

**YOU WILL NEED**

- Some time - about 20 mins
- A quiet spot
- A device to watch a Youtube vid
- A Bible, pen and some paper
- A balloon!

SHORT ON TIME? NOT A BIG READER?

Watch the video about Halida, reflect on the questions, then turn over, read Khushal's story and finish with the closing prayer. You'll be done in under 10 minutes!

Looking around it is not hard to spot that people are anxious. Maybe it's seeing people rushing to and from the shop with their head down, maybe it's seeing people jump back in fear when someone sniffs near them. Maybe you're feeling pretty anxious as you spend lots of time reading the news and swiping through social media. We want to encourage you to lift up your head, focus on God and learn from our persecuted brothers and sisters around the world who, despite dealing with daily anxiety, have found a peace that really does pass all understanding.

So, find a good chair, grab a drink, your Bible, a pen, some paper and get ready to hear some amazing stories that will challenge and encourage you to know God's presence and peace in these anxious and mentally draining times.

ACTIVITY: POP

Grab a balloon, give it a stretch by pulling it with your hands, then start to blow it up. When you get to the point when the balloon is well inflated, keep going. Keep blowing until the balloon pops...

Did you manage it? It's not a pleasant feeling is it? If there were others in the room with you, how did they react? Though this challenge is now over, the thing about anxiety is that it is rarely over quickly, and you don't get to choose how far it goes, like you did with the balloon. Anxiety can really affect us and it can affect those around us. Our prayer is that this session will help you when you are feeling anxious to get closer to God and His people.

PRAY

Just pause. Sit. Slow down your breathing. Focus on God. Ask him to speak to you whilst you go through this devotional. And know that we, and others around the UK, are praying this with you!

Father God. You are good. You are everything I need. Please speak to me as I read these stories. Help me put aside distractions and focus on You. Teach me something new. Let me know You are with me. Amen

VIDEO: CENTRAL ASIA – HALIDA

Check out this week's video ([click here](#)). This week Naomi shares

about Halida from Central Asia "...they can beat us and frighten us – and they do. But they can't take away the love and hope." Halida grew up in a Muslim family and was a committed Muslim. But she had deep depression. During Ramadan she was desperately seeking healing. "If God won't answer me in this pure, holy Ramadan month, I will die. I had no strength to resist any more."

- Halida had a friend who pointed her to God, something that ultimately brought her peace. Who points you towards Jesus? (We all need that prompting every now and then).
- Have you ever pointed someone towards Jesus? Can you think of people who need more peace?

STORY: INDIA - KHUSHAL "Many people prayed for me and I was a new person."

Khushal is a 50-year-old Pastor from central India. Because of his faith in Jesus, and his work as a pastor in his village he was attacked. A mob of people from his village and nearby villages had been turned against him by Hindu extremists, angry that he was leading people to Jesus and away from Hinduism.

"Around 250 people surrounded my house, they caught hold of me and dragged me for about half a kilometre to the nearby temple. When we

Continued...

arrived at the temple they pushed me towards the idol and ordered me to bow down; I mustered all the strength that was left within me and said, 'I will die but I will not bow to this idol.'"

The beating continued for over two hours until the police arrived and took Khushal to the police station.

"I really thought the police would help me, but instead they questioned me about how much I give to people to convert them to Christianity. I was appalled. I told them, 'I only pray for people; they convert to Christianity when they see miracles happening.' But no one believed me."

- How would you feel if your first your neighbours and then the police turned on you? Would it change how you saw your community and your safety?

Two false cases were filed against him – one blaming him for converting people to Christianity using fraudulent means, and the other accusing him of causing riots.

However, Khushal was released the next day, as many local Christian leaders protested and secured his bail. He says,

"After my release, I was happy to be home, but inside my heart I was deeply troubled. It occurred to me that such things could happen again at any time! My family also became very fearful. They kept fretting over my ministry and forced me to stay indoors."

After this Khushal went for specialist persecution survival training provided by Open Doors local partners. He was anxious about going and leaving his family behind. But, after attending the training, Khushal says he received inner healing. He says,

"During the training I felt the warmth of God's love and his protection. It felt as if God intended to bring me here to learn. I shared my testimony and my concerns. Many people prayed for me and I was a new person. Much more mature and much bolder!...The seminar reached me at the right time. It worked to strengthen me, my church members and my family."

- Have you asked anyone to pray for you about your anxieties?
- Why do you think it strengthened Khushal, his church and his family?

Khushal continues to live in the same village he leans forward as he describes his current situation.

"Right now things have grown calmer and the people living around my house have acknowledged that I had been framed. But in all circumstances I know God is with me." He then adds a final statement in a very strong tone. "Now I do not fear death. Everyone dies one day. I have understood that if I die a little early because of my faith or ministry, I know God will take care of my family and everything else that concerns me."

BIBLE: PHILIPPIANS 4:6-7

Read Philippians 4: 6-7

This is a very well-known bit of the bible - it's pretty 'gramable'. What do you think of it? Does it seem almost too easy - just don't be anxious, give

it to God and then you'll get this incredible peace - peace just like Khushal experienced. We don't want to be flippant, but is it really that easy?

The thing is, it's testimonies like Khushal's and Halida's that can inspire us to take passages like this more seriously - and to dig into finding that incredible peace for ourselves.

Read 1 Peter 5: 6-9

This passage unpacks all this a little bit more. We need to start with humility; with recognising that God is bigger than us. Halida couldn't heal herself. Khushal couldn't get rid of the people that were against him. When we recognise that **we can't**, it leaves space for us to rely on **the God who can**. Verse seven tells us that the reason we can cast our anxieties on God is because he cares. No matter how big or small your anxieties, He cares.

Anxiety is something that can creep back in to our lives. In verse eight it says that the enemy is always looking 'for someone to devour.'

- What do you think this means?
- How can we best deal with anxiety?

Let's go back to Philippians for an answer

"...in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God."

What it comes down to is prayer. Prayer reminds us of who God is and that He is big enough to hold our anxieties, because He cares.

At Open Doors we hear stories from all over the world of our Christian family doing amazing things in the name of Jesus. Like Halida and Khushal they are standing firm, literally living out 1 Peter 5: 9:

'Resist Him (the devil), standing firm in the faith, because you know that the family of believers throughout the world is undergoing the same kind of sufferings.'

If you want to get more encouraging stories to help you stand firm in this time of anxiety, consider following us on Instagram where we post daily.

RESPOND

We want to encourage you this week to follow the example of Halida and Khushal. Make a list like the one below, what else can you add to the list? But don't just do this once, make this something that you do regularly as the enemy is always looking 'for someone to devour', not just this week.

1. Who lifts my head to Jesus? Encourage and thank them.
2. Who needs more peace that you can point to Jesus? Give them a call.
3. Who can I ask to pray when I'm feeling anxious? Send them a text.
4. Read Phil 4: 6-7 & 1 Pet 5: 6-9, tick a box each time you read both.

PRAY

Father God, thank You for the example of Christians like Halida, Khushal and Christians around the world who are persecuted for their faith in You. Thank You that they have discovered a peace that passes all understanding and that I too can also have that peace. Help me to humbly ask You and people around me to help when I'm feeling anxious, and point out people to me that I can also support and pray for. Amen.