

# OpenDoors

60 years of serving persecuted Christians

magazine

January 2018

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Secrets, spies and standing firm

- **CAMPAIGN UPDATE**

Thank you for bringing hope to the Middle East

- **STRONGER**

A new Letter-writing Guide for 2018



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17 NOVEMBER  
BIRMINGHAM

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# Letter from Lisa: Wake up!

Open Doors is an international ministry serving persecuted Christians and churches worldwide.

Open Doors supplies Bibles, leadership training, literacy programmes, livelihood support and advocacy services.

We also mobilise the church in the UK & Ireland to serve Christians living under religious persecution.

If you have any questions about the work of Open Doors, or would like to reprint any of the articles in this magazine, please do get in touch.

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Cover image: North Korean street girl, known as 'kotjebi', looking for something to eat.

**I wonder what comes to mind when you think of North Korea. Threats, missiles, political prisoners? Or Supreme Leader, Kim Jong-Un? The increase in tension on the Korean peninsula means that global interest is the highest it's been for years.**

But the fact that there are an estimated 60,000 believers trapped in its brutal prison camps is barely known, even by many Christians in this country. In fact, the severity of persecution against Christians in North Korea has kept it at number one on the Open Doors World Watch List for the past 15 years. Shocking as these facts are, and overwhelming as the problem of evil and suffering can be, there is a surprising twist to this story.

The church in North Korea is growing! North Koreans who flee to neighbouring countries in search of food are discovering God's love and choosing to go back to share their faith. I find that kind of courage quite staggering. While the church here is asking itself, 'What does success look like?' our brothers and sisters are saying 'Jesus Christ is worth everything'. They see the beauty and worth of Jesus more clearly than we do, and they are finding Him faithful.

But their suffering should be a wake-up call to every Christian in this country – because we're all called to be part of the body of Christ. Every gift offered, every voice raised - in prayer, advocacy and encouragement - has a direct and significant impact on the life and future of North Korean Christians. It gives them hope – and it's good news for others, too, as you can read on p14-15.

*"Wake up! Strengthen what remains and is about to die"*

Revelation 3:2

The parliamentary launch of the Open Doors World Watch List on 17 January is a practical way that we can 'strengthen what remains'. Please be part of this crucial lifeline of support by inviting your MP to attend. The church needs to wake up, too, so do share the new World Watch List with your church, friends, and family, when it is released on 10 January.

With the numbers of persecuted Christians rising, the need is growing – as are the opportunities to serve them. That's why I've accepted a new role for Open Doors International, focusing on growing the number of countries praying for, supporting and speaking out for the persecuted church. I will also be leading our global advocacy team, raising awareness of global persecution in the corridors of power, and bringing justice for the persecuted church – building on the extraordinary momentum gained through recent campaigns, I'm sad to leave the outstanding team of staff and volunteers here in the UK and Ireland – so please pray for the right person to take my place.

So thank you for your partnership with the King. As our North Korean brothers and sisters remind us, He really is worth everything.

Lisa Pearce  
CEO, Open Doors UK&I

# WORLD WATCH NEWS

## **NIGERIA:** Captive finds hope and faith after Boko Haram

**A teenager who fell pregnant after being abducted and abused by Boko Haram militants is on the road to recovery after receiving trauma counselling and relief aid from Open Doors.**

Esther\* was 17 when Boko Haram militants attacked her town, kidnapping her and several other young women. In captivity she refused to renounce her Christian faith. "If I perish, I perish," she said, "but I will not become a Muslim."

The result was that she was badly abused and ill-treated.

When she was rescued by the military in November 2016 she was pregnant, and she gave birth to a little girl she called Rebecca.

It was a difficult homecoming. "They mocked me because I was pregnant. Even my grandparents despised me and called me names. I cried many tears. I felt so lonely. What broke my heart even more was that they refused to call my daughter 'Rebecca'. They referred to her as 'Boko'."

Open Doors invited Esther to a trauma care seminar. "I felt like my sorrow and shame disappeared," she says, "never to

come back again."

"People have noticed a change. Some of those people who used to mock me now ask me my secret. I tell them, 'I forgave my enemies and now trust God to take vengeance in His time.'"

"I had no idea how on earth I would ever be able to love this child," she admitted. But now, she says, "She has become my joy and laughter amidst sadness."

Esther still receives food aid from Open Doors to help support her and her family. "I have no family other than Open Doors," she says. "After hearing my story, you did not despise me but encouraged me and showed me love. Thank you so much!"

### • PRAY

- For healing for Esther, and other young women who have suffered such abuse
- For Open Doors partners supporting persecuted believers in Nigeria with trauma counselling and emergency relief.



*Esther\* who fell pregnant after being abducted and abused by Boko Haram militants with baby Rebecca*

## **ALGERIA:** Church closed for 'illegally printing gospels'

**A church in Algeria has been closed down on the grounds that it had been used to 'illegally print gospels and publications intended for evangelism'.**

Police in the north-western town of Aïn Turk sealed off the church, which is affiliated to the Protestant Church of Algeria (known by its French acronym, EPA). But the EPA denied any wrongdoing, saying the justifications for closing

the church were 'unfounded'. "There is no printing activity of gospels or Christian publications inside these premises," said Rev Mahmoud Haddad, the EPA president.

In cooperation with local partners and churches, Open Doors supports the Algerian church with training, literature distribution and other aid. Although the new Algerian Constitution supports freedom of religious worship, in practice it is

impossible for most churches to meet publicly.

"I am very saddened by this injustice and persecution we are facing in Algeria," said Youssef, a board member of the church.

### • PRAY

- That the government will acknowledge the rights of Christians
- That the church in Aïn Turk will be reopened.



**"I thank God that He sent us people like you to help us"**

Basima, Syria

**SYRIA: Houses restored in Homs, thanks to Open Doors supporters**

**It was called the 'capital of the revolution.' Years of heavy fighting between rebels and government have turned Homs, in Syria, to a mass of debris and rubble. But now, thanks to the generosity of Open Doors supporters, Christians are returning to their houses.**

"We visited our apartment; it was 70 per cent damaged," says Maha who has returned to Homs with her husband Souliman and her sister. "But it's not as bad as many of the other buildings." Maha bears the scars of the conflict. During her escape from Homs she was shot in the leg by a sniper. "We are so happy that we could return to live in our house. Thank you for your support to repair our house. Without that help, we wouldn't be able to return."

**SOUNDS OF SILENCE**

In 2016 Open Doors was able to help 31 families restore their houses in Homs. In the first half of 2017 some 66 families were helped to return to Homs, Daraa, Damascus and Maaloula. It is a huge challenge. Homs was once home to over a million people. Now complete neighbourhoods lie desolate.

"What strikes you most is the silence," says an Open Doors worker, "the complete absence of any sound of living beings in some parts."

Elderly couple Antoon Mansoor and Basima Abo Jamd fled from their house in Homs when it was hit by a mortar shell. "It was a miracle that we weren't injured," Antoon says. "There was

shrapnel flying all around, but I wasn't hit."

Now their house smells of fresh paint. "Thanks to your support we could return here," says Basima. "Of course, we always were thankful to God that we were safe. But we also hoped that one day we would be able to return."

Basima and Antoon spent five years in exile. "I didn't expect that we would be able to come back here," says Basima. "I am so happy! I thank God that He sent us people like you to help us."

The couple have been helped to settle by their local priest. "I was afraid we couldn't repair this house, it was so damaged," he says. "But when I talked with Open Doors they agreed to help. I am so happy that we could finish the house before the winter comes. This house has been family property for over 100 years."

"Now I feel much better, much stronger," says Antoon. "I can breathe again, I am happy."

**• PRAY**

- Thank God that families are able to return to Homs and other areas
- For Open Doors partners helping displaced Christians rebuild their homes
- For peace in Syria, and security for Christians.



*Maha (LEFT) and her husband have been able to return to their home in Homs*



*Basima and Antoon's house has been repaired thanks to your support*

## PAKISTAN: EU delegation visits Asia Bibi

### Three European Parliament Members recently visited the family of Asia Bibi, the Christian mother-of-five unjustly accused of blasphemy.

Asia Bibi (48) has been in prison since 2009. She was accused of blasphemy after an argument with some Muslim co-workers and sentenced to death by hanging in 2010. Her subsequent appeal to Pakistan's Supreme Court was adjourned amid protests, and she has been in limbo ever since.

The delegation met with Pakistan's Minister for Law and Justice. "As a first step, we want to see an end to the massive misuse of the legislation," he said. "One way to do that is to prosecute those who make false accusations."

They were then driven in armoured vehicles to the home of Asia Bibi's family in Lahore to hear from her husband and children. Despite Asia's long ordeal, her lawyer reports that she 'is both mentally and physically in good condition – it's a miracle'.

Pakistan's stringent blasphemy laws are often used against

religious minorities. Several Christians have been killed in Pakistan following charges of blasphemy, and others jailed. A few weeks before the EU visit, five Christian families were forced into hiding after one of their number – Sonu Arshad (18) – was accused of blasphemy. The families, from the remote village of Sukheki, 200 km north of Lahore, fled after a Facebook page purporting to be that of a local TV channel posted a photograph of the teenager and

asked locals to 'burn his church and give him the death penalty'.

#### • PRAY

- For Pakistan's religious minorities, who often find themselves the targets of persecution
- For Asia Bibi and her family, that she would be safely released.

Source: World Watch Monitor



Asia Bibi has been in prison since 2009, accused of blasphemy

## EGYPT: After 20 years, churches given approval to rebuild

### In a rare moment of good news for southern Egypt's beleaguered Christians, 21 churches have received approval from local authorities to rebuild, restore and expand.

Some of the churches had been waiting for more than 20 years for a permit to come through. The approvals, issued by Essam al-Bedeiwi, governor of Egypt's southern Minya governorate, may have been the result of visits by international evangelical delegations to Cairo. A local source said that Egypt's President is keen to 'show the US that Egypt is standing with the Christians and that there is no persecution in Minya governorate'.

Violence against the Christian

minority has been increasing in Minya, where many churches have been forcibly closed or set on fire. In November, in one weekend alone, four Coptic churches were closed by local authorities in Upper Egypt. The Bishop of Minya, Anba Macarius, said: "It is as though worship is a crime that Copts have to be penalised for."

In the same month, Saeed Ibrahim al-Sonbati (19) was sentenced to death for the murder of Coptic priest Samaan Shehata (45), who was on a visit to Cairo.

Meanwhile, Coptic churches around the country rang bells in solidarity with the victims of a bomb attack on the al-Rawda Mosque in north Sinai which killed at least 309 people and

injured 128. A local Islamic State affiliate known as Sinai Province is threatening to impose its hardline interpretation of Islam on Egypt's north Sinai population around El-Arish, Sinai's largest city. Hundreds of Copts have already fled the Sinai peninsular after eight Copts were murdered and Islamists posted videos and leaflets telling Copts to leave the area or be killed.

#### • PRAY

- That the churches would be rebuilt without danger or interference
- For local churches and Open Doors partners supporting Christians in Egypt with advocacy services and practical support.

# HOW TO SURVIVE IN NORTH KOREA



**North Korea is the most dangerous place in the world to be a Christian. Since 2002, it's been number one on the Open Doors World Watch List, the annual ranking of the 50 countries where Christians face the most extreme persecution.** Every aspect of life in North Korea is controlled by the state, and the belief that there is a higher

authority than the nation's leader, Kim Jong-un, is seen as a threat that must be crushed. Tens of thousands of Christians are incarcerated in horrific labour camps, and thousands more keep their faith in Christ a complete secret.

And yet, incredibly, the church in North Korea is growing – Open Doors estimates that there

are 300,000 courageous believers in North Korea. In such an oppressive state, this should be impossible. How do they survive?

### **SURVIVAL STEP 1: KEEP YOUR FAITH A SECRET**

The people of North Korea are under constant surveillance, and the authorities are always looking for signs of anything that might pose a threat to the ruling regime. There are even rewards for those who help discover Christians, such as being given a better house or a better job.

There is a neighbourhood watch system called *Inminban*, and every North Korean citizen is part of a local unit. The unit leader will write reports on each of the members, asking questions about who has been visiting their homes, any absences, whether they have participated in volunteer work, and even whether they clean the portraits of the country's leaders on their walls (all homes in North Korea have these portraits).

North Koreans also have to take part in self-criticism sessions with their local communities every week. They must say what they have done wrong that week and how they will improve, and then others in the group will accuse them of other wrongdoings. In reality, friends will arrange to



*Portraits of the dynastic family must be hung in all homes and schools*

criticise each other, but only for minor offences.

With so many eyes upon them, Christians must be very careful to keep their faith completely secret.

### **SURVIVAL STEP 2: BE SUSPICIOUS OF OTHER CHRISTIANS**

Government spies often try to infiltrate Christian networks. A refugee who has escaped North Korea remembers talking to someone being trained as a spy: "There are courses for religion in Kim Il-sung University. Most graduates are recruited by the NSA (the National Security Agency). The informant said he was being trained to uncover religious people according to special directions from the NSA.

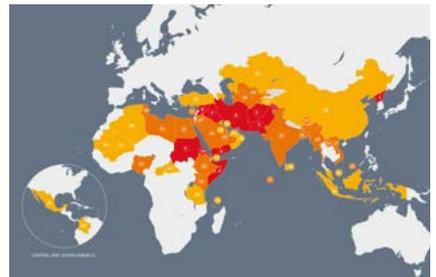
"He was supposed to look for things such as a person who remains silent with closed eyes and

### **TIME TO WAKE UP THE WORLD**

The World Watch List is Open Doors' annual ranking of the 50 countries where Christians face the most extreme persecution. It's a unique, in-depth record of the places where faith in Jesus costs the most, demonstrating the enormous scale of persecution being faced by Christians, not only in North Korea, but around the world.

#### **Take action:**

- The 2018 World Watch List will be launched on our website on 10 January. As persecution increases around the world, find out if North Korea is still number 1, along with all the latest information and prayer points, at [www.opendoorsuk.org](http://www.opendoorsuk.org)
- We will be launching the 2018 World Watch List in parliament on 17 January, asking our leaders to act on behalf of persecuted Christians. If you haven't already, **please ask your MP to attend** – visit our website to find out how.
- Pre-order the *World Watch List Church Pack* and take the stories of our persecuted brothers and sisters to your church – call our Inspire team on **01993 460015** or go to [www.opendoorsuk.org](http://www.opendoorsuk.org).



## WHO ARE NORTH KOREA'S LEADERS?

North Korea has been ruled by the same family for three generations, and these leaders are worshipped as gods. People bow in reverence to statues and images of them, and they are believed to be all-powerful entities guiding North Korea.

- **Kim Il-sung (leader from 1945 until his death in 1994)**

Became the leader of North Korea after the overthrow of Japanese rule. Known as 'the Great Leader'. His birthday is celebrated as a public holiday, called 'Day of the Sun'.

- **Kim Jong-il (leader from 1994 until his death in 2011)**

Son of Kim Il-sung. Known as 'the Dear Leader'.

- **Kim Jong-un (leader from 2011 to the present)**

Son of Kim Jong-il. His official title is 'Dear Respected Comrade Kim Jong-un, Chairman of the Workers' Party of Korea, Chairman of the State Affairs Commission of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and Supreme Commander of the Korean People's Army'.



meditates, or when habitual smokers or drinkers quit smoking or drinking all of a sudden. These people should be targets to be watched closely."

These spies may set up fake prayer meetings and learn extraordinary conversion stories. They will be given a good knowledge of the Bible, which makes it possible for them to convince real Christians that they are trustworthy. "Our biggest fear is that there may be a Judas within the church organisation," a secret church leader told Open Doors.

### **SURVIVAL STEP 3: DON'T TELL YOUR CHILDREN**

Most Christian parents don't tell their children about their faith until they are adults, for fear that they might accidentally let something slip. Children are indoctrinated from a young age to love the leaders of North Korea; the first words parents must teach their children are the words 'Thank you, Father Kim Il-sung.' At school they learn about the Kim family and their wonderful deeds. They are also taught that Christians are evil spies who kidnap, torture and kill innocent North Korean children, and sell their organs and blood.

But by God's grace, some North Korean children do find out about Jesus, often by accident. Sang-Hwa\* says, "My parents were

Christians, but they never told me and my brothers and sisters. One day, when I was 12, I discovered the family Bible by accident. My duty was to turn them in, but I also knew I would never see them again. So I told my father. He was shocked to find out I had discovered the book. Then he explained the gospel to me and also emphasised that I should never tell anyone."

#### **📞 Look out for...**

Sang-Hwa's full story will be on the Open Doors website in January: [www.opendoorsuk.org](http://www.opendoorsuk.org)

### **SURVIVAL STEP 4: SHARE WHAT YOU HAVE**

This might seem like a strange instruction for surviving in North Korea, where most people have very little. Every year there are natural disasters, with droughts in the dry seasons and flooding and mud slides in the rainy seasons. Harvests are poor. North Korea operates a 'military first' policy for distributing food and resources, meaning that ordinary people are often left to go hungry. An incredible 60,000 secret believers depend on Open Doors to smuggle in food, medicines and clothes to help them survive.

And yet, North Korean Christians choose

*continued on page 12* ►

\*Name changed for security reasons



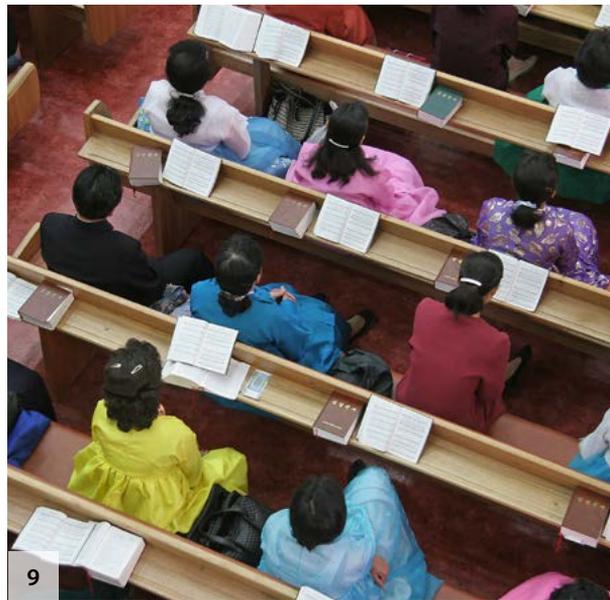
1 Ordinary people in North Korea have very little – some are forced to eat grass to survive. | 2 A propaganda image showing Kim Il-sung and his son, Kim Jong-il, with children. The first words parents must teach their children are 'Thank you, Father Kim Il-sung'. | 3 People bowing before a statue of Kim Il-sung, the founder of modern day North Korea. | 4 Many desperate North Korean women are trafficked to China and sold into marriage. The North Korean women in this picture are taking part in a Bible study run by Open Doors in China. | 5 Behind this mountain range is the Yodok concentration camp. Between 50,000 and 70,000 Christians are imprisoned in camps in North Korea. |



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9

**6** The people of North Korea are constantly being watched – by spies, their neighbours, and even their own family members. **7** It is completely illegal to own a Bible in North Korea, but incredibly, Open Doors workers are able to smuggle Bibles to secret believers. **8** The Juche Tower in Pyongyang. 'Juche' is the philosophy introduced by Kim Il-sung, which points to man's self-sufficiency. **9** There are four church buildings in North Korea's capital, Pyongyang. However, defectors testify that these churches hold fake services in an attempt to convince visitors to the country that there is religious freedom in North Korea.

## HOW TO SURVIVE IN NORTH KOREA

to share the little resources that they have with those who have even less. One Chinese worker who has been involved in missions among North Koreans says, "At the height of the famine a leader felt called to reintroduce the concept of 'holy rice', a practice whereby rice is set apart for use in God's kingdom. Ever since, these Christians don't consume all the food they receive from us. They save some to give to people who are even worse off than them. This gives them an opportunity to build trust and later share the gospel with these people."

### **SURVIVAL STEP 5: HOLD ON TO HOPE**

Kim Jong-un's recent missile tests and verbal threats have provided an excuse to demand more work of the North Korean people, making them too tired to engage in illegal activities. He counters international tensions by calling for 100-day mobilisation periods. During these periods, people are called to do extra work, on top of the 48-hour work weeks that many people already do and the 'voluntary work' that is expected of them, leaving them with little spare time.

"These mobilisation periods drain our energy," says one secret church leader. "However, we try to serve God when we can and even have small meetings. Whenever I visit our suffering believers' houses, I see if they have any problems and try to prepare any countermeasures for them. Even though they are suffering from many things in life, I encourage them to find hope and happiness through their hardships and live with hope for the eternal kingdom of God."

### **SURVIVAL STEP 6: DON'T GIVE UP – EVEN IF YOU GET CAUGHT**

Open Doors estimates that there are between 50,000 and 70,000 Christians imprisoned in terrible conditions in North Korea – in labour camps comparable to the concentration camps of the Second World War. But we know from the stories of those who have escaped that many stand firm in their faith, even under the most horrific circumstances.

Hannah and her family were arrested for leaving North Korea. When it was discovered that they were Christians, they were all put in solitary confinement.

She says, "Prisoners in solitary confinement were badly beaten up. Nobody dared to resist because you'd only make the torture worse. But my husband was different. The more they tortured him, the harder he defended his faith. He yelled at them: 'If believing in God is a sin, I'd rather die! Just kill me! It's my mission to live according to God's will!'"



North Koreans are required to do extra work during mobilisation periods, which often includes manual labour



Satellite view of prison camp 'Camp 25', near Chongjin city



Hannah: "We prayed throughout our time in prison... God answered our prayer."

"Of course, we prayed throughout our time in prison. One day, our entire family was called out of the prison cell. We were in front of the deputy of the prison, waiting to hear our verdict, and in our minds we all desperately prayed for a miracle. We didn't want to suffer and die in a political prisoner camp. God answered our prayer. The deputy gave us a special amnesty. When we walked out of the prison that night and were finally free and alone, we quietly sang a hymn."

### **📞 Look out for...**

Hannah's full story will be on the Open Doors website in January. Visit [www.opendoorsuk.org](http://www.opendoorsuk.org)

# YOU CAN HELP NORTH KOREA'S SECRET BELIEVERS SURVIVE

Of course, it is by God's amazing grace and power that the church in North Korea continues to endure and grow. He is working through the courage and faith of our persecuted brothers and sisters, and the prayers and actions of His global church family.

With North Korea making the headlines recently, it could be easy to feel that the situation in the country is only getting worse. But God is at work. One of our contacts recently told us, "Never before have I seen so many North Koreans come to faith as nowadays. The spiritual battle always intensifies when God is doing something amazing."

It makes a huge difference to our brothers and sisters in North Korea to know that they are not forgotten by us. One secret believer says, "We

always remember your love and concern for us. We are doing well thanks to your prayers."

**Open Doors workers are able to reach 60,000 believers in North Korea with food, clothes and medicines.** They also smuggle in Bibles and Christian books, and broadcast Christian radio programmes into North Korea at night, to help these courageous believers learn more about the faith they're risking everything for.

An Open Doors worker says, "Without your prayers and financial support we cannot continue this ministry. A gift of a few pounds makes a massive difference in a country where the average person doesn't make more than £2 a month."

## GIVE YOUR HOLY RICE

A gift from you today can help our courageous brothers and sisters in North Korea survive, as well as supporting believers who are facing extreme persecution around the world.

**Every £20** can provide Bible study materials for two courageous North Korean believers, to build their faith and bring them comfort.

**Every £58** can provide food, medicine and clothes to support a North Korean family for a month, helping them survive the long harsh winter.

One North Korean believer told us, "The joy we felt when we received your support, goods and Christian materials is inexpressible. There are no words to express our thankfulness."

## PRAY

Please keep our North Korean church family in your prayers – you'll find prayer points for them in your January prayer diary. If you'd like to spend time praying for our brothers and sisters in North Korea during Lent, why not order a copy of *Live Like a North Korean*, with daily prayers and reflections for individuals, challenging follow-up activities and downloadable resources for small groups.



## SEND A MESSAGE OF ENCOURAGEMENT

It is a huge encouragement for our brothers and sisters in North Korea to know they are being prayed for and support by their church family around the world.

There is a rare opportunity for you to send a brief message of encouragement to North Korean believers. The messages will be translated into Korean, recorded by North Korean believers in South Korea and broadcast over the radio to North Koreans at night.

The ideal message is brief but specific. E.g. 'My name is Jane, I am from the UK. I have prayed for North Korea since 2005. I pray that God will give you the courage and strength to follow Him no matter the circumstances.'

Your words can communicate God's hope to those who are facing significant hardship and remind them that the body of Christ is full of people who care and are praying for them. To send your message, visit [www.opendoorsuk.org/encouragenk](http://www.opendoorsuk.org/encouragenk)

# 12 MONTHS OF HOPE

Thank you for bringing hope to the Middle East in 2017! Your faithful generosity has provided tens of thousands of families in Iraq and Syria with vital aid such as food and medicines, as well as giving them hope for the future by rebuilding homes and creating jobs. Over 170,000 people in the UK and Ireland signed the *Hope for the Middle East* petition, calling on the UN and the UK government to act on behalf of Christians and other minorities in the Middle East. And tens of thousands of people prayed, asking God to be at work. Here's what happened:

## JANUARY

Thousands of people invited their MPs to the launch of the 2017 World Watch List in Parliament, to hear Father Daniel speak about life for Christians in Iraq. Over 90 Parliamentarians were there and were challenged to act.



## FEBRUARY

Open Doors launched an encouragement app, a way for believers in the Middle East to receive encouragement online from their family around the world. One believer in the Middle East said that the app is 'more than wonderful and it brings a lot of comfort and joy'.

## MARCH

Friends, families, small groups and churches across the country came together to share a meal and focus on the persecuted church during the month of Lent, using Open Doors' *Fast Food* resource. Week 3 introduced Pastor Edward in Syria. He says, "We are so thankful. In many ways prayers are being answered."



## APRIL

Syrian Christians celebrated Easter at a special service at St Elias Cathedral in Aleppo. The service focused on encouraging families who had lost loved ones – emphasising the Easter message of resurrection. Syrian believer Sarah\* said: "It was the first time in about five years that we were able to come together in freedom again. For many years we could only imagine returning to this place."



## MAY & JUNE

Your support kept hope alive for our church family in Syria and Iraq as you faithfully gave towards regenerating the lives of Christians in the region. Some of the money created employment through the opening of a stone factory outside Mosul. Nashwan, one of the men now employed there, said: "Without this project I would still be unemployed at home. But now it is better. I can take care of my family again. We thank the church for supporting us."



## JULY

Islamic State (IS) were driven out of the Iraqi city of Mosul by Iraqi forces. As Christians who had fled the city returned, they found their houses completely ransacked. However, thanks to your support, Open Doors' partners in Iraq have been able to begin rebuilding houses and lives in Mosul.

\*Name changed for security reasons

## AUGUST

People who attended Christian festivals across the UK and Ireland this summer were introduced to Noeh, a 12-year-old boy from Karamles in Iraq, who fled his home with his family as IS invaded his town and set fire to his house. Since the festivals, schools in Noeh's region of Iraq have started functioning again. His mother said: "Noeh is a smart student and he's doing well in his exams at school. I am very happy for that and I thank God."



## SEPTEMBER

Christians around the UK and Ireland continued to give generously to help their family in Syria and Iraq. Some of these funds have gone towards rebuilding homes in parts of Syria. Elderly couple Antoom and Basima were able to return to their house in Homs after six years of displacement. Antoom said, "I didn't expect that we would be able to come back, but we did! I am so happy, this house has belonged to our family for more than 100 years. I thank God for the people who supported us."



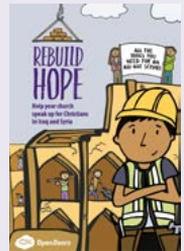
## OCTOBER

Christians in Kirkuk, Iraq, are left uncertain about their future due to instability following the Kurdish independence referendum. Tensions between Iraqi forces and the Kurdish Peshmerga have left the Christian minority confused and afraid. Even so, local Christian leader Father Farris is working hard to restore confidence within his community. He said: "Pastoral work means that you need to be with the people. It is about giving and sacrifice, especially in times of crisis and difficulties."



## NOVEMBER

Thousands of Christians prayed for Iraq and Syria on the International Day of Prayer for the persecuted church. Over 7,300 *Rebuild Hope* church packs were ordered, aiding churches to pray and stand with persecuted Christians around the world. Many used this opportunity to share the petition with their church – bringing in valuable signatures right up to the deadline. Thank you!



**See this issue's special insert for a report on December's *Hope for the Middle East* petition presentations!**

## DECEMBER

2017 culminated with the presentation of the *Hope for the Middle East* petition at the United Nations and Westminster. All of the hard work you put into collecting signatures came together to greatly impact these places of power. (You can read more in the special insert included with this magazine.)

**It's been quite a journey. But the journey for Christians in Iraq and Syria has only just begun. Please continue to stand with Christians in the Middle East as they rebuild their homes and lives in 2018 and beyond. If you ordered a wristband please use it to remind you to pray, and look out for the *Hope for the Middle East* updates in our monthly email and prayer diary.**

*A message of encouragement can be a life-changer, heart-healer, smile-starter, pain-soother, hope-summoner, hand-holder, faith-lifter, love-bearer, joy-giver, prayer-carrier, grace-pourer, peace-bringer. It can make you ...*

# STRONGER

*Your messages strengthened Damaris Kioko in Kenya.*

**Damaris and Jackson Kioko were married in April 2012. Eight days later, Jackson was murdered in Mombasa as he was about to share the gospel with colleague Dr Ben Juma. An angry mob lured them into a trap, killed them, and burnt their bodies to ashes.**

After his funeral, Damaris struggled. "People would try to talk to me, but I mostly could not concentrate." When other people moved on, she felt isolated. Then Hadassa\*, an Open Doors worker, arrived.

**"I felt loved once again. Bitterness started melting away."**

"You know, I did not know her or where she had come from. But I realised there were people who were concerned about me: the body of Christ. After we prayed together, she gave me a card and said they would continue praying for me. It really strengthened me.

"After some time, she came back again with so many letters! People were encouraging me and telling me they were praying for me. That started building my faith again. Receiving those letters was the first time I could smile or laugh again. After this visit, I started praying again. I thought, 'If people are praying for me, why can't I?' I felt loved once again. Bitterness started melting away."



And in July 2017, sadness was replaced by joy as Damaris Kioko and her new husband, Steve, were married.

Damaris says: "I would like to thank each and every one who took the time to write letters to me. Thank you so much for your prayers. I feel that we are in the same family, even if we have not met.

**"I would like to thank each and every one who took the time to write letters to me."**

"Every time I read those letters, tears come to my eyes because they minister to me. They have motivated me to continue in the faith and continue to serve God even more than I did before.

"How I wish you would continue this with the same heart to other people who are in hardship, because when you are in hardship you cannot stand on your own. Just know they are very encouraging and they uplift a soul that has been crushed. You may not be seen, you may not be known, but just know that God will reward you hundredfold."

*\*Name changed for security reasons*



## Jeovani, Steven and Dieu-Fera CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC

**When Muslim Séléka rebels fired an RPG into the Evangelical Church of the Brethren in Bangui, in 2012, young boys Jeovani, Steven and Dieu Fera suffered debilitating leg injuries that resulted in amputations.**

Since then, Open Doors has helped by providing prostheses, paying school fees, and helping their families set up small businesses. But when it was noticed that all three boys were struggling to adapt, supporters were invited to send messages of encouragement. The Open Doors team recently visited to deliver letters and to see how they are getting on.

The good news is that double-amputee Jeovani is making good progress, walking around using only

one crutch. Dieu-Fera is recovering well, running around and even playing sports. Steven outgrew his prosthesis, but has since received a replacement.

The letter-writing campaign is now closed, but please continue to pray for their schooling, the success of their parents' businesses, and especially for Dieu-Fera, who has been in the care of his grandmother since his mother's death.

All three have really appreciated the cards and messages they received from around the world. "Jeovani was all smiles and very happy when we met him," our local co-worker reported. "He tells his friends that it is people abroad who care for him."



*Jeovani is all smiles and progressing well*



*Steven loves showing his cards to his friends*



*Dieu Fera says "May God bless you!"*

## NEW!

### Encourage NORTH KOREAN BELIEVERS

**There is a rare opportunity for you to send a brief message of encouragement to North Korean believers. The messages will be translated into Korean, recorded by North Korean believers in South Korea and broadcast over the radio to North Koreans at night.**

The ideal message is brief but specific. Eg, "My name is Jane, I am from the UK. I have prayed for North Korea since 2005. I pray that God will give you the courage and strength to follow Him."

Your words can communicate God's hope

to those who are facing significant hardship and remind them that the body of Christ is full of people who care and are praying for them.

To send your message, visit our website: [www.opendoorsuk.org/encouragenk](http://www.opendoorsuk.org/encouragenk)



**You can strengthen other persecuted Christians through messages of support**

For more information about who you can write to, use the response form to order the new Letter-writing Guide or go to [www.opendoorsuk.org/write](http://www.opendoorsuk.org/write)



# JORDAN MUSKATHLON 2018

— | THINK YOU CAN'T? THINK AGAIN! | —

**Do you love to push yourself to your limits? Are you passionate about making a difference to the lives of Christians around the world? The Open Doors Muskathlon is an extreme endurance event which gives you the opportunity to run, cycle or walk in an extreme location, meet persecuted believers – and raise funds that will change lives.**

In October, three courageous Muskathletes embraced these challenges fully as they took part in our first ever Muskathlon to the island of Sri Lanka. Although it's a secular state, reports of intimidation of Christians have been increasing there, with services and prayer meetings stopped and church buildings attacked. We asked William from Brixham to share some of his experiences.



## **Why did you choose to take part in a Muskathlon?**

My wife and I were already Open Doors supporters and when we retired I started cycling to keep fit. I was interested in the Muskathlon in Sri Lanka, as our godson and his parents are Sri Lankan, but the idea of taking part was right outside my comfort zone. Through a sermon at church, the Lord challenged me about this, promising that He would provide. Although a little fearful, my wife recognised this to be God's will and gave me her full support. Our local church also supported us very enthusiastically throughout the whole venture.

## **What were the highlights of the Muskathlon?**

I was aware of God's faithfulness throughout the whole trip, but there were two standout moments. First, when we were worshipping in the Sri Lankan church with the local believers, I was reminded of the passage in Revelation 7v9 where people of every tribe and nation worship around the throne of God and I had such deep sense of joy. Second, on my last lap of the event, the rain started to come down in torrents and I was really struggling physically. Then I realised that this was helping me to identify with the suffering church and I was overwhelmed with joy. It was an outpouring in both senses of the word!

## **How did you feel supported along the way?**

The other team members were so encouraging

and supportive. And it was wonderful to meet the Sri Lankan Christians who were manning the refreshment stations along the way. One young Sri Lankan man even cycled alongside me for a while. He asked me my age and when I told him, he replied "...but you ride your bike like a teenager!"

## **What was the greatest challenge?**

It was during the months of training, something quite new for me. I built up my stamina and strength on my exercise bike and did regular bike rides of increasing length. However, in May I felt quite unwell and had to spend a night in hospital as I had some unusual heart palpitations. Later I had to wear a heart monitor for six days. Nothing serious was detected, but I often had short periods of physical weakness. My GP detected a slight heart murmur and insisted I see a cardiologist. One night in August I felt so weak and unwell that I considered abandoning the whole venture. In desperation I cried out to God and He wonderfully enabled me to do the six-hour ride I had planned for the next day! I went ahead and booked the flights, even though I had to wait until the end of September for the cardiologist's report giving me the all clear. Our church prayed faithfully for me and I have had no recurring symptoms since.

## **What would you say to people thinking of doing a Muskathlon?**

If the Lord wants you to go, He really will enable you. He is totally faithful!

## BOOKINGS ARE NOW OPEN FOR NEXT YEAR'S JORDAN MUSKATHLON

Sign up now to join the team and make a difference!

**Dates:** 6-13 October 2018

### Challenge:

- Run 13, 26 or 39 miles, OR trek 39 miles, OR cycle 75 miles – we'll give you a training plan and invite you to our training days
- Raise £10,000 to help support Syrian and Iraqi refugees fleeing extreme persecution – we'll give you lots of fundraising tips and advice, and help you manage your Just Giving site
- Deepen your faith – we'll pray for you throughout your adventure

### Itinerary:

- Daily group devotions and team times
- Visits to refugees from Syria and Iraq
- Training sessions
- Sightseeing trips
- Visits to churches in Jordan
- Post event celebration

**Costs:** £1800 trip costs plus flights

### Bookings:

To find out more and book your place, visit [www.opendoorsuk.org/muskathlon](http://www.opendoorsuk.org/muskathlon), email [challenge@opendoorsuk.org](mailto:challenge@opendoorsuk.org) or ring **01993 460015**.



## HOT OFF THE PRESS... NEW CHALLENGE EVENTS IN 2018!

### Runs

Whether you are an experienced runner or a complete novice, how about 'running for their lives'? In 2018 we have places for:

- Great Newham 10k Run - July 2018 (date yet to be confirmed)
- Great North Run Half Marathon - 9 September 2018
- Great Bristol Half Marathon - 23 September 2018
- Birmingham International Marathon - 14 October 2018

### Cycle Land's End to John O'Groats

From the rocky cliffs and pounding seas of Land's End, to the Northernmost point of the UK mainland, the Land's End to John O'Groats cycle challenge will test you to your limits. Join us from 28 August - 9 September 2018 as we travel 1,000 miles on this iconic adventure.

**To find out more and book your place, visit [www.opendoorsuk.org](http://www.opendoorsuk.org), email [challenge@opendoorsuk.org](mailto:challenge@opendoorsuk.org) or ring **01993 460015**.**

# **“LORD, LORD, PLEASE HELP!”**

**The only prayer learned by a  
secret Christian in North Korea**

Christians in North Korea face arrest, torture and almost certain death if their faith is discovered. And yet, there are thousands of courageous secret Christians in North Korea, who believe that following Jesus is worth the risk.

Open Doors' secret networks risk all to reach 60,000 secret believers with food, medicine and clothes, as well as smuggling in Bibles.

**Every £20 can provide Bible study materials for two courageous North Korean believers, to build their faith and bring them comfort.**

**Every £58 can provide food, medicine and clothes to support a North Korean family for a month, helping them survive the long harsh winter.**

Will you be there for your persecuted brothers and sisters for as long as it takes? Your prayers and gifts could be the answer to the prayers of a believer facing extreme persecution. Use the response form, call 01993 460015, or visit [www.opendoorsuk.org](http://www.opendoorsuk.org)

**Open Doors' annual ranking of the 50 countries where Christians face the most extreme persecution, the World Watch List, will be released on 10 January – visit our website then to find out if North Korea is still number one.**