“PERSECUTION IS AN ENEMY THE CHURCH HAS MET MANY TIMES. INDIFFERENCE COULD PROVE TO BE A FAR MORE DANGEROUS FOE.

BROTHER ANDREW, FOUNDER OF OPEN DOORS

Cover images: Bachu from Ethiopia. Her dad was killed by neighbours who were angered that the Christian family wouldn’t take part in local rituals. Since the murder, Open Doors has been supporting Bachu and her family by providing food, trauma care and school fees, as well as helping her mother to start a small business to bring in a regular income.

INTRO
Persecution against Christians around the world is increasing. The scale and severity of the issue is staggering. Research suggests that Christians in over a third of the world’s countries are now facing high levels of persecution (or worse). That’s over 245 million people. This session is about those people and the reality they will face because of their choice to follow Jesus. It’s an important lesson, and one that will stick with, inspire and challenge your group. But this isn’t just about learning information. As Brother Andrew says above, persecution is an enemy of the church, but not indifference. COULD PROVE TO BE A FAR MORE DANGEROUS FOE.

HOW TO USE THIS SESSION
In this session outline there are a bunch of ideas, videos, games, scenarios, stories, activities, prayers and teaching chunks to use. If you use the plan as is, it’ll take up around 75-90 minutes, but feel free to adapt and use the elements that you know will work best with your group. We’ve pitched the material at slightly younger teenagers (12s-16s), but you know your group better than us, so feel free to adapt and change content to suit your needs. We also have some talk notes and a PowerPoint presentation on the theme of Guts and Courage that might be more suitable to walk through with older groups. Get it at opendoorsyouth.org/speakers.

PREPARATION
Read through the session a good few days before you will use it and make a plan - you’ll see there’s some prep needed to get things right for some of the activities.

WHAT YOU’LL NEED
A space to gather in, and a secondary meeting place / Bibles / Pens / Paper / Jelly babies / Print outs of a worship song / Something to play videos and show images on / A world map (use our World Watch List Map) or globe / All the downloads from opendoorsyouth.org/wwl (including videos, pics and handouts).

RAIDED
10-15 MINUTES
Does your group meet in a regular place? Maybe you have a spot at church, or a particular room. If so, before the group arrives, spend time ‘raiding’ the room. Turn over chairs and sofas. Scatter materials. Take away Bibles and any obvious Christian materials. Cover over crosses. Leave an obvious mess. You could even leave handwritten notes scrawled on paper around the room - use statements or threats like: ‘Christians Leave’ or ‘Followers of the Cross go home’. Then use police tape (you can get some online pretty cheaply if you want the real effect) and tape off the door to the room or space. Download our police posters (get them at opendoorsyouth.org/wwl) and put them up on the doors and walls of the room or venue.

As the group arrives, let them walk around the room surveying the damage to ‘their space’. Let them all arrive before calling them together. Point out the posters and the threats that have been left.

Tell them that tonight you can’t meet in the same space. The room might have been bugged or the police might be watching them.

Quickly take the group to another room or venue that you’ve already prepared. If possible, make it a relatively small, dark space - somewhere not too obvious. It needs to be in obvious contrast to where you usually meet.

ASK THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS:
• How did it feel to have their space raided?
• Do they like the space they are currently in?
• Is it comfortable?
• Do they feel safe?

Briefly explain the reason behind the raid (later we’ll take this further). Explain that, although the police in the UK don’t harass and threaten Christians, in other countries, meeting to worship Jesus can be extremely dangerous. Across Central Asia, churches are regularly raided by the police, leaving destruction and mess, much like the scenario they’ve just experienced. In other places, churches can come under attack from extremist groups.

DISCUSS
Ask the group what they think of the images, and the stories they represent.

VIDEO: SUJIT / INDIA 8 MINUTES
Watch the story Sujit tells of his church being destroyed and attacked. It should help build on the previous discussion. (Download the video in a zip file with other resources at opendoorsyouth.org/wwl)

ASK THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS:
• What do you remember from the video - what stuck out to you?
• What do you think of Sujit?
• Why do you think people hate him so much?

GAME / THEY WILL NEVER WIN! 10 MINUTES
Get three volunteers - two girls and one boy. Ask them to all stand up in a line facing the rest of the group. Tell them to look up to the ceiling. Place a jelly baby on each person’s head. Now give them 30 seconds to move the jelly baby from their forehead down to their mouth without using their hands. As they mangle up their faces to move the jelly baby, everyone else is allowed to laugh. If the jelly baby falls off, they have to start all over again. As the leader, it is usually your job to be impartial. Explain you’ll be the referee and will be keeping an eye on the game. Your decision and actions are final. This is where you now have to be mean - you are going to make the two girls lose. As the game unfolds, poke, push, distract or even flick off the jelly baby from the two girls faces. Do whatever you can to put them off and make them give up. Get the rest of the group to cheer on the boy until he wins. Repeat
the game a couple of times with the same person, each time picking on the two girls.

At the end of the game, praise the boy for winning and then ask everyone to sit down. Ask if they thought the game was fair and if the boy deserved to win? Ask them why not? Hopefully your impartiality will be exposed.

**EXPLAIN:**

Apologise to the two girls. Ask them how they felt when they realised they weren’t going to win. Tell them you picked on them to make a point. Say that the game was (a very limited) example of persecution. That’s when people pick on a specific group to stop that group from succeeding or simply living their lives. That can look like violence, torture, intimidation, discrimination arrest or worse. Explain that millions of Christians around the world face persecution today because of their beliefs.

**ASK THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS:**

- Has anyone ever experienced any hassle because of their faith?
- Have they heard of persecution in the news?
- Are there any reasons that you can draw out or explain to the group:

**STAND UP. SIT DOWN.**

There are some shocking new facts that have come out in the Open Doors 2019 World Watch List (a ranking of the 50 places where Christians face the worst persecution).

Show people a globe or hold up a world map (our World Watch List Map would be good). Get ten people to stand up in a line. Now, count along the line to number nine, asking people to sit down as you pass them. You’ll have just one person left standing - give them the globe/map. Then ask the first two to sit down. Hand the map/globe to the last person standing. Ask them to find Asia. Can they name and point out any Asian countries? Explain that in Asia, one in three Christians experience ‘high’ levels of persecution because of their love of Jesus.

Finally ask everyone in the room to stand.

Now ask all the boys to sit down. Explain that 245 million Christians around the world face high levels of persecution for their beliefs, but that Christian women can pay that price twice. New research exposes the fact that women and girls face twice as many persecution pressures as men, exploiting the specific vulnerabilities of women. Ask the group what they think those vulnerabilities might be. How are women and girls worse off?

**VIDEO: THE TOP FIVE**

Watch the video to get an introduction and overview of what persecution is and where it is affecting Christians around the world. Download the video in a zip file with other resources at opendoorsyouth.org/wwl

**QUICK QUIZ**

Now play a quick game. Split the group into two teams. The teams have to listen to the questions below about the video they have just seen and write down their answers. The team can get all five. Further bonus point for the right order.

**1. Name three of the five countries on the World Watch List. Bonus points if either team can get all five. Further bonus point for the right order.**

**Answers:** North Korea, Afghanistan, Somalia, Libya, Pakistan

**2. In this country people are hearing about Jesus through radio programmes and dreams**

**Answers:** Afghanistan

**3. In which country are the leaders worshipped like gods?**

**Answers:** North Korea

**4. Where can simply being suspected of being a Christian lead to instant execution?**

**Answers:** Somalia

**5. In this country, Christian migrants have been killed or sold into slavery**

**Answers:** Libya

**6. Where are up to 700 Christian women and girls abducted every year?**

**Answers:** Pakistan

Add up the points and declare one team the winner. Give them the rest of the jelly babies!

**TEACH: WHY ARE CHRISTIANS PERSECUTED?**

**5 MINUTES**

Ask the group why they think Sujit from the first video was targeted? What are the reasons that Christians in other parts of the world face threats, violence, discrimination and abuse?

Ask the group to shout out answers and write them down on a board or big piece of paper. The answers and reasons can be complex, so here are some valid reasons that you can draw out or explain to the group:

- **ONE LEADERS WANT TO BE TREATED LIKE A GOD.** Anyone who says Jesus is Lord is thought of as a traitor and should be punished (true of North Korea).

- **TWO. SOMETHING RELIGION AND RACE ARE THE SAME THING** (Why Sujit and his church faced threats and violence). That means, in places like India, you have to be a Hindu to be Indian. In Pakistan, you have to be Muslim to be Pakistani. Some think that anyone who converts to Christianity isn’t just changing their religion, but rejecting their country and race – and that can make some people very angry.

- **THREE AND FOUR** (some extremist groups on the news - Islamic State or Boko Haram to name two). They believe that they will be rewarded for violence.

- **SOME SEE CHRISTIANS AS EASY TARGETS.** In many countries, Christians are from poor backgrounds and form a minority. It doesn’t help that Christianity can be seen as a Western religion, and many countries have a difficult relationship with the West, so Christians can be easy to blame for a nation’s issues.

- **SOME DON’T WANT TO SEE OTHERS FREE.** Jesus brings freedom. The truth sets people free. That happens in all sorts of ways - spiritually and practically. If a whole group of poor Christians become educated, have new employment options and know their rights, that can directly challenge the status quo and those in power may not like that change at all.

**EXPLAIN: CHRISTIANS AREN’T ON THE LOSING SIDE**

Despite all this we need to remember one key thing. Though Jesus’ enemies killed him, He rose again. They don’t have the victory. Jesus does. Hatred and violence cannot win. And Christians around the world know this. So whilst our church family may be victimised, they are also victorious. They are standing, courageously, against the darkness.

**WHY DOES THIS MATTER?**

**7 MINUTES**

**GAMES:**

Pick a volunteer. Sit them down at a table in front of some paper and pens. Tie their hands behind their back. Ask them to write their name. Could they manage it?

Now pick another volunteer. Send them to the opposite side of the room. Challenge them to get across the room without using their feet or knees. How do they get on?
YOUTH LEADER SESSION OUTLINE

WORLD WATCH LIST 2019:

Paul says that the church is like a body, full of many different parts, with many different roles. That applies to your local church as much as it does to the global church. As with our human bodies, when we hurt our hands or feet we feel the pain throughout the entire body. So when the church around the world is struggling, we should feel and share that pain, too.

What Paul is getting at is that, as Christians – as people who’ve chosen to follow Jesus and have God’s Holy Spirit dwelling in us – we are intimately connected. We’re a family, bound together by God’s love. It should hurt us when Christians around the world face persecution, and we should do all we can to use our freedom to speak up and act on their behalf.

ASK THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS:
• Do you feel part of a church, a body?
• Are we guilty of ignoring what we deem as the ‘lesser’ parts of the body?

LEAH’S STORY

4 MINUTES

Show the picture of Leah on an iPad, screen or laptop. Now ask a girl in the group to read the following story.

Leah is from Nigeria and she’s an absolute hero – her courage is immense. When she was just 15, in February 2018, her life changed for ever. She was just finishing her school day and about to eat dinner with her classmates when men dressed like soldiers arrived in trucks with guns. They raided the school and, along with 110 other girls, Leah was taken. It turns out the men were from an Islamic extremist group called Boko Haram.

After a month, 104 girls were released. Of the six girls left, five died whilst in captivity. That left just Leah. But her release was denied because she refused to convert to Islam.

She gave up her freedom to stick with her faith in Jesus. In a message given to her mother, Leah wrote:

“I know it is not easy missing me, but I want to assure you that I am fine where I am… I am confident that one day I shall see your face again. If not here, then there at the bosom of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

Leah’s faith is incredible. Faced with kidnap, captivity, abuse and violence, she stands defiant. She won’t give up on Jesus.

As a young Christian girl, Leah is doubly vulnerable. As a Christian she’s targeted because of her faith. As a girl, she’s vulnerable to exploitation because of her gender.

PRAY THIS PRAYER OUT LOUD

Father God, be with Leah right now. Let her know that she is not alone. Give her strength, peace and comfort. Help her know that people around the world are praying for her. I pray she and others in captivity would be released. Help me be known for my love of You. Holy Spirit, fill me with love and compassion. Amen.

SILENT WORSHIP:

4 MINUTES

Take some time to reflect as a group and bring what you’ve been learning about before God. Try a short time of worship, but do it in a completely different way (with no guitarist needed).

In many places, when secret Christians meet in houses, they worship in silence for fear of their neighbours hearing them. So they ‘sing’ without actually making a sound.

Explain that fact as you pass round the lyrics to a song your group will know. Now spend 3-4 minutes singing the song silently. People can whisper, but if things get too loud start shushing the group to keep things quiet.

ASK THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS:
• How did it feel trying to keep quiet when singing to God?

RESPONSE: WHAT ABOUT YOU?
10 MINUTES

Get someone to read the following passage from Philippians:

“I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.”

Philippians 3:8

Get someone else to read this quote from Brother Andrew, the founder of Open Doors:

“We ought to become people of guts and courage, with strong convictions – to not count our lives dear unto ourselves.”

EXPLAIN:

We’ve read, seen and heard about people who are living out their faith with immense guts and courage. They consider everything a loss compared with knowing Jesus. They are everyday heroes. They face armies, militants and extremists. They live in the midst of hatred, anger and violence. They are targeted, arrested, punished and beaten. But they still choose to follow Jesus and stick with Him through it all. These are normal, everyday Christians. Special, yes, but, thanks to the Holy Spirit and God’s grace, we have the potential to be like them.

ASK THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS:
• Which of the stories or facts you’ve heard today has stuck with you most? Why?
• How would you get on if sticking with Jesus meant putting yourself in danger?
• How can we live for Jesus with more guts and courage?
• Are there things, relationships or attitudes we have that we put before Jesus?

REFLECTION TIME:

In silence, get the group to wait on God and let Him show them areas of their lives that they put before Him and ways that they can live more boldly for Him. Pray that they would continue to hear God’s voice. Ask that they would grow in His incredible, life-changing, hope-giving love and that they would be people who come to view everything as loss compared with knowing Jesus.

Hand out the ‘Guts and Courage’ cut-out cards (download these at opendoorsyouth.org/wwl). Give everyone a pen. As a response to what they’ve heard about their church family around the world, ask them to write how they will use their freedom to live out their faith with guts and courage. They don’t have to share what they write… but if they are keen, they can tweet a pic of the photo to @opendoorsyouth or put it up on Instagram and tag @opendoorsyouthuk. Get them to keep the cards as a reminder of their commitment.

PRAYER

4 MINUTES

End with a time of prayer for the persecuted church and for each other.

In closing, ask someone to pray this:

Father God, the world seems so dark, but we know You are true and pure light. Strengthen the church. Bring hope and change. I pray that secret, persecuted Christians around the world would know Your immense and amazing love today. Help them keep going, and help me use my freedom to live my faith out loud. Amen.

TAKE AWAY

Give out the 2019 ‘Guts and Courage’ guides as a way for the group to learn and engage more with the issues they’ve been thinking about. Order these for free at opendoorsyouth.org/guts
TAKE YOUR GROUP FURTHER

1. GUTS AND COURAGE TALK AND NOTES
Want to do another session, maybe for older teenagers? Use our Guts and Courage talk notes and PowerPoint slides to help tell more stories from persecuted Christians. Get these at opendoorsyouth.org/speakers

2. RAISE MONEY.
Help raise money to support all kinds of projects from Bible delivery and discipleship training to literacy programmes, trauma counselling and small business loans. Head to opendoorsyouth.org for ways to get your group involved, including our annual 48-hour sponsored digital silence, Blackout (opendoorsyouth.org/blackout).

UP FOR A CHALLENGE?
HIDDEN WORD CHALLENGE
Get our awesome, quality resource, Hidden Word, and get your group inspired by persecuted Christians to learn chunks of God’s Word by heart.

Hidden Word is perfect both for individual devotional times or to work through as a group. Over six weeks, you’ll learn passages from the Bible that have meaning to persecuted Christians. Plus, each week, you’ll face a challenge to prove that you have truly learnt those passages. Included in the pack are some quality memory aids (notepad, highlighter pen, tattoos, stickers and wristbands), a devotional guide and a special edition of the New Testament and Psalms. But that isn’t all. The pack comes in a weather-proof buriable bag - perfect for use with some of the special group challenges we outline!

The packs cost £14 each (including postage and packing across the UK) which includes the cost of sending a Bible to a persecuted Christian, too. There are also discounts for anyone wanting to buy five or more copies to use in groups.

Find out more and order your pack at: opendoorsyouth.org/hiddenword