

Talk: We are family

Use accompanying Powerpoint 2: Talk on World Watch DVD/DVDRM

- SLIDE 1:** **Persecuted Christians: our family around the world**
"Jesus said: Remember the words I spoke to you: 'No servant is greater than his master'. If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also." (John 15: 20) As we've been hearing today, there are millions of people for whom this is true. So what does the persecuted church look like in 2016?
- SLIDE 2:** **(World Watch Map) What does the persecuted church look like?**
This year's Open Doors World Watch List describes the big picture, the facts and figures, the global trends. But the big picture is made up of millions of individual faces.
- SLIDE 3:** **A Christian refugee - Maryam**
The world has watched aghast as millions of refugees risk the hazardous route to Europe from the Middle East and the Horn of Africa. They feature in the news now almost every day. Their number includes tens of thousands of Christians fleeing war. There are thousands more who are displaced within their own country, like Maryam's family in Iraq. That's just the tip of the iceberg. Persecution has many faces – as the film we've just watched shows – and Maryam's is just one of them. Let me tell you about a few other members of our family who have experienced persecution, in different ways.
- SLIDE 4:** **A house church Christian in North Korea**
In North Korea, people are taught to worship and revere the ruler, Kim Jong-un, like a god. Christians are viewed as dangerous traitors who are trying to subvert the ruling authorities. Tens of thousands of Christians are in labour camps, in some cases, just for owning a Bible. Many of the population try to leave the country. Last year, a Christian family of four, desperate to get to safety, fled, taking with them their two daughters, aged twelve and nine. It meant having to swim the polluted border river between North Korea and China. The current was lethal and the youngest daughter nearly drowned – but they managed to get across. However, the danger is not over. In China, they are illegal immigrants. As Christians, if they were to go back to North Korea, they would be enemies of the state. They are reliant on others whom they can trust to help them survive.
- SLIDE 5:** **A church leader facing prison**
In parts of the world where the church is viewed with suspicion, or is outlawed by the authorities, the most vulnerable people in the church are their leaders. Kazakh Pastor Kashkumbayev was imprisoned for nine months in 2013, falsely accused of 'harming the health' of a church member by serving red tea for communion. He is now serving four years of house arrest and three years of probation, together with his wife, Alfia.
- SLIDE 6:** **A victim of violence in Sub-Saharan Africa**
You might remember in April 2014, the attack on Garissa University in Kenya. Al-Shabaab militants from Somalia crossed the border and killed 148 people – mainly students between the ages of 19 and 23. The attackers separated Christian students from Muslim ones and massacred the Christians. This included 22 members of the Christian Union who were meeting to pray. Normally, the prayer meeting would have had about 70 students, but for one reason or another, it was a much smaller meeting that morning. Fred Gitonga (21), the Chairman of the Christian Students' Union, survived by hiding under his bed. This is not a solitary incident. Over the last few years, churches and individuals in the area have been repeatedly attacked.
- SLIDE 7:** **A Muslim-background believer in an Islamic state**
Around the world, people raised as Muslims who choose to become Christians are at risk from their families and wider communities who may reject, threaten or harm them. So they live as secret believers. One young woman, in Central Asia, whose father is a Mullah – a Muslim cleric – kept her new faith a secret from her family for two months. When she told him about it, he forbade her from meeting with other Christians. She says, "I met with them secretly for a year before my father found out. He shouted loud and long... but I had made my choice. I had decided to follow the joy and peace that Jesus brings. To this day my father will not speak to me."
- SLIDE 8:** **A Hindu-background believer**
The same kind of persecution can also face Hindus who convert to Christianity. When Ajay became a Christian, his Hindu father was furious. He banned Ajay from reading his Bible, then forcibly married him to a Hindu girl (who then also decided to follow Jesus). Ajay's father disowned him, his brothers threatened to kill him and the couple were thrown out of the house and not a day has gone by without some form of persecution, but, amazingly, Ajay is not downhearted. He says, "God is blessing me in countless ways!"
- How do we respond to all this? It could leave us feeling overwhelmed. So let's ask God to help us. Let's see what the Bible has to say.

SLIDE 9: We are all part of Jesus' family Hebrews 2:11

Jesus is not ashamed to call us his family. He calls us brothers, friends, not just servants.

Sowmong, a Bangladeshi Christian from a Buddhist background, who has been disowned and attacked by his father. He says: "I have lost everything. My family, friends, relatives, and all my properties, but I am not sad because I found a bigger family in Christ." Sowmong has attended Open Doors training seminars which have given him new strength. At one workshop he said, "I thought people were unaware of what we go through and how much pain we deal with every day but I realised that other Christians really think about those who are hurting." That's family at work.

How far do we identify with our big family in Christ around the world?

SLIDE 10: We take inspiration from our family 1 Peter 5: 9

Do the kinds of Christians I've talked about inspire you to live more wholeheartedly and courageously for Jesus? As we hear about their courage, we can feel intimidated. They seem so much more holy and heroic than us. But I don't think they would see themselves like that. They're just trying to be obedient to the calling of Christ. In fact, they know they need us, too. One North Korean believer says: "The support and prayers from believers all over the world help us to overcome serious crises and dangerous situations."

SLIDE 11: We are called to look after our family Galatians 6:10

When Pastor Kashkumbayev was released from prison, he wrote a thank you letter to everyone who had sustained him by their letters and prayers. He said: "How wonderful to realise, through His love and Spirit, that we are integrated into one body, in His church! What a marvellous and incredibly amazing thing it is to realise that as His people we belong to Jesus! What a great joy to know that He is with us, with each one of us!" Do you feel challenged to support persecuted believers? There are many ways we can do this.

SLIDE 12: How can we look after our persecuted family?

- By identifying with them
- By speaking up on their behalf
- By raising money for their spiritual and practical needs
- By praying for them

These are all things we can do as individuals. In some cases, too, we can even write to certain persecuted Christians. It's a wonderful incentive to pray - and to feel that connection as we tell them that we are praying for them. If you go on Open Doors website you can find out more about this. Alternatively, you can use their letter-writing guide to help you.

SLIDE 13 Refugee Week 20-26 June 2016

There are many each of us can do as individuals, but we become more powerful as we act together. Refugee Week, 20-26 June 2016, gives us a good opportunity to do some of these things as a church, particularly as we think of persecuted Christians who've been displaced.

We could raise money to support our persecuted family by missing a meal, doing a sponsored walk, or with a big sleepover in a church hall or somewhere outdoor! We can raise awareness at the same time and speak up on behalf of our persecuted brothers and sisters. There will be further opportunities during the year, through Open Doors, to speak up on behalf of Christians in Iraq, Syria and the Middle East.

SLIDE 14: International Day of Prayer for Persecuted Christians (IDOP) Sunday 20 November 2016

Alternatively, it might be good to do something later in the year, on 20 November, say, for the International Day of Prayer for the Persecuted Church (IDOP). That's something to plan for the future, but we don't have to wait until then. We can pray any time. It's always the first thing that persecuted Christians ask us to do. So, let's pray now for the Christians I've mentioned today and the many others they represent.

On to Powerpoint 3: Prayers