TEN STEPS WITH THE PERSECUTED CHURCH

Open Doors YOUTH
Each of the 10 sessions includes an inspiring step someone has made with Jesus. We’ll read their stories and be challenged by the Bible. We’ll pray and reflect. We’ll understand and act. We’ll be inspired to take similar steps and walk more closely with God.

Alongside this faith building, inspiring stuff, we’re also hoping you’ll commit. The persecuted church has much to teach us about following Jesus, but their needs are also great. They need our support. So we’re hoping you’ll commit to pray, raise money and speak out about the persecuted church around the world. Helping those in need has always been part of following Jesus – in fact he even calls the naked, the lost, the sick and the imprisoned His ‘brothers and sisters’ (Matthew 25:34-40).

This isn’t something we can just ignore. This is about family.

This is also about you and God. This is about taking the next challenging steps in your journey with Him. As you read through the pages of this booklet, let God speak to you. As He calls you forward, we dare you to say yes and see what happens!

Watch: Before you get started, check out a video from our mate Caleb, about his sister Sarah. Find it on our YouTube channel under the name ‘It’s Time: My Sister, Sarah’. Watch it to see why it matters that you get involved.
So, the first step. It’s a simple one, but you’ll need to keep making it. You need to choose.

Every day we face a ton of choices. There’s the mundane; should I get up on time? What breakfast cereal should I go with? Then there’s the moral; should I look at that website? Should I post that comment? Should I walk away from that conversation?

If you’re a Christian, then you’ve made one simple choice to follow Jesus. But every day we have to decide to keep going at it. Some days that choice might cost you something. Choosing Jesus could mean you end up putting yourself at odds with what everyone else thinks and does.

Behnam knows all about the cost of choosing Jesus. He is the pastor of a church in Karaj, Iran. Well, actually, he was. In 2006 he was arrested simply for leading the church. The Iranian authorities considered him a threat to national security. What was so threatening? He was preaching the message of Jesus. And their response is simple. They are trying to lock up men like Behnam who believe in Jesus.

His health isn’t great. He’s been interrogated, beaten and put in solitary confinement. New charges were brought against him in September last year. One of them carries the death penalty. Despite all this, Behnam is staying strong, choosing to commit daily to Jesus.

“Many of my cellmates in prison ask me why I am paying such a huge price for my belief in Jesus. They ask me why I don’t just deny my belief and go back to my wife and children? I then ask myself: what cost did the Lord pay to save me, and to transfer me from the kingdom of darkness to the kingdom of light? The death of Jesus Christ on the cross, the blood of the Lamb of God! Yes, this is a huge price. Therefore I am also able to prefer prison to being set free. I have decided to keep my faith in our Lord and stay in prison. Jesus said: if you love your life more than me then you do not deserve me.”

Behnam shows us that each day we need to step out with God afresh. Each day we must choose Jesus – we must decide. Benham could give in, deny his faith and potentially be set free. But he knows only Jesus can offer true freedom. Pastor Behnam challenges us to make that daily choice to walk with Jesus, to step out and continue on the journey with God no matter what our mates think or what that choice will cost us.

“I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.”

Galatians 2:20

1. Where would you end up if you chose to follow wherever God would lead you? Would it look different to a normal day?
2. Pastor Behnam chose Jesus in the face of prison guards and interrogations. Where can we choose to show our commitment to Jesus today? What relationships or situations do we need to act differently in to show we’re stepping out and choosing to commit to God?
3. Think about the things in your life you love the most. Do you put these above Jesus? Bring them to God and ask Him to help you put Him first.

Prayer:

Father,

You are good. Thank you for my freedom. Thank you that you love me. Help me be like Pastor Behnam, to choose you today and every day. Prompt me, speak to me and guide me. Show me things I can do that will reveal your love to people I meet.

I pray for Pastor Behnam and all those in prison for their beliefs. Be with them, give them strength, hope and encouragement. Be with their families and friends. Use them to show many others your grace and mercy. Holy Spirit, help them keep choosing you, despite their current imprisonment. Build faith, and bring freedom.

Amen.

Brother Andrew chose to say ‘Yes’ to God’s promptings and look where it’s taken him! What about you?

Watch: Challenge what you choose to value by watching Susan’s story:

www.opendoorsyouth.org/article/worthy

Brother Andrew: Where choosing God can take you

In Scotland 1955, after seeing an advert for a communist youth festival in Warsaw, Brother Andrew decided to act.

He packed a suitcase of Christian booklets and set off for the festival. It was on this trip that he first met Christians persecuted for their faith. He asked God what he could do to help. He opened his Bible and read this passage from Revelation: “Awake, and strengthen what remains and is on the point of death” (Revelation 3:2). That was it. From then on he spent his time supporting and strengthening the persecuted church, first in the communist countries of Europe, then in China, North Korea, the Middle East, North Africa, Central Asia… the list goes on.

Step one: Choose

10 Steps with the Persecuted Church
We’re all looking for acceptance. We all want to know people think we’re alright, that what we do matters and who we are is valued by someone. We try and find that meaning and acceptance in all sorts of places. Some of us want to be popular. Some of us try to be funny. We want people to like us. It’s a pretty basic human need. Some of us put music, sport or a particular scene above all else as the place we find a bit of meaning, acceptance and purpose.

But is it enough? Do these things really help us feel like we’re truly loved – not for the ways we behave and act, but just for who we are, deep, deep down in our very being?

Family is an important one. For Arezki from Algeria, it was everything. In his rural community, family and tradition were central to daily life. But Arezki was unsettled. Something wasn’t quite making sense. Then a friend told him about Jesus and he became a Christian there and then. Being from a pretty conservative Muslim area, the reaction wasn’t great. He began speaking to his friends and neighbours about Jesus, which caused problems for his family.

One day he came home to find all his Christian books and CDs had been burnt. Arezki’s family were desperate for him to come back to Islam, but he couldn’t. He knew where he’d found true meaning, purpose and love. His Dad asked him to leave the family home. Arezki responded, “I told him I was in Christ, the God of greatness in whom I had found healing, life and peace.”

Arezki found something in Jesus he couldn’t find in another religion, in friendship, in work or even in his family. But have we? We’re surrounded with things that promise meaning and acceptance. But do they really deliver? Arezki realised that when he met Jesus, that was enough. He didn’t need to look elsewhere. It’s something we could do with learning.

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**Bible:**
“For He chose us in Him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in His sight. In love He predestined us for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ, in accordance with His pleasure and will.”
_Ephesians 1:4-6_

**Think and act:**
1. What or where do you look for acceptance and meaning? The number of likes on your Instagram feed? The grades you get? The friends you have? The clothes you wear? None of these things are bad, but if we put them before finding love and acceptance in Jesus, we’ll always feel like something is missing.

2. Note down some of the things you’ve thought about and pray about them. As you pray, read through the Bible verse and take in the words. God has chosen you, He’s adopted you, and He was happy to do it. Let that sink in and let God become the one who gives you true meaning, love and acceptance.

**Prayer:**
Father
Thank you that you’ve chosen me. Thank you that you know me and love me with an amazing, unending, never leaving, always there, love.

I’m sorry for the times I look to find my meaning, purpose and acceptance in something other than you. Help me be like Arezki, and understand your love so I can find my security and future in you.

Be with Arezki today. Bless him and his family. Keep him, and the many who choose you in the toughest circumstances, safe. Give them strength, courage and meet their needs. Today, use Arezki to help other people come to know true meaning and acceptance in you.

_Amen_
How often do you think you’re not ready, not good enough or not clever enough to be used by God? It can be a big obstacle to doing anything for Jesus. Often we look to those who are leaders and see them as holy, untouchable people – and that’s why God uses them. But they aren’t. Like you, they are broken, messed up and struggling. But, and this is the big ‘but’, they get that, despite their issues and insecurities, God can still use them, if they are willing.

Daniel lives in Iraq. He’s 24. He’s training to be a church leader. He’s not finished his studies. In the world’s eyes, he’s not ready. He hasn’t finished his modules, he hasn’t got his certificates, and he’s got hardly any experience.

But one August day, the church he was helping out in was suddenly flooded with 700 families, all of whom were fleeing the Islamic State. They’d heard rumours of atrocities. Some had witnessed murders. All had been forced to leave home, taking only a few possessions with them.

These families now live in the grounds of Daniel’s church. With little experience and unfinished training, he might have thought, ‘What can I offer? I can’t do anything to help these people.’ But instead, Daniel let God use him. He now looks after all the children in the camp, many of whom are deeply traumatised. He spends his days ensuring that these children get to be children, not just refugees. He’s set up a classroom, a cinema and activity clubs. He ensures all who need it receive special counselling to help them through this tough time.

In all of this Daniel says “Right now our differences don’t matter too much… we are united in Christ.” He realises God can and will use anyone, no matter what our differences, as long as we are willing. Daniel isn’t perfect. There must be days when he wrestles with God. But he’s said he’s willing. He’s realised he needs to step out, and is trusting God to fill in the blanks.

Bible:
“...But a Samaritan, as he journeyed, came to where he was, and when he saw him, he had compassion. He went to him and bound up his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he set him on his own animal and brought him to an inn and took care of him.”
Luke 10:33-34

1. Are you waiting for something to happen or something to change before you step out with God? What are those things? It could be finishing education, sorting a bad habit, or waiting for the right opportunity. Ask God about them, and see what he says.

2. Check out the Bible passage. The Samaritan wasn’t expecting to help an Israelite – a traditional enemy. But God shows him someone in need, and he acts. All the others that pass by the injured man are religious leaders. They would have been trained to show mercy and love. But they didn’t. The passage teaches us, whether we think we are ready or not, God can still use us in unexpected ways. We just need to be available. Ask Him to ready your heart to serve Him no matter what.

Prayer:
Father,
I know I’m not perfect. Sorry for when I don’t follow your lead, when I mess up and get things wrong. Even though I’m not perfect, I ask that you would use me. Like Daniel, make my heart ready to serve, and as I step out for you, please be there to guide my way.

I pray for Daniel and all the families living in and around his church. I ask you to give them strength, faith and courage to keep going. Please meet their needs and let them know you are with them. I ask that they would be able to go back to their homes safely and show your love to their very broken country.

Amen.

Watch:
See Daniel in action on some Iraq video diaries made between August and December 2014: www.opendoorsyouth.org/fatherdaniel
So, the last story was all about how God can use you even though you don’t think you’re ready. You just need to be willing. None of us are perfect, but, the reality is, as we journey on with God, He will help us to change – He’ll help us be more like Jesus.

Be brutal. What are the things you don’t like about yourself? What are the things you think God doesn’t like about you? It’s easy to think we’re not pretty enough, cool enough or generally good enough. We might have a bunch of habits that we know we need to deal with. Our mates might easily lead us along. But give all that to God. He’s big enough to hear it, and big enough to help you get through it. Don’t believe us? Well, get inspired by Pablo.

Pablo’s story is pretty insane. He’s from Colombia. When he was a teenager he smuggled drugs for rebel soldiers. He would drive about in a big truck dropping off cocaine to various dealers and pass out anti-government leaflets. One day enemies of the gang he was working for caught him. To save his life he told them everything he knew. He escaped, but was on the run.

He didn’t have anywhere to go, and this is where God stepped in. Pablo met some Christians; they told him about Jesus and he realised God had spared his life for a reason. After meeting an Open Doors volunteer, Pablo decided to go back to smuggling, but this time he’d be taking Bibles, rather than drugs, into dangerous parts of Colombia.

It’s not an easy job. The rebel soldiers he used to work for are violently committed to their beliefs, and the gospels that Pablo delivers offer a very different way of thinking. There is a price on his head. He’s had to go into hiding a few times – they see him as a target and the Bibles that he delivers as lethal weapons. But he keeps going, keeps serving and keeps growing to be more like Jesus.

If God can change a drug smuggling teenager from Colombia and miraculously use him, don’t be surprised to hear that God can definitely change you and use you too.

**Bible:**

*“I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh.”*  
**Ezekiel 36:26**

**Think and act:**

1. What would you love to see God change in your life? Look up the passage from Ezekiel and read it through a few times. Ask God to give you a new heart. Ask Him to meet you where you are and give you the courage to live differently.
2. Pablo knows what we sometimes forget. Changing isn’t just about knowing you’re a good or bad person. It’s about knowing that we are totally accepted and loved by God. It’s only when we know how much God loves us that we can truly change and be more like Jesus. And when we grasp that, God can transform us, just like He has transformed Pablo.

**Prayer:**

*Father*

Thank you that you love me no matter what I do or how I am feeling. Help me understand that love, to properly grasp it. Please Holy Spirit, help me to not look for value in all the stuff I own or the way people see me – or even the positions I hold or places I go. Like Pablo, help me find my value in you.

I pray for Pablo and other Christian leaders in Colombia who risk everything to share your love with others. I ask that each Bible Pablo delivers would find its way into the right hands, and that the stories of Jesus would reveal your love and transform many lives.

*Amen*
Does God have a plan for you? Of course He does. But more often than not it’s something we can get really wound up about. What am I going to do with my life? I’m a rubbish Christian - is God really going to use me? Does He even care?

Life can throw us some pretty rubbish times. Stuff can happen to us – or be done to us – that we have no handle on. It can make us give up on God’s plan. But, we need to trust. God does have a purpose for each of us, no matter who we are or where we find ourselves.

Rebecca is a doctor and the leader of a small church from Indonesia. She also started a Sunday school and after-school club for a bunch of street children in her village. As the project grew, Islamic fundamentalists became furious that Christians were gaining a presence in the area. Rebecca was arrested for speaking about Jesus. She was sent to a notorious prison for five years.

The prison was a scary place. The other women were jihadists, terrorists or murderers. Prison officers would only go into the block wearing full riot gear. The walls of the cells were covered in excrement because the other inmates had become so dysfunctional.

In the first 24 hours there, Rebecca heard the voice of God speak to her. She called the prison guards and asked for buckets of water and disinfectant. She washed out and cleaned all the cells. Then she started to cook for these women, giving away her rations to serve them.

The atmosphere in the prison changed. By the third week a prison guard came to Rebecca, knowing she was a doctor, and asked for her help. He had severe stomach cramps, so she wrote down the medicine he needed to get to make him better. By the end of the following month, around 40 prison officials were coming to Rebecca for professional medical advice.

At the end of the third month the prison supervisor invited her into his office. He said:

“I had heard that you were subversive, so I was going to break you. But you have been a blessing to the entire prison population. How would it be if your church came to prison on a Sunday? They will be safe here, we will take care of you. You can say whatever you want to your church when you are here.”

Isn’t that ridiculous? The place intended to silence Rebecca became a place where she could host a church and speak openly about Jesus – wow!

Rebecca was released two and a half years early. The week after she was set free from prison, she went back to disciple the 47 people who had become Christians during her time in jail.

We don’t know God’s plans for us, we don’t know where He will lead, but He asks us to step out and trust Him, no matter what we face or where we are. Even in the darkest situations, God can use us in amazing ways. He does have a plan.

Bible:

“Trust in the Lord with all your heart, don’t lean on your own understanding, in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will direct your paths.”

Proverbs 3:5-6

Think and act:

1. Read the passage from Proverbs. This is one of Rebecca’s favourite verses. Memorise it, dwell on it, repeat it over and over in your head. Write it on your hand and let it sink into you today.
2. Rebecca called the experience she had in prison her ‘university of trust’. Have you gone through – or are you going through – a time when you feel God is stretching and challenging you? If so, how can you respond like Rebecca did?
3. Even in the bleakest situations, God can still use us to bring His light and life to the world. Commit to trust God no matter what you face and ask the Holy Spirit to help you step out and act when God speaks, just like Rebecca.

Prayer:

Father,

Thank you for Rebecca and many like her who trust you no matter what they face. Be with them, bring them comfort, love, compassion, energy and belief to keep going. Holy Spirit, help me trust deeply in my heart, knowing that no matter what I face, you will be there.

Thank you for the freedom I have, but help me use it for good. Give me boldness to step out and act when I know you have spoken. Inspire my heart, my words and my actions to bring glory to you, and help me never limit what you can do because of my ‘own understanding’.

Amen.

The image is for illustrative purposes only
**Step six: Be prepared to risk it all**

**Ajay, India**

What’s the riskiest thing you’ve ever done? A bunjee jump? Skydive? A stupid challenge from your mates? Eating raw chillies? We don’t tend to put our lives on the line all too often – security and safety are natural human instincts that most of us are quite happy to uphold.

But some of the most incredible and inspiring people in the world risk everything, not for fame or reputation, but simply because they love Jesus. They get that we need to be like the early disciples, and be ready to drop everything when Jesus asks.

This is pretty much what Ajay did. He’s from India, and though his family were Hindu, he became a Christian after one of his cousins told him about Jesus. He was just 13 at the time.

One day Ajay’s Dad saw him reading the Bible. He didn’t know he was a Christian. He became really angry and beat Ajay severely. He was the oldest son of the family and local tradition would expect that Ajay would sacrifice to the Hindu Gods.

Ajay’s Dad tried to get him to convert back to Hinduism. When he was 16, he arranged for Ajay to marry a Hindu girl. But the plan backfired. After living with Ajay for a few months, Ajay’s wife also chose to follow Jesus.

This just made things worse between Ajay and his father. The family started to distance themselves from Ajay and his wife – they wouldn’t even eat with them. His four younger brothers got involved and threatened to kill him unless he came back to Hinduism. On the day they came to fulfil their threats, Ajay and his wife were not at home. Instead, they threw all of Ajay’s things outside the house. Ajay and his wife had to leave - they were now homeless.

Life was hard. They found a small room to live in, but when Ajay’s wife went to the village well to collect water, people refused her access because they knew she was a Christian.

Ajay is now 21. For the eight years he has been a Christian, he has never gone a day without some form of persecution. But he’s never stopped following Jesus. Despite all the rejection, despite the intimidation and despite the hatred, Ajay says “God is blessing me in countless ways!”

Ajay stepped out. He’s risked it all, family, security, home, and the rest, for Jesus. And what’s more, he still faces all that and continues to step out and choose Jesus.

**Bible:**

“If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.”

Matthew 16:24-25

**Prayer:**

Father,

Thank you that you know me, you know my life and you are for me. Help me to take up my cross today. Help me take risks for you, and as I step out, please be with me, guiding me and encouraging me.

Look after Ajay and his wife today. Holy Spirit, bring them comfort, strength and courage. Bring them favour, and let their words and actions reveal your love and life to those people they meet. Thank you for Ajay’s example. Inspire me to be more like him in how I live out my love for you.

Amen.

Names have been changed and images are for illustrative purposes only.

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Think and act:

1. Check out the Bible passage. Jesus is pretty clear - there is a cost to truly following him. That doesn’t mean we need to do something to earn God’s love – but if we claim to love Him back, then, like any relationship, we have to give up a bit of ourselves to show Him that we’re serious. Spend a while thinking what it means for you to take up your cross today. For us, risking it all might not mean leaving our family, but it might mean stepping out and telling other people about our faith, being kind to someone we’ve fallen out with or speaking out when no one else will.

2. Having lost the security of family, home and social acceptance, Ajay still says that God is blessing him. How do you respond to God when things don’t go the way you hoped or planned? Do you still see life as a blessing? When the darkness closes in do you still choose to give God praise?

Watch: Check out the video called ‘Fatima’s story’ to get inspired to risk it all for your faith. Find it on our YouTube channel: youtube.com/opendoorsyouth
Jesus often did the impossible. Throughout the gospels we see him healing, performing miracles and generally doing some crazy stuff that shows God is breaking through. The central part of Christianity, the fact that Jesus rose from the dead, is impossible. But God did it.

Today, Jesus is still healing; he’s still doing the impossible. He’s changing lives, breaking through and bringing life, love and hope.

Damaris is a great example of God intervening. She’s from Nigeria. Back in March 2010, her husband was killed in anti-Christian riots. He was trying to help a blind man get home safely when he was attacked. Damaris felt hopeless. She had four children, no source of income and a growing bitterness towards her husband’s killers. With no money, she faced an impossible future. She couldn’t provide for her family alone.

Gradually, with the help of Open Doors, she managed to get her life back together. She started a small business selling firewood and charcoal. She’s come through it and is now even speaking up for other victims of violent persecution. God stepped in. She has an income, a fresh faith and new hope. But the real miracle is that Damaris has learnt to forgive. Villages and towns in Northern Nigeria have suffered devastating attacks from Boko Haram extremists. Churches have been burnt, many Christians have been killed. But she stands as a miracle of forgiveness.

“If I do not forgive, the Lord Jesus will never forgive me. So I have forgiven and God will help me to love everybody. It is not easy, but it is God that will give us grace and love.”

We often think the impossible needs to be some crazy physical healing. And it can be. But for Damaris, God has done something many, many of us would really believe to be impossible. She’s forgiven the people who killed the man she loved. God has healed her in ways that can bring life to others – she’s an example of how to respond to terrible hate.

God might not always do what we want or expect. But He is in the business of making the impossible possible. He’s in the business of using normal, broken people to help heal a broken, hurting world.

Bible:
“You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbour and hate your enemy.’ But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your Father in heaven.”
Matthew 5:43-45a

Think and act:
1. God calls us to forgive. Who in your life has done you wrong or harm? Do you have mates or family members that have treated you badly? Ask God to help you heal, move on and forgive. You might find you can’t straight away, so keep praying and thinking, asking the Holy Spirit to work in you.
2. God can, has and still does do the impossible. Are there things you’re desperate to see God do, but can’t see them happening? It could be a friend coming to know Jesus, or someone who you’d love to see healed from an illness. Ask God to bring His hope and life to those situations… ask Him to do the impossible.

Prayer:
Father,
Thank you that you are a God of the impossible. Thank you that no matter how dark a situation appears or has become you can bring goodness, life and change. Help me to not hold grudges, but to forgive and to show love and care even to the people who might not like me. I ask for your love and grace to help me, just like you helped Damaris. Be with her and the many others like her who have lost husbands, wives, mums, dads, children and friends because of their faith in you. Keep them strong, free from bitterness and despair. Wrap them in your love and care today.
Amen.

Brother Andrew: Believing the impossible
Brother Andrew has seen a lot of changes in the world in his life. The Berlin Wall has fallen. China has opened up to the gospel. Now, he’s ready to dream that the impossible will happen again:

“I believe that North Korea will open its doors… I have faith in the fact that in countries where the church is now being heavily persecuted, the church will emerge strongest and put us to shame.”

His belief is based on the resurrection: “The one who believes in the cross and the resurrection takes the side of those who are persecuted. Whoever identifies with the persecuted stands in the power of the resurrection… The Lamb conquers, and we conquer too, in Him.”
You can’t follow Jesus on your own. You need others. It's a simple truth: Jesus never wanted our journey as a Christian to be something that we do by ourselves. From day one God has been about community – in fact, that is who He is. God is three in one: Father, Son, Holy Spirit. He exists in a community of love, so it’s no wonder He calls His followers into community – into church.

The simple fact is that we can't do it alone. We need other people to pull us along, to keep us going, to help us, shape us and refine us. That’s what church is about. In our culture, where we’re obsessed with money and success, we love the idea of the ‘self-made man’ or woman. We love people who’ve built and achieved stuff single-handedly. Sometimes it means we don’t ask for help when we need it – we’re scared it might make us look weak or like a bit of a failure if we do.

But it’s different with church, and with God. The point is that you can't do it by yourself. We’re all different, and none of us can say to any one else ‘I don’t need you’ (1 Corinthians 12:21). The truth is we all need each other.

Marina knows this pretty well. She’s just ten, the only girl in a poor Christian family, living in rural Egypt. Despite the revolution and wave of hope that spread through the country in 2011, her homeland is extremely unstable. She lives in a remote area and faces all sorts of discrimination. Even though she’s young, Marina knows that people single her out for following Jesus.

In school, the Muslim teachers know she’s a Christian and make her sit her at the back of the class. They often ignore her. It doesn’t help that she’s a girl either – where she lives, girls always come second to boys. Abuse is not uncommon. Most girls marry young.

It would be really hard for Marina to reach her potential all by herself. Like all of us, she needs help, which is why local Christians provide her and other poor students with vital extra classes. They help Marina develop her reading and writing. Now she says:

“Teachers in my public school used to ignore me, and they never asked me to answer questions. But now all my teachers consider me the best student!”

Marina needed help to read and write. She needed people to come alongside her, build her confidence and encourage her. That’s how she changed. The same is true for us. Some of us might have secret habits or issues we desperately need help with, but often we’re too scared to tell anyone as we worry what they might think. Today, think about some of your struggles and questions and begin to ask God for someone in your life who will help you overcome them.

1. Community isn’t just about being helped – it’s also about helping. Think about the local Christians in the story who saw a need, acted and made a difference. How can you be someone who does the same and helps others reach their potential? Ask God to show you ways to be kind, caring and involved in the lives of others.

We all need help – none of us can do it all by ourselves. Christians who face persecution know this well. They depend on each other to get through. They depend on our prayers and actions to see change. They know God calls them to community: with Him, with each other and with us. Let’s learn to do the same.

2 Corinthians 12:21-25

“The eye cannot say to the hand, ‘I don’t need you!’ And the head cannot say to the feet, ‘I don’t need you!’ On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable ... God has put the body together... so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other.”

Prayer:

Father,
Thank you that I’m not alone in all this. Thank you for my church family, locally and around the world. Thank you for people who challenge, inspire and empower me. Help me find more people like that and help me continue to grow to be more and more like you.

I pray for people like Marina who face all kinds of hate, pressure and abuse because they choose to follow you. Let them know your love – a love so big that it deals with all the hurt and accusations that they face. As I walk with you, help me be like those who set up extra lessons for Marina. Help me be someone who doesn’t just see a need; but responds, acts and works in your power to see change.

Amen.
one of us can get through life without experiencing disappointment. This isn’t about being sad because you didn’t get the birthday present you really wanted, but more about those moments in life when it feels like God, and everyone else, is against you.

Of course, it’s never quite like that. God never gives up on us, even if we give up on Him. One of the most powerful things we can do in the midst of the storm is to hang on to hope. That’s exactly what Chun has done. Being from North Korea, life hasn’t been easy. She was a high ranking officer in the North Korean army, but she was also married to a man who beat her. To get out of the relationship she tried to escape across the border to China. But she was captured.

As she held such a high position in the army, her punishment was severe. Beatings, torture… by the end of it she could barely stand up. But in the midst of a dirty, overcrowded prison cell, she was looked after by another prisoner – a woman who had become a Christian in China, and who was living out her faith as loudly as possible:

“When I was in so much pain, she invited me to lay my head in her lap. She stroked my hair… She continued to pray for me. It was my first encounter with the love of Christ, given to me through someone else”.

Her life from that point on was all about staying hopeful despite devastating despair. She tried to escape North Korea again, this time with her young daughter. But human traffickers captured them. Chun and her daughter were separated and she hasn’t seen her since.

Chun was then sold for the equivalent of £500, but somehow managed to escape again, this time for good. She was helped by some Christians and now lives in South Korea, still hopeful that her daughter is ok:

“I am convinced that one day I will meet my daughter again. In this lifetime or the next. She is 11 years old now. Despite all my suffering I love God with my whole heart. I am so grateful for Him.”

We need to learn to hang on to hope, believing, like Chun, that God is bigger, better, kinder and more loving than we could ever know. Our hope isn’t in vain. Jesus was raised from the dead, and one day, God will make all things new - including you, Chun and her daughter.

Bible:

“And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out His love into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, whom He has given us.”

Romans 5: 2-5

Step nine: Don’t lose hope

THINK AND ACT:

1. Chun’s story is incredible, but we have no idea what happened to the lady she met in prison. This believer was brave enough to show kindness and offer hope despite facing punishment herself. That act introduced Chun to Jesus’ love for the first time. We’ve all got friends who we’d love to see know Jesus, but we might have lost hope for them. This lady shows that no matter where you or your mates are at, God can still work – we just have to be bold enough to act and let God do the rest.

2. Imprisoned. Tortured. Captured. Sold. These are all words that are part of Chun’s story. But she hasn’t let those things control and define her. Instead she knows God’s love and is sticking to the truth of His promises. We can’t let our history define who we are - like Chun, we need to let God’s love and truth be the basis of who we are. Think about that, and chat to God about the bits in your story that get in the way of God’s love defining all that you are.

PRAYER:

Father

Thank you that because of Jesus we have a reason to hope. Thank you that despite whatever I may face you are there for me. Help me to show and tell of your love to others. Prove me wrong when I think that there is no hope for my friends and family to change.

Thank you so much for your faithfulness to Chun. Thank you for her courage and her example. I pray for many like her in North Korea. Keep them strong and help me persevere with hope, just like they do.

Amen

Watch Hea Woo’s story to find out more about life as a Christian in North Korea. Find it at youtube.com/opendoorsyouth

Names have been changed and images are for illustrative purposes only
When trouble comes, often our first response is to think about giving up. Few of us look forward to trials and tough times. In fact, at the first sign of problems, most of us would probably ask God to get us out of the situations we face. Not Huu and Nguyet. They are a married couple from Vietnam, and they know what it means to keep going, rather than look for an easy escape.

Huu became a Christian back in 1970. Within three years he was pastoring a church and overseeing three others. By 1975, when the war with the US ended, the new communist government assumed all Christians, and especially leaders, were American spies. So Huu was sent to a labour camp. He was freed for a while, but was again arrested and imprisoned in 1988. Nguyet, Huu’s wife, remembers this harsh time: “The men in the church couldn’t go out to evangelise... the police always followed them. The ones who spread the gospel then were women. We would pretend we were going farming. We would dress up in farmers’ clothes, walk from place to place, and share the gospel.”

With a husband in prison, and a similar fate for her if she was caught, Nguyet didn’t give up. She didn’t look for an escape. Instead she embraced the opportunities God gave her, and amazing things started to happen:

“At a time when we were most persecuted, many came to the Lord. Immediately after my husband was imprisoned, 10-20 villagers approached me and said they wanted to accept Jesus. I asked them if they were afraid, and they said ‘No’, they just wanted to believe in God.”

Years later they are still going, and through it all God has used them in incredible ways. They have a room at the back of their home where their church meets. This room is also used for a secret church-leader training programme. Over 300 churches have been opened by those who have been on the course. Huu and Nguyet alone are responsible for around 22 house churches with over 1000 members. That is amazing.

Huu and Nguyet stuck with God no matter what they faced. They kept going. They didn’t try to escape from the dire situations they found themselves in, but trusted God, and through it all, He revealed His love to thousands of others. Nguyet says, “It’s through persecution that we grow... it’s a blessing to be part of Christ’s suffering.” Like them, the challenge for us is to keep going through tough times, seeing and looking for ways that God can keep using us to show His love to the world.

Bible: “Be strong and courageous. Do not fear or be in dread of them, for it is the LORD your God who goes with you. He will not leave you or forsake you.”
Deuteronomy 31:6

Think and act:
1. Think about the situations where you’ve learnt most about God – times you’ve grown, changed or just taken things up a notch. Often, as Huu and Nguyet have discovered, these moments will come not when life is easy, but when times are hard. Ask God to help you recognise His hand and direction when you’re in both good and bad moments.
2. Nguyet knew the risks when she went out to tell others about Jesus. We do too. Shame, people making fun of us, mates thinking we’re no longer cool... these things can be a massive barrier to sharing God’s love. Think about the things that stop you speaking out about Jesus and ask God to give you courage to help you keep going, no matter what others may think.

Prayer:
Father,
Thank you for the commitment and inspiring example of Huu and Nguyet – help me be like them. I pray you’d use me to see many come to know you and grow in their faith. Help me to not always think of escaping, but to be available to let you use me.
Help me step out with you in new ways. Thank you for all who keep going in their faith despite the harshest of situations. I pray I’d remember all those I’ve read about in this guide, and that my relationship with you would grow. Help me to hear your voice and say ‘Yes’ when you ask.
Amen.

Watch Nurta’s story, and be inspired to keep going as you step out with Jesus. Find it on our youtube channel, with the title, ‘Be Bolder’.

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ood job. You’ve taken 10 steps and been inspired by walking with your persecuted family. But let’s be honest, 10 steps is probably only going to get you from your kitchen to your front door. So now, it’s up to you to continue the journey.

We need to keep taking steps with God. Like Brother Andrew we need to keep saying ‘Yes’ to Him, growing and changing with each decision. Think about the people we’ve been looking at and think how they have challenged you. How are you going to respond? In what ways can you be more like them? If it helps, write down your thoughts, challenges and prayers. Most importantly, decide to keep being inspired and changed, and ask God to help you!

TAKE THE NEXT STEP AND WALK WITH THEM - SAY YES.

Yes, I will commit to pray, speak out and give or raise money to support my persecuted family

Want to help now?
There are loads of ways you can step out and commit to walk with your persecuted family. As you’ve read, they face massive challenges, and as part of our family it’s only natural that we should want to respond and help them.

So please do. Journey with us, and walk beside persecuted Christians. Commit to pray, give (or raise money) and speak out about the persecution facing millions of Christians today. If you take this next step, we promise to help you on your journey. Use the form below and we’ll send you more resources to help you as you go. You’ll become part of a growing network of young people and students who are committed to doing what they can to serve their persecuted family. Tick the box below and use the other side to commit to give, raise money, pray and speak out!

MY NEXT STEP

I will give
I would like to give
☐ As a regular, monthly gift
☐ As a one off donation

We’ll send you a form in the post to help you complete your donation

I will raise money
☐ Tell me about ways I can raise money to help support my persecuted family.

We’ll send you a few emails a year with specific fundraising activities you can get involved with.

I will pray and speak out
☐ Send me monthly emails to help me speak out and pray for my persecuted family
☐ Send me the quarterly magazine, ‘The Cost’, to help me speak out and pray

I’d like ☐ copies of this ‘10 Steps’ prayer and action resource to share
I’d like ☐ copies of the ‘World Watch Poster’ to use and share

Over 21? Want some resources created for adults to help you take the next step?
We’ll send you our ‘Step of Yes: Daily Discipleship Guide’.

Title
Surname
Address
Date of Birth
Email*

*Please enter these details if you’re happy to be contacted in this way.

Please tear off this form, pop it in an envelope and return it to Open Doors UK & Ireland, Freepost OF582, PO Box 6, Witney, OX29 6WG. No stamp needed! We won’t pass on your details or send you mail if you decide you don’t want any more info.
What now?

WHAT CAN I DO NOW?

Share the love!

Just finished reading through the sessions? Well, fill out the tear-off form and commit to take the next step with your persecuted family. Want to do more? Great. Do this stuff now:

Share the love
Tell your mates, friends at church and family what you’ve learnt.

Hashtag it up: Tell people what you’ve discovered as you’ve stepped out with the persecuted church. Get on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram and use the Brother Andrew inspired tag #stepofyes

Go to your group: Share these stories and this booklet with your mates in your home group, CU or youth group. Use some of the videos and audio files we refer to throughout the booklet to help inspire others and check www.opendoorsyouth.org for youth leader sessions and resources.

We’re 60!
We know, we don’t look it, but Open Doors started 60 years ago when Brother Andrew first set off for Poland with a suitcase full of Christian booklets. Check out www.opendoorsyouth.org for fresh new resources and ways you can keep stepping out to walk with your persecuted family.

Open Doors UK
PO Box 6, Witney, Oxon,
OX29 6WG
T 01993 777300
E youth@opendoorsuk.org