World Watch List 2020

YOUTH SESSION OUTLINE

Fresh ideas to introduce your group to the brave faith of persecuted Christians

DIGITAL VERSION!
Introduction
PERSECUTION SESSION PLAN

What is this?
THIS IS AN ADAPTABLE SESSION PLAN THAT YOU CAN USE WITH YOUTH AND SMALL GROUPS.

The session includes:
• Videos
• Bible material
• Games
• Activities
• Prayer ideas
• and more!

Feel free to use what you think will work for your group and adapt other parts, or leave them out altogether (e.g. some of the games might not resonate with older teenagers) – make the session work for you!

Why use this session?

Aim: For young people to understand that there is a cost to following Jesus.

You should use this resource with your small groups and young people because:
• Hearing stories from Christians who live in places where faith costs can inspire and challenge us in our faith.
• Young people might not know the situation faced by millions of Christians around the world, and they might not know they are connected to an incredible global church family.

We hope this resources will help grow:
• The heart of young people for their church family around the world who are boldly following Jesus despite the cost;
• The depth of young people’s faith - simply from hearing stories where God is doing incredible work;
• The courage of your young people to live for Jesus no matter what they face.

What you’ll need
• Bibles
• A screen to show films on
• Custard/Yogurt
• Blindfolds
• Films and downloads from opendoorsyouth.org/wwl
• A 2020 Open Doors Youth World Watch List map (either order one or download one from opendoorsyouth.org/guts)
• Items depending on which prayer activity you choose

The World Watch what?

This session is based on the Open Doors World Watch List. The World Watch List is an annual ranking of the 50 countries where Christians face the worst persecution. It’s a helpful tool to show where the global church is suffering and why. As part of this session, your group will find out about some of these places and what life is like for Christians there. We’ve included a full 2020 World Watch List map on the reverse of this outline – it’s pretty big, so stick it up in your youth spaces and use it as a reminder and means of praying for your persecuted family around the world. Have a look at the prayer activities for ways you can use the map as part of this session and throughout the rest of the year too.

Boy on the cover image: Madeng Sunday, a teenager from northern Nigeria (an area affected by the Islamic militant group, Boko Haram), with his Bible, which he learnt to read thanks to an Open Doors supported project.

Image: Worshippers gather at at mosque in Iran
What is persecution?

Game: UNFAIR DODGEBALL
10 minutes

Split the group into two teams. Have them play a quick round of dodgeball. Use multiple (soft) balls, and when anyone is hit, they are out of the round. The team that is the first to have all players out, loses. Now replay the round but introduce an unfair rule. Play multiple rounds and keep adding increasingly unfair rules that stack the chances of winning to one particular team. The rules could be:

- One team has to play with only one hand
- One team has to play whilst hopping
- One team must be blindfolded (that should make it pretty hard)

Get the group together. Give the winners some sweets and lots of praise for how they won and played an impressive game of dodgeball.

Ask the group the following questions:

- Was the game fair?
- Did the losing team have any chance of winning?
- How did the losing team feel, knowing they had little chance of succeeding because of the unfair refereeing decisions?
- What made the games unfair?
- Would they still want to play if every game was almost impossible to win?
- Would VAR have changed anything (ha!)?

Explain: Being a Christian in many parts of the world is a dangerous choice. One in eight Christians globally face persecution for their faith in Jesus. They are treated unfairly, sometimes violently. They can be arrested, intimidated by police and excluded by their community and family. There are unfair rules and laws that mean they can’t meet together or worship freely. In some places, simply owning a Bible can mean big trouble. It’s unfair, unjust and not right.

Video: MOHAN*, INDIA
12 minutes

Watch the video. Ask the following questions:

- What was the one thing that has stuck with you from the video?
- Why?

Explain these key points:

India is a largely Hindu country. The government has tied being Indian to being Hindu. That means Hindus like Mohan who leave Hinduism are rejecting not just a religion, but part of their national identity – and that makes some Indian Hindus very angry.

One extremist group linked to a leading political party has said it wants India free of Christians and Muslims by next year (repeat that if you have to – it’s a shocking claim).

After Mohan’s house was attacked, the police didn’t defend him – they just told him to leave and not come back. Mohan and his family weren’t able to access their land, they had no income, and no way to grow food.

They were completely rejected, isolated and alone. This isn’t fair. It’s not right. Like in our game of dodgeball, rules and decisions are being made that mean Christians in India will always lose.

But Mohan said, “Jesus didn’t call me to a life of comfort… but he does promise to walk with me…”

As a result of Mohan’s brave faith, three other families have come to know Jesus. Amazing.

Ask: Split the group into pairs or small groups. Ask the following questions (maybe put them up on display). Tell them they will feedback to the rest of the group in just a few minutes.

- How does Mohan’s story make you feel?
- Despite persecution, three other families chose to follow Jesus like Mohan. Why do you think they made that choice, knowing it would come at a cost?
- Does following Jesus cost you anything?

Pick someone to read James 1:2-4 and then ask these questions:

- How do you respond when tough times come your way?
- What if you thought about troubles as a way of developing your character?
- Why do you think perseverance is an important part of faith?

Now go through the questions again, asking each group/pair to feed back and say what they thought.

Summarise their comments and explain that Mohan thought all the trials he has faced were worth it just so he could walk with Jesus. He was healed, he’d encountered Jesus and his life changed forever. And that example led three other families to become Christians too. Mohan knew Jesus was worth losing everything for. Do we feel the same?
Why does it matter?

**Illustration:**

THE WRONG BODY PARTS
12 minutes

This is a simple, particularly stupid illustration, but one that should generate a bit of laughter and light relief after the seriousness of Mohan’s story and experience.

**Say:** Why does it matter? Mohan’s experience is bad and unjust, but why should I care? Well, Paul, one of the main authors of the New Testament, says that the church is like a body. It’s made up of many parts, and all those parts must work together for the body to function properly.

**Ask for two volunteers.** Ask them to take off their shoes and socks. Give them a pen and some paper and ask them to try and write their name using their toes instead of hands. If you have time, you could get them to try and draw a self-portrait. Get them to hold up their finished pieces – see if you can decipher the names they’ve written or recognise the portrait they have drawn!

**Now ask for two more volunteers.** Tell them they have to race across the room, but they can’t use their feet or knees. See if anyone can crawl or walk across the room on their hands, elbows, bum, back, shoulders or head!

**Ask someone to read 1 Cor 12:12-26.** Of course, most of us can’t write or draw as well with our toes as with our hands. And it’s much easier for most of us to walk across a room using our feet, rather than our hands. The body has many parts and each part has a unique purpose. 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. And as with our human bodies, when we hurt our hands or feet we feel the pain throughout the entire body. 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.

**Blind Custard challenge:**

**(OPTIONAL)**

**Ask for two pairs of volunteers.** Blindfold one of each pair and tie the hands of the other person in each pair behind their back. The blindfolded person has hands, but not sight. The person with their hands behind their back has sight, but no hands.

You know the deal here – get the blindfolded person to stand behind their partner, being their hands. They must feed their partner a yogurt, or some custard, without being able to see. Their partner, who can see, must try and direct them to get the food safely into their mouth with as little mess as possible (there will be mess, so aprons might be a good idea). The winning pair are the ones who have eaten most of the yogurt/custard after one minute.

**Explain.** It’s not just that we’re a family. It’s more than that. If you hurt your hand you might not be able to write, or even feed yourself (like in our messy game). If you sprained your ankle, you wouldn’t be able to walk. Your whole body would be affected. You couldn’t do some important and basic stuff... The same is true of the global church; if the church in one country is facing pressure and persecution – if one part is being weakened – it impacts the whole global church. We need to realise that they are part of us as much as we are part of them – we’re one global body, working to see Jesus glorified, and in places where Christians are under threat and attack, that can sometimes be harder to see happen.

**Have someone re-read 1 Cor 12:26.**
Where and why is this happening?

Video:
2020 OPEN DOORS WORLD WATCH LIST – THE TOP FIVE
10 minutes

Explain: This video looks at the five countries where Christians face the most intense persecution. Tell the group to listen carefully as you’ll ask some questions about the video once it is finished.

TOP FIVE VIDEO QUIZ
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.

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 give answers. You can do this as a series of quick-fire question-and-answer rounds or in a pub-quiz style with written responses that get checked at the end.

1. Name three of the five countries mentioned on the video. 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 TV and radio programmes and the web.
   **Answer:** Libya

3. In which country are 50-70,000 Christians in prison camps?
   **Answer:** North Korea

4. Where do militant groups want to get rid of all Christians?
   **Answer:** Somalia

5. In this country, when Christians die they are buried as Muslims so that their families don’t get into trouble.
   **Answer:** Afghanistan

6. In this country Christians must work in the lowliest, dirtiest jobs?
   **Answer:** Pakistan

Add up the points and declare one team the winner. Give them a little prize too!
It’s about real people...

**Video**

**MEET KIM SANG-HWA**

15 minutes

Watch the video about Kim Sang-Hwa. Once it’s finished, ask the following questions – ask specific people to give their answers.

1. Why is the Bible so dangerous in North Korea?
2. What’s your view of the Bible? Do we treasure it like secret North Korean believers?
3. Despite the danger, Kim Sang-Hwa’s family still kept reading and discussing the Bible. They would read a passage out loud and discuss how it applied to their lives. Let’s try that.


- What does it mean to deny ourselves?
- What does it mean to take up our cross?
- What does it mean to lose your life?
- What does it mean to gain the whole world, but lose yourself?

**Say this quick prayer:**

Father, help us put You first, no matter the cost. Help us know You with the same intimacy and commitment as Kim Sang-Hwa’s family. Help us be people of brave faith, that will follow You through good and bad. Amen.

**What about me?**

**ALGERIA**

10 minutes

**Explain:** The Algerian government has been closing churches and investigating the activities of congregations over the year. The closures have specifically targeted a group of protestant churches – eight were closed in 2019 alone.

**Watch the video:** This quick movie was recorded by a young person who was a member of the church. The police barging in is pretty shocking, right? One of them said, “You can film this and tell America all you want, but we won’t stop closing your churches”.

**Explain:** Young people from the church sent this series of text messages to our contacts in the region (use the slides to talk through the WhatsApp messages).

15/10/2019 at 18:58

‘They are closing our church right now. The authorities told us they would close the church tomorrow but they came today at 6pm while we were praying and worshipping. They say that we can film this and tell America all we want, but that they won’t stop closing our churches.’

17/10/2019 at 13:16

‘I was arrested while I was with my Dad. We were walking towards the local authorities to protest against the church closures but the police came and put me in jail. They took down my name, they took my phone and searched through it.’

18/10/2019 13:00

‘Tomorrow we decided with our youth leaders that we as a youth group will fast and pray. We don’t have a church service to go to but we will fast and pray together.’

**Think:** Challenge the group to put themselves in the shoes of these young Algerian Christians. Split them into small groups. Ask them the following questions, giving them a few minutes to think about their answers:

- What would you do if you were in the same situation as these young Algerian Christians?
- How would you feel if the police came and closed your church?
- Would you protest? What could the consequences be?
- Where would you meet?

**Explain:** Christians who are persecuted for their faith aren’t that different to you and me. We might think of them as heroes, but none have chosen persecution. Instead, they’ve chosen Jesus, and many stick with Him despite the cost. They don’t have super powers, they still feel sad, scared and have doubts. But those who keep going know, like Mohan and these young Algerian Christians, that Jesus is with them, and that is enough.

**Challenge:** Have the group sit quietly and ask them to think of different ways they could be inspired by the stories they’ve heard to be braver in their walk with Jesus. For some, that might mean committing to follow Him for the first time; for others, that might be sharing their faith with friends and family; for others it might be about their plans for their future.

Give them a few minutes to write down that one thing on a piece of paper. They don’t have to share it, it’s a personal commitment for them to take away. Have them fold up what they have written and get them to keep it on them, in a wallet or phone case. Now pray quickly over them, asking God to help them be braver in living out their faith.

- Would any of you offer your house as a meeting place, knowing the risks?
- How would your church meeting look different? What would have to change?

Ask the groups to feed back and share their answers.

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What can I do? Pray?

Lots of these ideas use our latest Open Doors Youth World Watch List prayer maps. You can order them for free (if you’re in the UK or Ireland) at opendoorsyouth.org/guts or download versions to print off at opendoorsyouth.org/wwl

**Prepare**

Read out these quotes:

“Your prayers were as a wall of fire around me; even when it was very cold, the Lord Jesus warmed me and when it was very hot, Jesus provided me with shadow.”

Pastor Ilmurad, Turkmenistan

“If we understood the potential power of our prayers, we would be on our knees one hundred times a day asking Him for things that would turn the world upside down.”

Brother Andrew, founder of Open Doors

“The first thing I want you to do is pray. Pray every way you know how, for everyone you know.”

1 Timothy 2:1-3, The Message

“Our prayers can go where we cannot. While many things may seem impossible from a human standpoint, in the realm of prayer there are no impossibilities.”

Brother Andrew, founder of Open Doors

**Prayer ideas**

Use some or all of these ideas:

1. TOO YOUNG TO PRAY? MEET ELEANOR

Show the short video interview with Eleanor, a teenager from the UK who prayed through the 50 countries on the World Watch List over the course of a year. She chose a different country each week, researching what to pray for and praying in different creative ways. Ask if anyone would be up for doing the same as Eleanor and committing to pray each week for the persecuted church. Get them to start there and then, sketching out a page on a country on the World Watch List – they could draw, write facts, Bible verses and prayers… it’s up to them. If they are keen, maybe even give them their own notebooks they can use to journal and pray for the different countries over the next few weeks and months.

2. WORLD WATCH LIST MAP / STRING AND PEG PRAYERS

Why not use the World Watch List as a means of getting each person in your group to pray for a specific country? If you’ve ten people, split up the top ten between them (if you’ve 15, do the top 15 – you get the idea). You could use some of the prayer points on the World Watch List maps, or those on the country profiles at opendoorsuk.org/wwl to help.

Once they have a country, ask them to write a very short, simple prayer (one they could remember) on a piece of paper. Then use the map on the other side of this plan. Pin it up on a wall. Put a big pin in the map where your town is in the UK. Give each person another pin, a peg and a piece of wool (different colour pieces if you can). Ask them to tie the wool round the big pin you put in the UK and then pin the other end in the country they were given to pray for.

Lastly, ask them to peg their prayer for that country on the woollen line between the UK and their chosen country. As they pin the wool and peg the prayer, ask them to pray the prayer out loud so others can join in. By the end of your session you’ll not only have prayed through the top few countries on the list, but have a great reminder to pray up on your youth room/space wall for future weeks.

Take it further: Don’t just limit this to one week. You could divide up all the top 50 countries between your group and commit to praying for one country a week for the year – each week a different person could highlight what is happening in a particular country and add a prayer. By the end of the year, you’ll have a visible show of how your prayers in the UK are spreading over the whole world… amazing!

3. PRAYER MAP / THROWING ROCKS

Read this quote about prayer that features in Pete Greig’s ‘How to pray’:

The pioneering missionary educationalist, Frank Laubach, whose literacy programmes taught more than sixty million people to read, compared praying to throwing rocks in a swamp. Each rock sinks without a trace. The exercise seems pointless. But keep going long enough, keep throwing those rocks, and the swamp will eventually be filled. One day, a rock will be thrown that will not sink. Solid ground will begin to appear.

Get a Open Doors Youth World Watch List map (see note under the title). Lay the map down on the floor. Put a small tub/washing-up bowl of water by the map. Give each person in your group a pebble, along with the name of one of the countries on the World Watch List. Ask them to write the name of the country on the pebble with a pen. It might take some effort – they can make it pretty with different colours if you have time. As they write the name, ask them to look at the facts and prayers on the map and use the info to think of a quick prayer for that country.

When they’ve all finished, and have a short prayer ready, turn over the map and get them to place the rock on the map where their country is marked. As they place the rock, get them to pray their prayer, either out loud or in silence. Have everyone watch and join in. Do this for the whole group.

When you’ve finished, ask each person in turn to pick up their rock and put it in the bowl of water. At first, the rocks will be under water, but the more rocks that are put in the bowl, the more the rocks will become visible – a sign that the prayers are becoming more powerful and present. By the time everyone’s pebbles are in the bowl, hopefully they will no longer be submerged.

Take it further: You could adapt this idea and have a bigger bowl/tank of water and, after your initial session, pray quickly in the same way for a different country when you meet each week. The more you pray, the more likely it will be that the rocks will rise above the surface… It’ll
act as a great encouragement to keep praying throughout the year.

Tip: Make sure you have enough water so the rocks should just come out of the water – you want to encourage more prayer, but also give hope that their prayers are working and aren’t just submerged!

4. PRAYER MAP: MAKE IT YOUR OWN
This is a longer term way of using the map (again see note about maps under the title on the previous page), but you could start building up this idea as part of this first session. As you meet over the next term or even year, keep coming back to the map and add your own images, written prayers, torn-out news articles and more onto it. You could...

1. Divide up some key countries to pray for amongst the group and stick images of those people next to those countries. Print and cut out pictures of people like Mohan and stick them on the map along with a quote from them near the country they are from. Check out opendoorsyouth.org and instagram.com/opendoorsyouthuk for regular images and stories to add.

2. Cut out newspaper articles of big events that happen throughout the year involving our persecuted family and stick them on the map near the relevant countries. In 2019 there were big news stories about persecution of Christians in Sri Lanka, Egypt, Kenya, Iran, Nigeria and many other places. (Sadly, that won’t change in 2020 – so keep your eyes peeled.)

Make your map unique to your group as you pray throughout the year. Take a picture of your map and tag us on Instagram; we would love to see your group’s ideas and prayer grow.

4. WHEN WE CAN’T PRAY
Prayer isn’t always easy. You just have to read some of the stats from places like North Korea and Afghanistan in the facts section to feel utterly helpless. The situations can seem impossible, but God is bigger. If your group are struggling to pray, whether about the places in this guide, or something that is going on closer to home, try this prayer advice from Brother Andrew:

“There is one prayer the church has used for 2,000 years: ‘Lord, have mercy.’ As we learn of turmoil and tragedy, we find ourselves breathing this prayer: ‘Lord, have mercy on those who are suffering. Lord, have mercy on our brothers and sisters who are affected by this event. With these words we acknowledge our helplessness and our need for God to intervene and use for good a situation that was probably intended for evil.’

So, use the map – read out the name of a country in the top five, explain some of the facts, then together say, “In North Korea, Lord have mercy”. Do the same for the whole top five and other countries too.

Open Doors works with Christians around the world who are persecuted for their faith. We are committed to smuggling hope by providing Bibles, training, literacy and livelihood programmes, and advocacy support for people who know the true cost of following Jesus.

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