

Open *Doors*

MAGAZINE | July/August 2024



**Inside:
secrets from
Afghanistan**



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 460015.

PRAYER WEBINAR

ARISE AFRICA

5 SEPTEMBER | 7.30PM | ONLINE

Join a special prayer webinar for persecuted Christians in sub-Saharan Africa. You'll be able to hear stories of courageous faith from region, and join Open Doors supporters across the country in praying for our African church family.

Register today for you or your small group at opendoorsuk.org/webinars



THE SMUGGLER'S SUITCASE



FREE, READY-TO-USE HOLIDAY CLUB OUTLINE FOR 7-11 YEAR OLDS

- Meet brave persecuted Christians from Iran, North Korea, Central Asia, and China
- Five 2.5-hour session plans with games, activities, crafts, teaching points and much more
- Everything you need for an exciting, engaging, inspiring holiday club.

Download for free at opendoorsuk.org/children

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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Open Doors UK & I

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COVER: Khada from Afghanistan has to keep her faith secret from the Taliban (name changed, and image is from a re-enactment of Khada's story)

LETTER FROM HENRIETTA

Secret witnesses

“Whoever finds their life will lose it, and whoever loses their life for my sake will find it.” MATTHEW 10:39

I've recently re-read Matthew 10 and been struck by what a powerful chapter it is for our persecuted brothers and sisters. It's when Jesus sends out His disciples. He tells them to be 'as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves', and warns they will face arrest, violence, rejection and persecution. It's exactly what our persecuted family face today. Jesus didn't sugarcoat it: following Him can come at great cost.

In this magazine, we have the rare privilege of hearing a testimony from a secret believer still living in Afghanistan (p7). Khada's* choice to follow Jesus comes with unfathomable risk. It even meant her husband being killed. I can't imagine anything more heartbreaking. But Khada – like so many millions of others in the persecuted church – is prepared to put everything on the line for Jesus. When Jesus sent out His disciples He told them that, in the midst of persecution, they would be 'witnesses' (Matthew 10:18). Courageous believers like Khada are today's witnesses to Jesus's glory and worth. She certainly inspires me.

You and I have our part to play in helping secret Christians like Khada. In Matthew 10:42, Jesus said, "If anyone gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones who is my disciple, truly I tell you, that person will certainly not lose their reward." Your prayers and support are so much more than a cup of cold water!

You can also read about how you are helping our persecuted family in our 2023 Annual Review on p.14. Your continued prayers and gifts make such a difference – thank you!

Every blessing,



Henrietta

Henrietta Blyth
CEO, Open Doors UK&I

P.S. Please do pray for the General Election in the UK, for all new and existing MPs and that religious freedom around the world will be a priority for whoever is in power. Read about how you can pray and take action on p.6.

*Name changed for security reasons

WORLD WATCH LIST BULLETIN

NORTH KOREA

Links to Christianity punished

At least ten North Korean refugees have been sent to political prison camps after being forcibly returned to North Korea, because they read the Bible, met with Christians, or tried to reach South Korea. The ten were among over 200 North Korean refugees who were forcibly repatriated from China last year.

“Christians are considered Western and South Korean spies by the North Korean authorities,” says Simon*, an Open Doors fieldworker for ministry among North Koreans. “That’s why they are fiercely persecuted.”

Meanwhile, Kim Jong-un continues to make subtle but significant moves to reassert his authority. “The people don’t believe the lies of the government anymore. Perhaps that’s one reason why the intensity of propaganda is increased,” says Simon, adding that it makes life even harder for Christians. “More propaganda, more control and harsher punishments.”

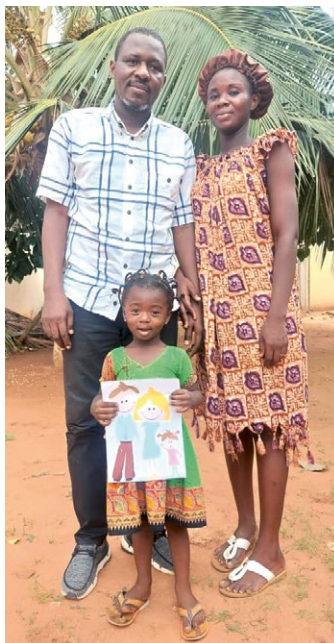
PRAY That all imprisoned believers will have profound experiences of God’s nearness with them.

TOGO

“There’s peace at home, we get to laugh”

Peace, joy and laughter have returned to Titik’s home in Togo following the provision of support by Open Doors local partners.

Titik grew up in a Muslim family, but after giving his life to Jesus in 2015, financial support for his studies ceased and, when his father died, his siblings deprived him of his share in the inheritance. They also stopped funding treatment for Titik’s



glaucoma, a disability which meant losing his job.

Thanks to your support, Open Doors local partners are providing his family with food, rental support and funding for Pascal, his wife, to start a small business. They’ve also provided medical support, bringing an improvement in Titik’s eyesight.

“The support you gave us really did us good.”

“Thanks to this support, peace has returned to our home,” says Titik. “We can take care of our daily needs, and there is joy. There’s peace at home, we get to laugh. Thanks to the medical care, I can see a little. The support you gave us really did us good and I’m very grateful for what you’ve done in my life.”

PRAY “I humbly ask you to pray for me that I may regain my health and resume my occupations, and for my wife’s activity as well,” he asks. “Pray for me that I may strengthen my faith also in Christ.”

LEFT Titik with his wife, Pascal, and daughter, Joanna

*Names changed for security reasons

NORTHERN IRELAND

Shortbread sale raises £1,600!

A young supporter from County Omagh, Northern Ireland, has raised more than £1,600 for our persecuted family through a shortbread sale.

Eight-year-old Edith Tumilty was inspired by her sister, Molly, who raised money for Open Doors in 2022 through a fundraising challenge of her own. Edith has a particular heart for Yemen. The money she raised will go towards helping Christians worldwide who are facing extreme persecution, which includes believers from Yemen.

Has Edith inspired you to tackle your own fundraising challenge? It can be as simple or unusual as you like! Head to opendoorsuk.org/fundraise to get started.



ABOVE Edith has a heart for Yemen, which is fifth on the World Watch List

IRAN

Imprisonment for believer baptised in Malaysia

An Iranian woman has been sentenced to two years’ imprisonment for involvement in Christian activities in Malaysia, including baptism, highlighting the dangers facing Iranian believers even outside the country.

Laleh Saati (45) was presented with evidence of her ‘crime’ when she returned to Iran in 2017 to be with her elderly parents and push through her asylum claim. She was arrested in February 2024, followed by a court hearing in March where she was given her sentence. After a visit to see Laleh, her mother said Laleh is struggling with her mental health and needs professional support.

PRAY For God’s comfort, strength and hope to engulf Laleh and all imprisoned believers in Iran.

BANGLADESH

Sunday school shut down by mob

A Sunday school for 15 Christian children from Muslim backgrounds has been forced to shut down in Bangladesh, after a group of Muslim women stormed the group and threatened people.

The mob – led by a member of an extreme Islamic political party – falsely accused the believers of forcefully converting people to Christianity and said that all Christian activities should stop. They confiscated some of the Sunday school material. During an arbitration meeting, a local political leader sided with the persecutors and instructed the cessation of all Sunday school activities.

Akter*, the leader of the Sunday school, is very fearful after the incident. Meanwhile, the Christian parents want to send their children to Sunday school but are deeply concerned about their safety.

PRAY For peace for those affected by this incident and a safe place for activities to resume.

MORE STORIES

- 686 kidnap victims rescued in Cameroon
- Nepalese believers strengthened to withstand persecution
- How do Open Doors safe houses for North Korean refugees work?

Head to opendoorsuk.org/news or follow us @opendoorsuk for more news and updates





Keeping religious freedom on the political agenda

Following the UK General Election, we will have many opportunities to share the importance of freedom of religion or belief (FoRB) with new and re-elected MPs alike. Your prayers and your voice can make a real difference.

In the UK and Ireland, we have the privilege

of speaking directly to decision makers. This year, you've really used that privilege to help your persecuted brothers and sisters. From sending the *See. Change.* report on gender-specific religious persecution to raising the issue of freedom to worship in India and other countries, you're amplifying the voices of the persecuted church. Thank you!

The World Watch List parliamentary launch is a particularly crucial moment each year for sharing first-hand stories and information about religious persecution with MPs, and equipping them to respond. Thanks to your invitations, 101 MPs across the political spectrum attended this year's launch. They shared how useful they found the information, statistics and testimonies.



Make sure your MP is informed

Many new MPs will shortly be elected – and most don't yet know about the work of Open Doors or the details of Christian persecution. Can you help make sure they find out?

We've put together a set of helpful factsheets about the persecuted church, the World Watch List and the importance of freedom of religion or belief for you to share. You can download them from the Open Doors Advocacy website.

Keep an eye on the Open Doors Advocacy site to find out how best to share information about the persecuted church with your MP – new or returning. You can also sign up to special advocacy emails, keeping you up to date with all the information, resources and prayer points you need. Let's not miss this amazing opportunity.



Sign up for emails or find the latest news and resources:
opendoorsuk.org/advocacy

HOW TO PRAY

Your prayers are so important at this time of change. Here's three ways you can pray for new and re-elected MPs in the next term:

- For MPs to receive and grasp information about Christian persecution around the world
- For MPs and decision makers in our country to act boldly for global religious freedom
- For the election period to be peaceful, and a time when Christians can be a witness to the love and hope of Jesus Christ.

KHADA IN AFGHANISTAN WANTS TO SHARE HER SECRET STORY WITH YOU

The last time Khada* saw her husband was an ordinary day – or as ordinary as any day can be in Afghanistan since the Taliban takeover in 2021. Afghan citizens face daily restrictions, oppression and danger, and nobody more so than people like Khada and her husband, Ehsan*: Afghanistan's underground Christians. On that 'ordinary' day, their worst fears came true. Ehsan disappeared.

Christians in Afghanistan have to make sure their faith isn't discovered by the wrong people – but the church in the

PICTURED Khada follows Jesus in Afghanistan, one of the most dangerous countries in the world to be a Christian.

*Names changed and re-enactment images used for security reasons

country is growing. They are part of a silent, worldwide group who don't know each other's names and may never see each other's faces: the secret church.

KHADA'S SECRET GIFT

Khada was born into a deeply religious Muslim family. She expected to follow the same path as her mother: marry the Muslim man chosen by her parents and raise a devout Muslim family herself.

“I took the book home and started reading it with my husband.”

Sure enough, Khada married Ehsan, as arranged by their families. She moved in with her in-laws, and the union was very happy. “Our relations at home were very good,” she remembers. “Everyone loved me, especially my husband who loved me immensely.”

It was relatively common, then, for Afghan women to have jobs – something seldom now possible under the Taliban regime. Khada enjoyed working in an office and was close with her boss. “We became friends, and



Khada's boss bravely gave her a Bible, which she read with her husband

I felt free in front of her,” Khada says. “I shared all the stories of my life, and she shared her life stories too.”

One day, Khada's boss made an extraordinarily brave decision. She gave Khada a Bible.

AMAZED BY THE BIBLE

In Afghanistan, even before the Taliban takeover, it was extremely risky to give a Muslim a Bible. It's illegal to convert from Islam and very dangerous to share your faith

– Khada's Christian boss took a huge risk in giving her the Word of God.

When Khada got home, she showed the Bible to Ehsan. They both knew the Quran thoroughly but didn't know what was in the Bible, and were curious to find out. Over the next six months, they read through it all – and were amazed at what they found.

“When I took the book home and started reading it with my husband, at



first, many questions came to our minds,” says Khada. “We solved those questions together.”

Under the law, women are second-class citizens and

Together, they made the courageous, life-changing decision to follow Jesus.

HEALING AND SHARING

Having made this choice, Khada and Ehsan decided to get baptised. They couldn't do this in a church, of course – there aren't any church buildings in Afghanistan. But it was still a very special moment. Khada even received physical healing at her baptism, having suffered from bad headaches for years. She says, “From that day on, my headache disappeared, and I am completely fine now.”

Khada and Ehsan knew they had to keep their new faith secret from the authorities. They couldn't go to a church, worship aloud or wear a cross. But they didn't want to keep their faith hidden from everyone. Some secret believers around the world can't

expected to obey their husbands or male relatives. However, Ehsan was kind and respected and trusted his wife. “He

loved me a lot, and we both always chose the same path,” remembers Khada. “When we read the book, my husband told me, ‘Whatever path you take, I am your best ally and I will follow you.’”

tell anyone at all about their choice to follow Jesus – but Khada and Ehsan decided to risk sharing the gospel with her family.

They started with Khada's brother. “He was anxious due to unemployment,” Khada says. “I asked him to learn stories from the Old Testament, and he believed. Later, I shared stories with my family and they all became believers! My husband shared stories with his sister, and she became

Secret faith in Afghanistan

An Open Doors partner in Afghanistan shares his experience of the courageous Afghan church.

WHAT IS THE CHURCH LIKE IN AFGHANISTAN?

The Afghan church is primarily composed of individuals aged 40 and younger who have converted from Islam to Christianity. It is still small in number. Despite its size, the Afghan church holds a degree of influence, driven by the transformative power of the gospel.

Simultaneously, Afghan Christians find themselves in a vulnerable position, lacking political power and often facing personal persecution. Since the regime change, many Afghan Christians have had to leave the country, and those who remain must operate cautiously and underground. They have encountered numerous challenges, including forced relocation, abduction, beatings and the tragic loss of beloved family members.

HOW ARE AFGHANS BECOMING CHRISTIANS?

Despite these hardships, believers' unwavering faith in Jesus Christ motivates them to operate covertly, spreading the good news among their fellow Afghans.

The Taliban enforce an extreme version of Islam, and they oppress the people who do not have the right to choose. The people of Afghanistan are thirsty for love because, for decades, they have experienced war and misery. So when our servant leaders explain Christianity and the love of Jesus

to them, it seems different to what they experience from the Taliban.

DO YOU FEEL OPTIMISTIC FOR THE FUTURE FOR BELIEVERS IN AFGHANISTAN?

There is a visible shift in people's beliefs, with some converting from Islam to Christianity, especially since the Taliban assumed control of Afghanistan. That's why I feel optimistic for the future of believers in Afghanistan. I remain hopeful for the future of believers in Afghanistan and believe that one day we can bring about positive changes in the country's overall culture.

HOW DO CHRISTIANS LIVE OUT THEIR FAITH IN THE COUNTRY?

Although the situation is very difficult for believers, they are trying to keep their faith alive by reading the Word every day. They don't have a building, but they do find ways to support each other by meeting together, celebrating the Lord's Supper, staying in contact, and visiting one another.

WHAT DOES OPEN DOORS DO IN AFGHANISTAN?

Open Doors supports partners both inside and outside of Afghanistan through various initiatives: Bible translation, livelihood projects, vocational training, radio broadcasts and supporting widows and orphans.

a believer. We continued spreading our faith."

This courageous couple were seeing incredible fruit, and had a period of joy. But their happiness was short-lived.

THE DAY EVERYTHING CHANGED

Khada doesn't know how or when Ehsan's secret faith was discovered. They had been cautious only to tell

people they trusted. But one day, when Ehsan was on his way to an underground Bible study group, she realised the secret must have got out.

"His phone was turned off and it didn't ring. I thought at first that maybe his phone wasn't working," says Khada. "I also called someone from my family and there was still no news from him. I felt fear and all kinds of thoughts."

As day stretched into night, Khada's fears grew. She didn't hear anything for two days. Then she received the news she'd been

"His phone was turned off and it didn't ring."

dreading. Ehsan's body had been found, bearing signs of torture. He lost his life for his faith.

"It was traumatic, and I fell into a coma," says Khada. "When I regained consciousness, I found myself at home and my husband's body was being taken for burial."

KHADA'S HOPE

Khada was absolutely devastated. She's learned the huge cost of following Jesus in a country as dangerous for Christians as Afghanistan. But she also knows that He is worth that cost. "I continue to be a servant of Christ, following His example of humility and greatness," she says. "In the difficult Taliban regime, we face challenges, but with strong faith, we persevere."

Khada's former boss, who had given her the Bible, was one of the people who comforted her – reassuring her that Ehsan was now with Christ. "I stopped crying, read Ephesians 6 and vowed to serve in the way of Christ," says Khada.



Khada's husband was killed for his faith, leaving her to raise her children alone

Ephesians 6 reminds her to 'be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power' (v10) and to 'pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds and requests' (v18). Every evening, she spends time in prayer with Jesus – the part of the day that she and Ehsan would set aside to read and discuss the Bible. "In the past, all my stories and conversations were with my husband," she says. "Now, all of them are with Jesus, and I tell Him stories every night and every day. I believe that He is listening and hears all my conversations."

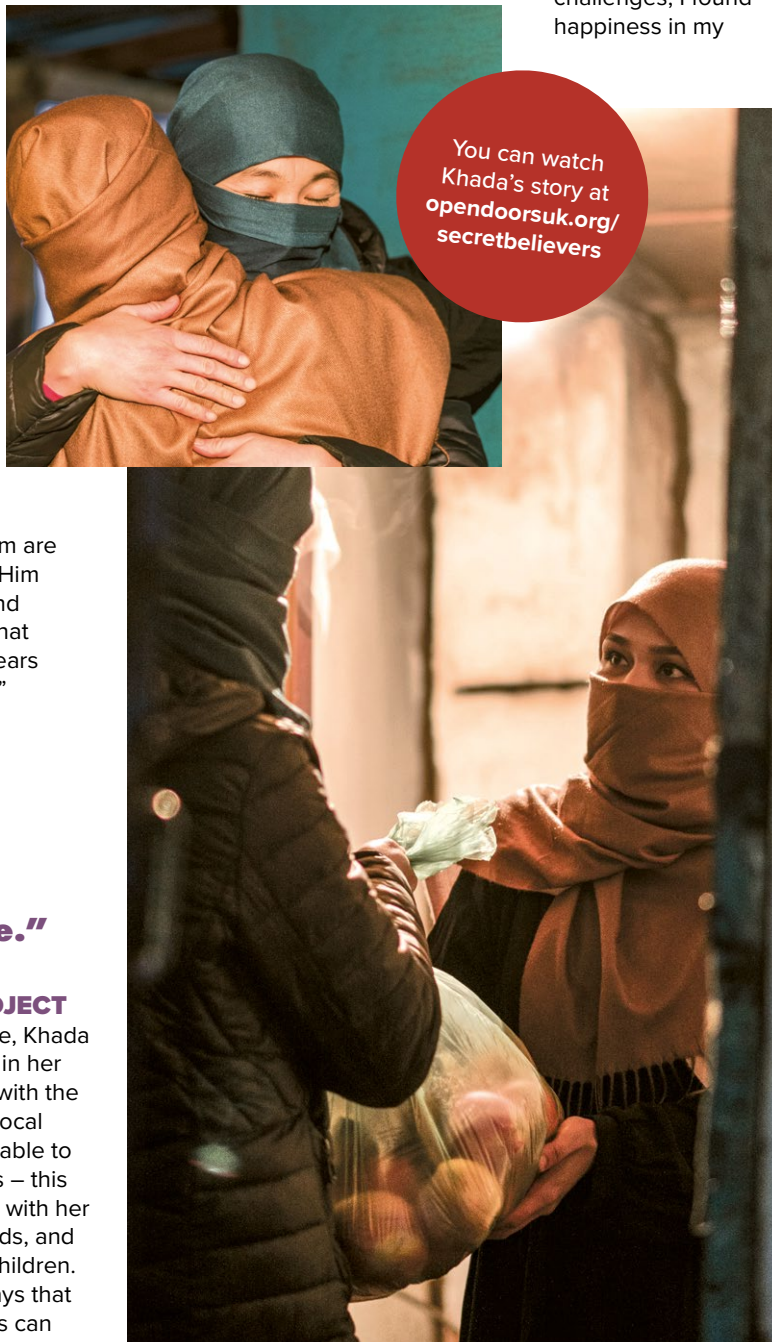
"We face challenges, but with strong faith, we persevere."

LIVELIHOOD PROJECT

Under the Taliban rule, Khada isn't allowed to work in her office anymore. But, with the help of Open Doors local partners, she's been able to start a small business – this means she can trade with her neighbours and friends, and can provide for her children. It's one of the key ways that your gifts and prayers can help bring practical hope to secret believers like Khada.

Life is hard, but Khada is not without hope. She's part of an underground community

of believers. "We support each other through our faith by reading the Bible," she says. "Despite the challenges, I found happiness in my



You can watch Khada's story at opendoorsuk.org/secretbelievers

Local Open Doors partners support and encourage Khada

new life without my husband, supported by my faithful brothers and sisters."

SECRET BELIEVERS NEED YOU

Khada's story is echoed throughout the world, in places where Christians have converted from Islam and have to keep their faith secret. Small communities of believers come together to support one another.

"Brothers and sisters who have more to share help each other," she says. "This is the strong faith that Jesus gave us, so that we can support each other and remove hardships among our brothers and sisters."

"Brothers and sisters who have more to share help each other."

Khada's hope is that, today, you will be one of those brothers and sisters who help each other. Now you know Khada's secret, will you show believers like her that they aren't alone or forgotten? Your gift and prayers can make an incredible difference to secret believers in places like Afghanistan, daring to follow Jesus, even though they know the heartbreaking cost of that decision.

PLEASE PRAY

- For Khada and all secret believers who are afraid, in mourning or alone, to know God's comforting love and provision
- That God will watch over local Open Doors partners in their coming and going, and that He will equip and direct them to serve the persecuted church
- For an end to oppression and persecution in Afghanistan and for God's church to continue growing in the country.

You can also pray, individually or in a small group, with the updated *Silence for the Silenced* resource. Download yours at opendoorsuk.org/silenced and pray alongside the Afghan church and other secret believers.



PLEASE GIVE

You can give to bring hope to secret believers who dare to follow Jesus at opendoorsuk.org.

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

Every £35 could encourage five secret believers with discipleship training, so they can be effective witnesses for Christ despite persecution and opposition.

Every £46 could help a secret believer establish their livelihood, giving them long-term financial security.

Meet the risk-takers of the persecuted church

After miraculously surviving a Boko Haram attack, Manga has a story to tell – one that you can hear first-hand at Standing Strong in October.



It was Tuesday evening in Maiduguri, Nigeria. Manga (ABOVE) was watching TV with his siblings, when loud bangs were heard at the door. Within moments, Boko Haram militants had invaded their home.

Manga, two of his brothers and his father were tied up. “If you are not going to denounce Christ, we are going to kill you today,” said the militants. The men refused to deny Jesus, but it came at an awful cost. Their father was killed, whilst Manga and his brother, Daniel, were knifed and left to die. Miraculously, they survived.

“I was so inspired and humbled, and it not only helped me to deepen my own faith, but made me aware of how I can use my prayer times to support my brothers and sisters suffering persecution.”

STANDING STRONG ATTENDEE, GLASGOW, 2024

“Paul said he suffered all this for Christ, but above all

he should count it all joy,” says Manga. “This word kept pounding in my heart: I should count it all joy. But with this hatred of what these people did, count it all joy? But again, with the second chance God gave me, that joy had to exist.”

WHAT WOULD YOU ASK?

You can meet Manga and hear more of his extraordinary story at two Standing Strong events in Lisburn (N. Ireland) and Lincoln in October. You will be able to ask him questions and pray with him.



Are Birmingham or Newcastle closer to you? Then you’re warmly invited to Standing Strong events in November, where you’ll meet John from Yemen (ABOVE). He’ll share why his faith is worth the cost of rejection and death threats. “It wasn’t easy, but I chose to put Jesus first,” he says.

BOOK AND INVITE

Head to opendoorsuk.org/standingstrong to book your ticket. Could

you invite friends, family or others from your church along? We’d love for you to join us as we gather to worship God, hear what God is up to worldwide, and discover the difference your support is making to our persecuted family. It’s an experience not to miss!

STANDING STRONG

SOUTH EAST

Saturday 21 September
Christ Church,
Tunbridge Wells

NORTHERN IRELAND

Saturday 5 October
Lagan Valley Vineyard,
Lisburn

EAST MIDLANDS

Saturday 12 October
Alive Church, Lincoln

WEST MIDLANDS

Saturday 2 November
Anchor Point Church,
Birmingham

NORTHERN ENGLAND

Saturday 9 November
City Church, Newcastle

YOUR FREE COUNTING THE COST DEVOTIONAL

New resource invites you to learn from seven courageous Christians following Jesus no matter the cost

If owning a Bible put you in danger, how would it affect the way you used it?

For Bedru* from Ethiopia, the question is not theoretical. “They saw a Bible in my hands,” he says. “As soon as they saw that Bible, harsh persecution started.” Living in a predominantly Muslim community, the family’s decision to follow Jesus was brave – and costly. Their home and coffee plantation were destroyed.

Despite this, the family’s faith is resolute. “There is nothing that can take me back from continuing this journey with Jesus,” says Bedru.

DEEPENING DISCIPLESHIP

Bedru’s story is one of seven covered in *Counting the Cost*, a new devotional for groups or individuals showing how different aspects of the Christian life can be costly for our persecuted family – and what we can learn from their

courageous faith. For Bedru, owning a Bible was the trigger for persecution; for others in *Counting the Cost*, it’s praying, sharing the gospel or gathering with other believers.

How can these inspirational stories change our approach to the areas of discipleship that we might take for granted? And what does our persecuted family’s willingness to count the cost – even to the point of death – say about the ‘surpassing worth of knowing Jesus’ (Philippians 3:8)?

The resource seeks to explore these questions, and more, through a series of seven picture cards, each of which features a separate story alongside a Bible passage for reflection, questions to ponder, suggestions for prayer and an activity related to the story – all with the aim of enlarging your vision of Jesus and deepening your walk with Him.



HOW TO USE?

The resource can be used in two ways:

- **For individual prayer and reflection:** engage with one story each day, or spread them out over several weeks
- **As a small/prayer group activity:** display around a venue as prayer stations, or spend time going through them over several sessions.

ORDER TODAY

The resource is free and, depending on how you’d like to use it, you can order as many copies as you like. Head to opendoorsuk.org/countingthecost to find out more.

*Name changed for security reasons

Your faith or your family? Elmahdi in Morocco made a courageous decision



©Unsplash | Image is illustrative

Elmahdi loved his wife. She was the woman he wanted to spend the rest of his life with. But, secretly, Elmahdi also loved Jesus. He knew that, in Morocco, following Jesus would come at a cost. But it was only when his wife found out about his faith and threatened to divorce him that he discovered just how great the cost was to be.

Open Doors partners in many regions are reporting a notable surge in conversions to Christianity, especially among young people. Many of these are the result of simple curiosity. They want to find out about Christianity, so they search the internet, connect with social media.

And they discover Jesus. But there is a cost to curiosity.

DISCOVERING THE TRUTH Elmahdi, a young man in Casablanca, Morocco, encountered Christian teaching on Facebook. Deeply moved by what he found – especially by the extraordinary life of Jesus – in 2019, he gave his life to Christ.

“Elmahdi’s wife gave him an ultimatum: revert to Islam or face divorce.”

He had to keep it hidden. He loved his wife but she, like all her family, was a strictly devout Muslim. Elmahdi didn’t want to provoke a conflict, so he kept his conversion secret

and made up excuses to allow him to attend church.

Inevitably, his wife became suspicious. When she searched his phone she discovered the evidence: chat messages with fellow church members; Christian books and songs, and, worst of all, a digital copy of the Bible. His secret was out.

At first, she, too, held back from confrontation. Maybe it was a phase. So she encouraged him to participate in things like the prayers and fasting during Ramadan, or attending Quran reading sessions at her brother’s home. But Elmahdi just made more excuses.

Finally the crunch point came. She confronted

Elmahdi with the evidence. He confessed his faith in Christ, but emphasised that he had no intention of imposing his beliefs on her or pressuring her to convert. He loved her. She was the woman he wanted to spend his life with.

It was no good. She gave him an ultimatum: revert to Islam or face divorce.

But Elmahdi could not go back.

FOLLOWING CHRIST AT ANY COST

Aided by her father, Elmahdi’s wife instituted divorce proceedings. Under Moroccan law, a husband who leaves Islam for a different religion faces almost certain legal defeat, with custody of the children typically defaulting to the mother. This was the outcome for Elmahdi. Even worse: unlike most cases, he is also prohibited from seeing his sons.

For some two years, Elmahdi has lived with this devastating loss. Understandably, he is tormented with thoughts of reverting to Islam just so he can see the children he loves. Yet he remains steadfast in his faith, comforted and consoled by his relationship with Christ.

Elmahdi has laid aside his own desires to follow Jesus. He carries a cross of loneliness and rejection. But he is prepared to pay that price for the sake of all that he has found in Jesus Christ.

PAUSE

Read Matthew 10:34-39 Jesus says that following Him will turn children against their parents and that ‘a man’s enemies will be the members of his own household’ (Matthew 10:34–36). He links this with the need for Christians to be prepared to carry their cross. Elmahdi is living out this truth: commitment to Christ transcends familial ties.

PRAY

Elmahdi continues to be supported by his church and to participate in Christian ministry in Casablanca. But he needs our prayers and support. Open Doors partners ask us to pray for him ‘to remain steadfast in his faith and that he would be reunited with his sons. Additionally, please pray for comfort and peace for Elmahdi during this challenging time.’

Elmahdi’s experience is extreme, but not unusual. Christians in North Africa face opposition and hostility in many different ways. Those known to be Christians might lose their family, like Elmahdi, or they might be denied education or lose their jobs. Open Doors partners help them with encouragement and prayers and through providing them with employment projects.

*Name changed for security reasons

PONDER

Family defined everything to Jesus’s first listeners: your status within society, who you married, what job you did. It still means everything in many cultures today. Why do you think following Jesus often disrupted those structures?

Do you know of any situations where following Christ has caused conflict in family life? Perhaps you have first-hand experience yourself. How should such conflict be approached?

You can reflect more on the cost of following Jesus in the *World Watch List Top 50* booklet.

Order your free copy at opendoorsuk.org/wwl



KHADA IS TRUSTING YOU WITH HER BIGGEST SECRET.

Khada* is a secret Christian in Afghanistan. It's a risk for her to trust you with her faith. She's doing it because, like so many secret believers, she needs your help.

Khada's husband was killed when his secret faith got out. She continues to follow Jesus – with the help of people like you. Open Doors partners are equipping her to earn an income.

"Brothers and sisters who have more to share help

each other," she says. "This is the strong faith that Jesus gave us, so that we can support each other."

Every £46 could help a secret believer establish their livelihood, giving them long-term financial security.

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

Thank you.

*Name changed and image from a re-enactment of Khada's story