“WE OUGHT TO BECOME PEOPLE OF GUTS AND COURAGE, WITH STRONG CONVictions – TO NOT COUNT OUR LIVES DEAR UNTO OURSELVES.”

BROTHER ANDREW, FOUNDER OF OPEN DOORS

Brother Andrew was just in his early twenties when he chose to say ‘Yes’ to wherever God would lead him. Sounds like a simple decision, but it’s one that turned his world upside-down and inside-out. God showed him that around the world, Christians were facing abuse, intimidation, threats, violence and worse simply because they loved Jesus.

Brother Andrew knew this wasn’t right, so he started out on a life-long journey to support the suffering church. Initially that meant some pretty risky trips from his home in the Netherlands to the Soviet bloc, where he would smuggle illegal Bibles in a VW Beetle to Christians facing pressure from the Communist regime. In the 60 years since, he’s visited nearly all the places where Christians face the worst persecution, encouraging and strengthening the church with each step. Because of his guts and courage, Open Doors, the movement he founded, now supports Christians facing persecution in around 60 countries across the world.

COVER IMAGE: Wasihun from Ethiopia. When he was 7 his dad was killed because neighbours were angered that his Christian family refused to take part in some local rituals. Since the murder, Open Doors has been supporting Wasihun and his family by providing food, trauma care and school fees, as well as helping his mother to start a small business to help her bring in a regular income.
You just have to flick through the New Testament to see that Jesus was both loved, and hated. His enemies, of which there were a fair few, ended up killing him. The earliest followers of Jesus were similarly reviled - all but one of Jesus’ disciples were said to have been martyred for their faith. And 2,000 years on, many who follow Jesus today still face hatred, violence and imprisonment. But why? Here’s some simple reasons...

**SOME LEADERS WANT TO BE TREATED LIKE A GOD.** Anyone who says Jesus is Lord is thought of as a traitor and should be punished.

**SOME INSIST THAT RELIGION AND RACE ARE THE SAME THING.** 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.

**SOME THINK YOU CAN GET TO PARADISE BY KILLING PEOPLE.** You may have heard of these extremist groups on the news - Islamic State or Boko Haram to name two. They believe that by killing people, you can secure your place in paradise.

**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. Those in power may not like that change at all.

**BUT 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 SHOULD YOU CARE?**

Two simple reasons. The first is that being able to choose your religion or belief system without fear of threats or violence is a fundamental human right (it’s in the UN Declaration of Human Rights). No-one should be able to demand what someone else should believe.

The second is that if we believe in Jesus we’re connected to a worldwide body of believers. We’re part of a global family, and, as Paul writes in the New Testament: “If one part suffers, every part suffers with it” (1 Cor 12:26). We care because our brothers and sisters are suffering for their faith, and we can do something about that. Check out this quote from a secret Christian in North Korea:

“’It’s impossible to imagine a car without an engine. In the same way, we cannot imagine how we’d be able to survive without your concern, support and love for our brothers and sisters. Whenever we face strong storms of difficulty, we remember that you care for us. Through your love and care, we break through any circumstance.’

**WHY SHOULD I READ ON?**

Persecution - sounds depressing, right? It can be. When Christians are singled out, forcibly displaced, excluded, violently targeted and rejected because of their choice to follow Jesus, it doesn’t make for happy reading. But, in the midst of such darkness, many Christians are shining God’s love brighter than ever. Many continue to live out their faith with immense guts and courage, despite trials, suffering and persecution. Many keep going, many keep sharing and many keep choosing to be different. These courageous Christians can inspire us to live out our love of Jesus with greater boldness, compassion and love - and that’s far from depressing, in fact, it’s exactly what our comfortable Westernised Christianity needs. Read on to challenge and grow your own faith, and let us know how you get on! Drop us a line at youth@opendoorsuk.org or message us on our social profiles to tell us which stories have impacted and inspired you!
SARI
INDIA
Sari is 12. She’s gone through a lot already. Throughout her childhood she’d been pretty ill and struggled with her hearing. But a few years ago she was healed in a church. Her parents were pleased, but being Hindu, they didn’t want her to be around Christians. However, Sari ignored them and would secretly go back to the church. It wasn’t long before her brother found out, and he would beat her for going.

Eventually, her family forced her out of the house. She now lives with her aunt, who is also a Christian. Despite missing her family, she says that she can’t leave Jesus.

MARQOS
EGYPT
Marqos is 17. He’s from a Christian family, but he’d never really had a faith. His dad was pretty devout - getting up early to pray and being involved in the local church. It was only when his dad was killed that Marqos wanted to know more about Jesus. Two men had walked into the pharmacy that Marqos’ dad had owned. They dragged him out into the street, made him kneel, put a gun to his head and told him to convert to Islam. Marqos’ dad refused. He was shot there and then.

Amazingly, the fear of similar attacks hasn’t stopped Marqos from choosing to follow Jesus with the same courage as his dad. In fact, Marqos says, “I was proud of my father, for standing by his faith until the last moment...My father’s death for Christ has made me search for Jesus.”

THERE IS A COST
Jesus was pretty explicit, he said following him would come at a cost (Matt 16:25). That doesn’t mean we all need to experience the things that Sari and Marqos have to be ‘real’ Christians. Nope, it’s about grace (see Rom 8:1). But, that doesn’t mean we say ‘yes’ to Jesus and the rest is easy. There is a cost, and facing that cost takes guts. Read the conversation between Jesus and the rich young ruler in Mark 10:17-27. Put yourself in the rich man’s shoes. What would Jesus call out in your life as things you put before God? Ask God to show you and pray that you’d be able to lay them down if He asks.

PRAY
Father God, Thank You for those who choose You, despite the cost. Give them strength and courage to keep following You no matter what they may lose in the process. Help me to keep choosing You in good times and bad. Amen.

ACT NOW!
Stand with Egyptian Christians facing increasing violence and terror. Get some of our temp Coptic cross tattoos at opendoorsyouth.org/shop

WHY ARE CHRISTIANS PERSECUTED IN INDIA?
1. Those in power see being Indian as being Hindu, so Indian Christians are despised.
2. A Hindu extremist group linked to a leading political party is actively trying to wipe out the church - they’ve set a target of 2021.
3. 12,500 Christians and about 100 churches were attacked last year.

AND IN EGYPT?
1. Egyptian Christians face exclusion and discrimination in nearly all areas of life, from education and health care to finding work.
2. The so-called Islamic State is waging war against Christians in Egypt. Hundreds have been killed in attacks over the last few years.

IT TAKES GUTS TO CHOOSE JESUS
IT TAKES GUTS TO CHOOSE JESUS. DOING SO MEANS STARTING A JOURNEY THAT CAN TURN YOUR LIFE UPSIDE-DOWN AND CHALLENGE THE VERY CORE OF WHO YOU ARE. THE CHOICE CAN TAKE YOU PLACES YOU NEVER DREAMT OF AND CHANGE YOU FROM THE INSIDE-OUT. NOW IMAGINE IF THAT CHOICE ALSO MEANT YOU BECAME A TARGET FOR EXTREME VIOLENCE OR WERE REJECTED BY FAMILY - THAT WOULD BE A REALLY COURAGEOUS CHOICE...

GUTS AND COURAGE
www.opendoorsyouth.org

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Leah is an absolute hero. At age 15, her courage is immense. In February 2018, along with 110 other girls, she was kidnapped by 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. Her release was denied because she refused to convert to Islam. She gave up her freedom to stick with her faith in Jesus. Incredible. 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 excluded and discriminated against because of her gender. This isn’t right. Get involved in our campaign ‘SEE. CHANGE.’ to help women and girls who pay twice the price to follow Jesus.

**How Will You Stand Out?**

Leah’s example is amazing, but it’s come at a cost. She’s lost her freedom. She’s likely to have been abused, beaten and intimidated. She knows the cost of following Jesus more than most. She’s shown courage to stand out and be different. Will you be inspired by her example and have the guts to be different, standing out as a Christian? That doesn’t mean being down on people - we’re not here to judge others - we’re here to stand out in how we love, show compassion, offer forgiveness, and lead lives overflowing with grace. Think about how you can be radically different in those ways, and ask for courage to live out those ideas.

**Pray**

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.

**Act Now!**

Follow our social media accounts and like and share our regular posts. FB/Twitter: @opendoorsyouth Instagram: @opendoorsyouthuk

**Why Are Christians Persecuted in Nigeria?**

1. Nigeria is split between a largely Christian south and largely Muslim north. Islamic extremists in the northern states target Christians with violence.
2. An extremist group, Boko Haram, have abducted and killed those who refuse to convert to their strict view of Islam. Many villages have been attacked and thousands of Christians have been displaced.
3. Plus, Muslim Fulani herdsmen regularly attack Christian villages. Many have been killed, whilst whole villages have been burnt down.

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IT TAKES GUTS TO TELL OTHERS

WHAT’S ONE OF THE THINGS MOST OF US STRUGGLE WITH IN OUR WALK WITH JESUS? IT MUST BE HAVING THE GUTS TO TALK TO OTHERS ABOUT OUR FAITH. SADLY, CHRISTIANITY HAS CONNOTATIONS. AND IT’S HARD TO BREAK PEOPLE’S PERCEPTIONS. WITH FAKE NEWS EVERYWHERE, PEOPLE ARE RIGHT TO BE SCEPTICAL. BUT, GOD WANTS US TO SHARE HIS LOVE AND GRACE, AND THOUGH IT MIGHT COST US, WE NEED TO SHOW THAT TO OTHERS IN THE WAY WE LIVE, LOVE AND TALK.

WHY ARE CHRISTIANS PERSECUTED IN SOMALIA?
1. Simply being suspected of being a Christian can lead to instant execution.
2. Christians from a Muslim background are hated; some have even been beheaded.
3. A radical militant group has stated publicly that they want Somalia free of all Christians.
4. Christians keep their faith a secret; even liking a Christian social media post can have the most severe consequences.
5. The government has stated that leaving Islam is illegal since 2015. Christmas celebrations have been banned.

WILL YOU SHARE?
’Nothing could stop me from preaching the gospel’. When was the last time you said that about yourself? Now, don’t feel judged, not all of us are called to be amazing evangelists, but we’re all called to show and share God’s love to the people we meet. So, how will you get inspired by Farah’s example? How can we fix our eyes on God, give our anxieties to Him and be bolder in showing others why following Jesus means so much to us? Here’s a simple way to start. Pray for three people this week and ask for concrete opportunities where you can show or explain God’s love to them.

PRAY
Father God. Thank You that even in places where Your name is rejected and hated, Your followers still speak it out with courage and boldness. Thank You for Farah and others like him. Help them to keep sharing Your love in whatever ways they can and that many would turn to You. Help me have the same courage in sharing and showing Your love to my friends. Amen.

ACT NOW!
Christianity is facing a total blackout in Somalia. Join the Blackout, spend 48 hours offline, raising money and prayer: opendoorsyouth.org/blackout

Farah is the son of a Muslim leader. When he was just 8 he heard a voice call to Him and he knew it was Jesus. The only way his secret faith could grow was to listen to Christian radio.

As a teenager, he was expelled from school for telling his whole class - 40 students - about Jesus. Three became Christians.

After that, he could no longer hide his faith from his parents. His dad wanted to kill him. He kept on preaching about Jesus, which led him to being imprisoned. He was 17. But a prison wouldn’t hold him back. Farah says: “Nothing could stop me from preaching the gospel, so the officers said I had to be kept alone.”

Farah is now in his 40s. His family have rejected him. He’s faced all kinds of discrimination and persecution because people know about his love for Jesus. Through local partners in the region, Open Doors has helped him start a small business as no-one would employ him. He’s part of a small, secret church. His advice to us is:

“Always read the Bible and fix your eyes on Jesus. Pray fervently, and give all your anxiety to God. We must understand that our fate is God himself. When suffering comes, be persistent.”

FARAH SOMALIA

WILL YOU SHARE?
The situation in Eritrea is not simple, and that complexity has effects on the lives of real people. Matthew was just 15 when he was arrested for being part of a non-official church. In Eritrea, only the historic Orthodox Church is accepted by the government, any other expressions of Christianity are seen as dangerous, foreign imports. Sadly, that meant Matthew was branded as a spy and a traitor. He was kept in terrible conditions, beaten and treated appallingly. After 40 days he was transferred to a military training camp - the government that arrested and punished him, wanted to force him to fight for them - he was now their property. After months enduring life in the camp, Matthew managed to escape and fled the country, a crime that can lead to death. But despite his experiences, Matthew hasn’t given up his faith:

“I have seen the hand of God encouraging us, answering our prayers. We see that God is still in control and that he’s working in us. That’s the only thing that has kept us going. God has never forsaken us.”

Wow. Arrest, torture, imprisonment, near slavery - but God is in control. Incredible.

WILL YOU KEEP GOING?
Matthew didn’t give up. Like many of the followers of Jesus in this guide, persecution has strengthened his faith. This isn’t just about thinking positively, but knowing God, the One, the Creator, the Almighty. It’s not about downplaying what we face in the here and now, but knowing - truly knowing - that we are loved, and nothing can touch that. We might never know trials, pain and suffering like Matthew, but will we choose to let God’s love be our strength during tough times? Like Matthew will we be able to say that ‘God is still in control and he’s working in us’ when the storm hits?

PRAY
Father God, thank You for the millions of Christians around the world that haven’t given up when pain, suffering and tough times come. Thank You for their steadfast faith. Encourage and strengthen all those trying to stand strong today. Holy Spirit, give them hope for a different future. Help me cling to You and to keep trusting no matter what I face. Amen.

ACT NOW!
Write a letter to a persecuted Christian. Let them know they aren’t forgotten and inspire them to keep going opendoorsyouth.org/sendhope

WHY ARE CHRISTIANS PERSECUTED IN ERITREA?
1. The Government views Christians as agents of the West and will arrest, harass and kill them with impunity.
2. More than 700 Christians were arrested last year. Many believers are held in horrific conditions, some in shipping containers in scorching temperatures.
3. In Muslim areas, becoming a Christian is seen as betraying your family and the Islamic faith.
4. Church meetings and Christian weddings are raided by the police. Many can be imprisoned for long periods just for being caught at a service.

IT TAKES GUTS TO KEEP GOING
WE ALL FACE BAD TIMES, BUT IT’S HOW WE APPROACH THEM THAT DEFINES US. RELATIONSHIPS GO WRONG, LIFE DOESN’T TURN OUT AS WE EXPECT, A CLOSE FRIEND OR FAMILY MEMBER GETS SEVERELY ILL, WE DON’T GET THE GRADES, WE KEEP MESSING UP IN THE SAME WAY OR WE CAN’T HELP FEELING DOWN MOST OF THE TIME. LIFE ISN’T EASY, IT’S ONLY GOD’S LOVE AND GRACE THAT WILL SEE US THROUGH. AND IT’S THAT LOVE AND GRACE WE NEED TO RELY ON TO HELP US COURAGEOUSLY STAND STRONG THROUGH THE STORM.
JOHN NORTH KOREA

When John was 15, he was caught trying to flee North Korea. He was trying to make it to China, running from the poverty, starvation and death he'd known on the streets. The North Korean government was brutal, he'd witnessed a public execution, and decided he'd have a better life elsewhere. Being caught brought the nightmare of his time in North Korea into full focus.

“Fifty people were crammed in my prison cell. One inmate behind me died during the night. Cause of death – Torture? Starvation? Illness? Lack of medical care? All of the above…”

John was tortured, and almost died. But, for some reason, he was released. He doesn’t know why, but he knew he’d do all he could to leave North Korea. This time he managed to escape to China successfully. He now lives safely, with freedom, in the West. He says:

“I can walk to church without being arrested. I can read the Bible and not be afraid of spies. I can pray, sing and worship, knowing that God and others can hear me. I don’t have to be afraid.”

USE YOUR FREEDOM

Christians in North Korea have to keep their faith secret, otherwise they’ll experience similar things to John. Simply having a Bible could lead to your arrest and the imprisonment of your entire family. But, many still choose Jesus.

There are an estimated 300,000 Christians in North Korea. There are no churches (bar some ‘show’ churches in Pyongyang), so if Christians do meet it will be in secret. They may share fragments of the Bible that they have learnt by heart and whisper a song - Amazing Grace is a favourite. But, they know that the cost of being caught is worth it. They know what Paul, one of the authors of the New Testament, wrote nearly 2,000 years ago: “I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord” Philippians 3:8

PRAY

Father God, thank You that even where there are horrific regimes, people are still choosing to follow and worship You. Please be with all those in prison camps in North Korea - give them strength to keep going, ensure they have food, warmth and shelter and I pray they’d have the courage to share Your love with others in whatever ways they can. Help me use my freedom to live my love for You out loud. Help me not be afraid. Amen

ACT NOW!

Speak up. Host a session in your youth group, small group or church and inspire others to follow Jesus with the same guts, courage and perseverance as the Christians in this guide. You can find ready made talk notes and powerpoints on various themes at opendoorsyouth.org/speakers. Plus there is a ready made group interactive group session outline there too!
**WHAT YOU CAN DO?**

1. **Pray.** As Brother Andrew said, “Our prayers go where we cannot.” When we pray we stand alongside our persecuted family, even though we may be thousands of miles away from them. Our prayers matter. You could even write a prayer and send it to a persecuted Christian (see [opendoorsyouth.org/sendhope](http://opendoorsyouth.org/sendhope)).

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](http://opendoorsyouth.org) for ways to get involved, including our annual 48-hour sponsored digital silence, Blackout ([opendoorsyouth.org/blackout](http://opendoorsyouth.org/blackout)).

3. **Speak up.** Tell people what is happening to the church around the world. Share the stories in this book. Write to your MP and ask them to raise the issue in Parliament. Keep an eye on our website and social profiles for loads of ways to speak up and share!

4. **Buy.** Head to [opendoorsyouth.org/shop](http://opendoorsyouth.org/shop) to find a bunch of t-shirts and resources to buy. All the profits from these items go towards supporting persecuted Christians.

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**UP FOR A CHALLENGE?**

**HIDDEN WORD**

Get our awesome, quality resource Hidden Word and be inspired by persecuted Christians to learn chunks of God’s Word by heart.

Hidden Word is perfect 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 aides (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](http://opendoorsyouth.org/hiddenword)