

# WITNESS

*Sharing the faith of the persecuted church.*

## **SMALL GROUP SESSIONS**

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### **GENERAL INTRODUCTION**

These small group sessions have been written to accompany the book *Witness* by Eddie Lyle and Nick Page.

You can order free copies of the book for you and your small group participants at [opendoorsuk.org/witness](https://opendoorsuk.org/witness) where you can also find all the videos to accompany the sessions. It is helpful if people read the relevant chapters before the session, so please encourage everyone to order their own copy.

The first and last session are based on the introduction and conclusion of the book.

The intervening sessions can either be done as eight individual sessions, focusing on one chapter each time, or as four sessions, each focusing on two chapters. That allows groups to run the course as either six or ten sessions. (Of course, if you are covering two chapters in one session, you might want to choose just one or two of the questions for each chapter.)

For the purposes of this guide, we have presented the material as six sessions. But please, feel free to shape and adapt the plans in the way that best suits your groups and their needs.

Finally, for each chapter in the book, we have suggested 'Acts of Witness' – actions which people can do to put the themes of the book into practice. You can also find these in the book.

Thank you so much for engaging with this book – and through it, sharing the faith of the persecuted church.

\* All names marked with asterisk have been changed for security purposes

# SESSION ONE

The witness of *life*

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## INTRODUCTION

In this session we reflect on the opening chapter of the book: The Witness of Life.

### READ MATTHEW 10:16-20

- What do you think of when you hear the word 'Witness?'
- How have you heard it used in a Christian context?

### WATCH: WITNESS – BEHIND THE SCENES

If you want, you can watch this video featuring the authors, Eddie Lyle and Nick Page. They talk about why they wrote the book and touch on some of the themes of *Witness*. (find it at [opendoorsuk.org/witness](https://opendoorsuk.org/witness)).

### REFLECT

- Together, start by discussing the introductory chapter of the book.
- What were your reactions? What was the main argument of the chapter? Was there anything which stood out to you?

### READ MATTHEW 13:44-46, MATTHEW 5:1-10

## THE WITNESS OF LIFE

### WATCH: JOO MIN

Watch the video about Joo Min\*, in North Korea. (you can find it at [opendoorsuk.org/witness](https://opendoorsuk.org/witness)). Reflect on the story. Why do you think she decided to return to North Korea?



## DISCUSS

- Jesus describes the Kingdom of God as like buried treasure which costs everything to own. What are the costs of following Jesus? And what are the rewards?
- Would you describe yourself as 'blessed'? If so, why?
- In *Witness*, the authors suggest that Christians have a crisis of confidence. Do you agree? And if so, what have they lost confidence in?
- If you had to explain to people why you follow Jesus, what would you say?

## PRAY

- Pray for persecuted Christians around the world who stand before the authorities as witnesses. Pray that they will have strength and courage.
- Are there situations where you are called to stand up as a witness? How can you pray for each other in these circumstances?

## ACTS OF WITNESS

Turn to the 'Acts of Witness' for this chapter. (You'll find them on page 12 of the book.)

- Are there any suggestions which you could act on this week? Or perhaps, during the session, you felt God speaking to you about something else you could do?
- If so, share with the rest of the group members what you are going to do as an act of witness this week.

## BLESSING

- End with the blessing prayer on page 10 of *Witness*.

# SESSION TWO

The witness of *hope* | The witness of *comfort*

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## INTRODUCTION

In this session, we're going to think about hope and comfort. If you and other members of the group decided to do an act of witness from the last chapter, perhaps you could share how that went. Was it easy or hard? What did you discover?

## REFLECT

- Start by sharing reflections on the relevant chapters of *Witness* (chapters one and two). Which stories did you respond to? Did anything stand out?

## READ MATTHEW 5:3-4

- What do you think Jesus means by 'poor in spirit'?
- How do you think those who mourn will receive comfort?

## THE WITNESS OF HOPE

### WATCH: PASTOR BARNABAS

Watch the video featuring Pastor Barnabas (you can find it at [opendoorsuk.org/witness](https://opendoorsuk.org/witness)). What gives Pastor Barnabas hope?



## DISCUSS

- The opening story in *Witness* is about Eddie giving away something precious. Have you ever been in a similar situation? How might this give people hope?
- As one Indian partner of Open Doors said, “People become Christians because it gives them hope and value. It tells them they are not worthless.” What do you think this means for these people?
- “When you are told, over and over again, that you are worthless, that you are low status and without value... you come to believe it.” Can you think of people who feel this way? Perhaps you have even felt this yourself?

## PRAY

- Pray for people like Pastor Barnabas, that they will receive hope.
- Pray for people in the group, or people you know who need hope.

## THE WITNESS OF COMFORT

### WATCH: VIAN

Watch the video featuring Vian in Syria (you can find it at [opendoorsuk.org/witness](https://opendoorsuk.org/witness)). Vian says, “I can reflect the presence of God and help someone out of their sorrow.” How do you think she does this?

## DISCUSS

- In *Witness*, the authors use the metaphor of helping grieving people to ‘dance’ again. What do you think this might look like in practice?
- In your experience, what helps people in times of loss and grief? Perhaps you have experienced this yourself. What brought you comfort?

## **PRAY**

- Spend a little time sitting in silence and reflecting on what you have shared.
- Bring before the Lord anyone you know who is experiencing loss right now. Ask the Holy Spirit to be close to them.

## **ACTS OF WITNESS**

Turn to the 'Acts of Witness' for these chapters. (For 'Hope', they are on p24, for 'Comfort', they are on p36)

- Are there any suggestions which you could put into practice this week? Or perhaps, during the session, you felt God speaking to you about something else you could do?
- Talk it through with the rest of the group members. What are you going to do this week to demonstrate the hope and comfort found in Christ?

## **BLESSING**

- End with one or both of the blessing prayers for these chapters:
- For 'Hope', you will find it on p22
- For 'Comfort', you will find it on p34.

# SESSION THREE

The witness of *perseverance* | The witness of *humility*

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## INTRODUCTION

In this session, we're going to think about humility and perseverance, covered in chapters three and four of the book. If any of you decided to do an act of witness from the last chapter, start by reflecting on your experience during the week. What changes did you see?

## REFLECT

Together, share your reflections on the relevant chapters of *Witness* (chapters three and four). Which stories did you respond to? Did anything stand out?

## READ MATTHEW 5:5-6

- What do you think of when you read the word 'meek'?
- In what situations do people 'hunger for righteousness'?

## THE WITNESS OF HUMILITY

### WATCH: SALEH

Watch the video featuring Saleh\* from Yemen (you can find it at [opendoorsuk.org/witness](https://opendoorsuk.org/witness)). What do you think gives him the courage to serve others in that way?



## DISCUSS

- Jesus' life embodied sacrificial, servant leadership. Have you seen examples of this in other leaders?
- In *Witness*, we say that humility doesn't mean self-hatred (see p45). What is the difference?
- "Humility comes from identity." What do you think this means?

## PRAY

- Pray for persecuted Christians around the world, that they will show the sacrificial, servant heart of Jesus.
- Pray for each other, that we all might know who we truly are, how loved we are, and that this might strengthen us to serve others.

## THE WITNESS OF PERSEVERANCE

### WATCH: LAXMAN

Watch the video featuring Pastor Laxman\* from India (you can find it at [opendoorsuk.org/witness](https://opendoorsuk.org/witness)). He has had many setbacks. What word would you use to describe him?

## TALK

- Are you a patient person? What kind of things make you angry?
- The word translated 'righteousness' – the Greek word *dikaïosunē* – means justice and fairness, but also 'deliverance', 'victory' or even 'salvation'. In what types of situations do you think people need to see a victory for justice?
- The book talks about how the early church patiently 'carried on doing the stuff that trainee Jesuses do.' What do you think that looked like?
- How do we hunger and thirst for righteousness? What holy habits will witness Jesus to our frantic, impatient world? What things can you do to demonstrate radical patience?



## **PRAY**

- Pray that persecuted Christians will see justice. Particularly pray for all those caught up in legal battles or facing false charges.
- Think about what areas in your life require patience. Pray that God will give you the strength to persevere.

## **ACTS OF WITNESS**

- Turn to the 'Acts of Witness' for these chapters. (For 'Humility', they are on p49; for 'Perseverance', they are on p62.)
- Is there an idea which you could put into action this week? Or perhaps you feel inspired to do something else?
- Discuss with the rest of your group what you are going to do as an act of witness this week.

## **BLESSING**

- End with one or both of the blessing prayers for these chapters:
- For 'Humility', you will find it on p47
- For 'Perseverance', you will find it on p60.

# SESSION FOUR

The witness of *mercy* | The witness of *wholeheartedness*

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## INTRODUCTION

In this session, we're going to think about mercy and wholeheartedness, covered in chapters five and six of *Witness*. If any of you decided to do an act of witness from the last chapter, start by reflecting on your experience during the week. What changes did you see?

## REFLECT

- Together, start by reflecting on the relevant chapters of *Witness* (chapters five and six). Did anything stand out for you?
- Which stories did you respond to?

## READ MATTHEW 5:7-8

- Why do you think the merciful will receive mercy?
- Why would Jesus' audience need to show mercy?
- What do you think it means to be 'pure in heart'?

## READ MATTHEW 6:24 AND JAMES 4:8

- How do these verses relate to the idea of purity of heart?

## THE WITNESS OF MERCY

### WATCH: MORYOM

Watch the video featuring Moryom from Bangladesh (you can watch it at [opendoorsuk.org/witness](https://opendoorsuk.org/witness)). What really strikes you from her story?



## DISCUSS

- “If you look closer... you see that mercy is not extinct”. Can you think of examples of mercy and forgiveness which have affected you?
- It says in the book that ‘mercy is an imaginative act’ (p72). What role does the imagination play in mercy and forgiveness?
- Jesus says to Bartimaeus, “What do you want me to do for you?” (Mark 10:51). If He asked the same question to you, what would you say?

## PRAY

- Pray for the victims of persecution and injustice, that they would be able to forgive. Pray also for the persecutors, that they would come to know Christ.
- Pray for each other, that we all might have the courage to forgive and to be forgiven. Perhaps, in a moment of silence, you could think of a situation in your own life where you need to practise forgiveness and mercy.

## THE WITNESS OF WHOLEHEARTEDNESS

### WATCH: XUAN

Watch the video featuring Xuan\* from Vietnam (find it at [opendoorsuk.org/witness](https://opendoorsuk.org/witness)). How has following Jesus changed her life?

## DISCUSS

- The early church called Christianity ‘The Way’. Why do you think they chose that?
- Jesus said that no one could ‘serve two masters’ (Matthew 6:24). What other ‘masters’ do people serve? What pulls you away from the path?
- Jesus said that the ‘pure in heart’ will see God. What do you think that means?

- Archbishop Rowan Williams said that we have been given ‘the responsibility for making God credible in the world’ (p89). Do you agree? If so, how might we go about that?

## **PRAY**

- Pray for Christians like Xian. Pray that they would continue to be focused on serving Jesus.
- Pray for ourselves, that we would not be torn between two masters. Ask the Holy Spirit to help us to refocus on following Jesus.

## **ACTS OF WITNESS**

Turn to the ‘Acts of Witness’ for these chapters. (For ‘Mercy’, they are on p77; for ‘Wholeheartedness’, they are on p91.)

- Is there an act of witness there which you feel you could put into practice this week? Or maybe, during the session, you felt God speaking to you about something else you could do?
- Talk it through with the rest of the group. Work out what you are going to do this week to put what you have been thinking about into practice.

## **BLESSING**

- End with one or both of the blessing prayers for these chapters:
- For ‘Mercy’, you will find it on p75
- For ‘Wholeheartedness’, you will find it on p89.

# SESSION FIVE

The witness of *peace* | The witness of *courage*

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## INTRODUCTION

In this session, we're going to think about peace and courage, covered in chapters seven and eight of the book. If you and your group decided to do an act of witness from the last chapter, maybe spend some time reflecting on what you did and how you found it. What did you discover?

## REFLECT

- If you have read *Witness*, start by reflecting together on the relevant chapters (chapters seven and eight). Which stories did you respond to? Did anything stand out?

## READ MATTHEW 5:9-10

- What do you understand by the phrase 'children of God'? Why would peacemakers be called this?
- What kinds of persecution did Jesus' followers face?

## THE WITNESS OF PEACE

### WATCH: FASIL AND EZANA

Watch the video featuring Fasil\* and Ezana\* from Ethiopia (find it at [opendoorsuk.org/witness](https://opendoorsuk.org/witness)). "Doing good to the community that is persecuting us – that's the only way we can change the community." Why might this bring about change?



## DISCUSS

- The word used by Matthew for ‘peacemakers’ means someone who does their utmost to bring together people who have disagreements. Do you know any stories of people like that?
- “Peace, then, is not just the absence of conflict; it’s the presence of blessedness.” How do you picture peace? What might that look like?
- What can we do in our world to be peacemakers?

## PRAY

- Pray for the witness of persecuted Christians in places where they face conflict. Ask that they might be peacemakers.
- Are you in a situation of conflict or disagreement? Pray that God will show you how to be a peacemaker.

## THE WITNESS OF COURAGE

### WATCH: ZAHRA

Watch the video featuring Zahra\* from Yemen (find it at [opendoorsuk.org/witness](https://opendoorsuk.org/witness)). What gives her the courage to continue?

## DISCUSS

- “The Kingdom of God is a perfectly good and perfectly safe place to be.” What do you think about that statement? What does ‘safe’ look like?
- “Anyone who lives a Jesus-shaped life will face opposition.” Have you ever faced opposition for following Jesus? How did you resolve it?
- “The example of persecuted Christians should inspire, not condemn.” What do you find inspiring about the stories in this chapter?
- “To love is to look. And not just to look, but to speak out.” Are you aware of a situation which needs changing? How can you courageously speak out about it, in a loving and Christlike way?

## **PRAY**

- Pray for our persecuted brothers and sisters, that they may have courage to stand up for what is right.
- Do you know people who need to be brave at the moment? Perhaps you need some courage. Pray for one another.

## **ACTS OF WITNESS**

Turn to the 'Acts of Witness' for these chapters. (For 'Peace', they are on p108; for 'Courage', they are on p123.)

- Which of those suggestions could you put into action this week? Or is there something else which you feel inspired to do?
- Talk it through with the rest of your group. Put it into action and, if you are willing, come back next week and let them know how you got on.

## **BLESSING**

- End with one or both of the blessing prayers for these chapters:
- For 'Peace', you will find it on p106.
- For 'Courage', you will find it on p121.

# SESSION SIX

## The witness of *joy*

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### INTRODUCTION

This session focuses on the concluding chapter of the book: the Witness of Joy. If members of your group decided to do an act of witness from the last session, spend some time discussing what you experienced through your actions and what effect they had.

### WATCH: WITNESS – FINAL THOUGHTS

In another ‘Behind the Scenes’ video, authors Eddie Lyle and Nick Page reflect on key lessons they have taken from their encounters with the persecuted church (find it at [opendoorsuk.org/witness](https://opendoorsuk.org/witness)).

### REFLECT

- If you have read *Witness*, start by reflecting together on the relevant chapter (the conclusion, page 124). Which stories did you respond to? Did anything stand out?

### READ MATTHEW 5:1-10

- Read the whole of the Beatitudes together again. Why do you think that Jesus uses the word ‘blessed’?
- Has anything changed in the way you view these verses since you began discussing it and following the book?

## THE WITNESS OF JOY

### WATCH: SORÉ

Watch the video featuring Pastor Soré from Burkina Faso (find it at [opendoorsuk.org/witness](https://opendoorsuk.org/witness)). What times have you felt Jesus with you most closely?





## DISCUSS

- “We need to honour the witness of the persecuted church.” (p128)  
How can we do that?
- How would you define ‘joy’? Can you think of times when you were joyful?
- The book talks about being inspired by the example of the persecuted church, not weighed down by it. At the end of this series, what stories have inspired you the most?
- Think of the topics we have looked at in this series: hope, comfort, patience, mercy, peace, courage, wholeheartedness. Which of these resonates with you the most? Which do you need God to help you with?

## PRAY

- Millions of Christians are displaced or living as refugees. Pray that they, like Pastor Soré, would know the real presence of Jesus.
- Ask God to help you receive His joy.

## ACTS OF WITNESS

Turn to the ‘Acts of Witness’ for this chapter, which you will find on p132.

- Do you feel inspired to put any of those suggestions into action? Or has God been speaking to you about something else that you should do?
- Look at the challenge on p133. How will you witness to the needs of the persecuted church? Is there anything you could do either individually or as a group?

## BLESSING

- End with the blessing prayer on p130 of *Witness*.

## THANK YOU

Thank you for spending time thinking and praying about this book, and about the witness of the persecuted church. We hope that it has helped you understand a bit more about the faith of our persecuted brothers and sisters – and also that it has helped to strengthen and encourage your own walk with God.

Don't forget that you can find more resources for groups and churches, as well as information for prayer and inspiring stories, at [opendoorsuk.org](https://opendoorsuk.org)

\*Names changed for security reasons