*Name changed for security reasons

> **Watch a video of Ko Aung at opendoorsuk.org/myanmar**



HOW YOU CAN PRAY FOR MYANMAR WORLD WATCH LIST #14

PRAY FOR SAFETY

"There are several places in Myanmar where churches are being burned down, and believers have to run and hide in the jungles," says Ko Aung. "So many people have also been killed. Please continue to pray for the safety of Christians in the country who are so vulnerable."

PRAY FOR BREAKTHROUGH

The military coup has exacerbated Myanmar's long-running civil war. It's had a catastrophic impact on the whole country and increased the persecution of its Christian minority. Pray for an end to the coup and a cessation of all hostilities.

PRAY FOR PROVISION

The military coup has exacerbated Myanmar's long-running civil war. It's had a catastrophic impact on the whole country and increased the persecution of its Christian minority. Pray for an end to the coup and a cessation of all hostilities.

WHAT CAN WE LEARN FROM THE PERSECUTED CHURCH?

READ


"After many days had gone by, there was a conspiracy among the Jews to kill him, but Saul learned of their plan. Day and night they kept close watch on the city gates in order to kill him. But his followers took him by night and lowered him in a basket through an opening in the wall." – Acts 9:23-25

REFLECT

Imagine that you're being closely watched day and night: your bank accounts have been frozen, you must be careful in how you use your phone, and even at home you aren't safe. And all because of your faith. How would you react? How would it affect your faith and witness?

RESPOND

Like Saul, later called Paul, Ko Aung escaped because of partners who (metaphorically) 'lowered him in a basket through an opening in the wall'. People rallied round both in their time of need. Perhaps someone you know needs people to rally round them today. How can you 'lower a basket' to help? Who can you gather to help?



**EVERY BIBLE
THAT MING
BRAVELY
SMUGGLES IS
SEEN BY GOD...**

**...BUT WHO ELSE
IS WATCHING HIM?**

In China, sharing the gospel online is becoming increasingly dangerous. With tightening digital restrictions and oppressive surveillance, courageous Christians like Ming* risk everything to smuggle Bibles.

"I could be arrested and imprisoned," he says. "But God called me to share the gospel by distributing Bibles."

Every £20 could give Bibles to five believers, so they can meet God in His Word.


Every £54 could train three Christians so they understand the dangers of being digitally spied on – and remain connected, resilient and fruitful.

Your gift can strengthen Christians under oppressive surveillance in China and the wider region.

You can return the enclosed envelope, phone **01993 460015** or visit **opendoorsuk.org**.

*Name changed

CHRISTIANS UNDER DIGITAL SURVEILLANCE

 **OpenDoors**