

# GUTS AND COURAGE

Get inspired to follow Jesus no matter what the cost



Stories from places where faith costs the most

[www.opendoorsca.org/youth](http://www.opendoorsca.org/youth)



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


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**“WE OUGHT TO BECOME PEOPLE OF GUTS AND COURAGE, WITH STRONG CONVICTIONS – TO NOT COUNT OUR LIVES DEAR UNTO OURSELVES. IF ONLY WE COULD FULFIL THE HIGH CALLING OF GOD ON OUR LIVES.”**

**BROTHER ANDREW, FOUNDER OF OPEN DOORS**

## **WHEN BROTHER ANDREW TALKS HAVING GUTS AND COURAGE, HE KNOWS WHAT HE’S TALKING ABOUT.**

Brother Andrew became a Christian in his early twenties, and chose to say ‘yes’ to wherever God would lead him. Initially that meant some pretty risky trips from his home in the Netherlands to the Soviet Bloc, where he would smuggle illegal Bibles to Christians facing pressure from the communist regime. Since then he has visited nearly all the places where Christians face the worst persecution, encouraging and strengthening the church with each step. He’s befriended and shared the gospel with known terrorists and taken God’s love to the darkest of places. Because of his guts and courage, Open Doors, the movement he founded, now supports Christians facing persecution in more than 60 countries across the world.





**"IF ONE PART SUFFERS,  
EVERY PART SUFFERS  
WITH IT"**

**1 CORINTHIANS 12:26**

**WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO HAVE TRUE COURAGE? WE'RE OFTEN SHOWN IN MOVIES THAT THOSE WITH THE GREATEST STRENGTH, THE BIGGEST MUSCLES, OR MOST GUNS ARE THE MOST COURAGEOUS. BUT MAYBE THAT'S NOT RIGHT.**

True courage is about determination; it's when you keep going no matter what you face; when you choose love in the face of hatred and pain; when you spark a light in the bleakest of dark places. You don't need guns or muscles.

Jesus said that following Him wouldn't always be easy. In fact He says 'For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it' (Matt 16:25). Finding life with Jesus means we need some immense



courage to be prepared to die to ourselves and put Him above all else. Sounds tough, right? Well, it is. And millions of Christians around the world have knowingly embraced the cost of following Jesus. Why? Because knowing God, our heavenly, loving Father is worth more than anything money, possessions, reputation or security can offer us. Knowing God means millions of Christians are prepared to courageously face persecution.

## PERCY WHAT?

**Perse-cution. It's when you're singled out and targeted because of what you believe or who you are.**

**Believe it or not, followers of Jesus are the most persecuted group in the world.**

Millions face abuse, violence, intimidation, arrest, torture, beatings, exclusion, isolation, rejection, fear and death because of their choice to follow Jesus. This is happening across the world – from North Korea to India, Nigeria, Kenya, across the Middle East and even in Colombia, too. And it's getting more extreme. In 2016, over 3,000 Christians were killed for their faith in Jesus. In fact, 1 in 12 Christians on the planet face at least 'high' levels of persecution. Shocking, right?

## WHY DOES IT MATTER?

The worldwide church is a body. In the New Testament, Paul, one of the leaders

of the early church, says that this body must work together. He's pretty insistent – he says there are no parts of the body that are more important than the rest, and all the parts are needed for the body to work and function properly. But it's more than that too. He says if one part suffers, we all do. So, when Christians in other parts of the world suffer for their faith, it should hurt us. It should move us. And we should respond in whatever way we can. Read what Paul says for yourself in 1 Corinthians 12:12-26.

## IT'S ALL ABOUT FAMILY

But it's important that we don't just see persecuted Christians as victims. They are our family. They are our brothers and sisters in Christ, and importantly, many of them can inspire us to greater passion, vision and courage in our walk with God.

Just check out the stories and reflections over the next few pages. Each one is about a person living in a country on the Open Doors 2018 World Watch List\* - that means they live in a place where Christians face some pretty extreme challenges. The young people in these stories show us that following Jesus takes true guts and true courage. They challenge us, with the freedom we have, to follow Jesus no matter what, because we know He is more than worth it.

*\*Every year Open Doors publishes the World Watch List, a ranking of the 50 countries where following Jesus is toughest. Visit our website to get more information, or request your own copy by emailing [youth@odcan.org](mailto:youth@odcan.org)*





# IT TAKES GUTS TO BELIEVE

LUKE 9:23-25



No.1  
North Korea  
94 World Watch  
List points

IMAGE IS ILLUSTRATIVE

**“I WAS AFRAID TO TOUCH THE BIBLE, BUT I  
COULDN’T JUST LEAVE IT THERE. I CLOSED MY EYES,  
PICKED UP THE BOOK AND PUT IT BACK.”**

**Kim Sang Hwa grew up in North Korea. For followers of Jesus it’s the most dangerous place in the world. Anyone suspected of being a Christian will be interrogated and potentially sent to a harsh labour camp, while owning a Bible will most definitely lead to arrest.**

Kim knew this. So, when she found her parents’ Bible at the age of 12, hidden in a secret cupboard, she was pretty scared. At the time she had no clue that her parents were even Christians; they’d kept their faith hidden from her to protect her. After finding the illegal Bible she didn’t know what to do. She knew she should tell her teacher or the local police, but then she also loved her family.



After 15 days wondering what to do, Kim spoke to her father. He was surprised, but sat her down and explained who God was, and how her heavenly Father had created the world. Over the following weeks and months she had many conversations with her parents, until she herself chose to believe. She learned to pray in whispers, knowing she couldn't tell anyone about her faith.

What a decision. It takes courage to make that choice. It takes guts to know you're choosing a faith that could cost you everything.

Years on, Kim now lives in South Korea, but she's still as brave as ever: "I wish I could go back to North Korea and share the Gospel with the people there."

## WHAT'S IT LIKE IN NORTH KOREA?

- North Korea has been the place where following Jesus costs the most for nearly 20 years
- Christians are viewed as spies and traitors, and if found they will face arrest, torture, imprisonment, and perhaps even public execution
- Up to 70,000 Christians are imprisoned in harsh labour camps.
- Christians therefore keep their faith a complete secret; many don't even tell their children
- But the church appears to be growing. There may be as many as 300,000 secret believers in North Korea!

## RESPONSE:

Following Jesus is a choice, and one that should cost us. Christians, like Kim, from North Korea understand that being a Christian is worth risking everything for, including their lives. What about us? What, if anything, are we prepared to give up for Jesus?

## PRAYER:

Father God, thank You for secret Christians in North Korea. Thank You for their courage, belief and perseverance. Help them find ways to meet and encourage one another and share Your love without being found out. Help me to have the courage to believe and follow You with all I have. Amen.



# IT TAKES GUTS TO TELL OTHERS

ACTS 4:23-31



**That's something Christians in India know first-hand. For many, especially converts from Hinduism, sharing your love of Jesus will have severe consequences.**

Subhash was born into a Hindu family. He's young and married - in his twenties. But when his wife

**FOR MANY OF US, ACTUALLY SPEAKING ABOUT OUR FAITH WITH OTHERS CAN BE A PRETTY DAUNTING THOUGHT. IT TAKES COURAGE AND GUTS TO TELL OTHERS.**

became sick, a Christian pastor prayed for her and she was healed. This changed everything. Subhash decided to follow Jesus for himself, and just as his pastor had prayed for his sick wife, Subhash began praying for lots of sick people. In fact, many were healed because of his prayers, so much so, that he started holding special meetings where he'd share the gospel and pray for people. Up to 3,000 people came

to one of these gatherings!  
But all this attention started worrying the authorities. Subhash was arrested on false charges and held in prison while the claims were investigated. The prison officers would hit him, but he didn't fight back - instead, he chose to fast and pray. Then in prison, he began doing exactly what he'd been arrested for – he started telling others about God's love.

*“God used me inside the prison. I shared the gospel with twelve other inmates. Eleven of them believed, so I taught them how to pray”.*

What amazing courage - to keep sharing Jesus' love and hope when doing so could make things even worse! Subhash was released, but is still fighting the false charges against him.

### **RESPONSE:**

If we live in North America, we have some immense privileges. We're free to follow Jesus, and share that with others, without fear of arrest or violence. But sharing can still take guts, and it might well cost us. Subhash went to prison for his faith, but still kept telling others about Jesus. How can we have the same passion to see others come to know God's love? How can we be more courageous in sharing our faith?

### **PRAYER:**

Father God, thank You for the courage of many Christians in India who are prepared to risk their safety to tell others about You. I pray many would come to know You because of the risks they are willing to take. I'm sorry when I don't have the same passion as Subhash to share Your amazing love. Give me courage to speak to my friends about You, and give me the right words to say when they ask questions about You. Amen.

### **WHAT'S IT LIKE IN INDIA?**

- Radical Hinduism is growing, and the link between being Indian and being a Hindu is becoming increasingly important
- This means tolerance for Christians and other religious minorities is decreasing
- Five states have anti-conversion laws, where it's illegal to leave Hinduism
- Those who convert from Hinduism can face extreme violence and be excluded by their families and community
- In 2017, at least eight Christians were killed and nearly 24,000 physically assaulted



# IT TAKES GUTS TO LOVE AND FORGIVE

EPHESIANS 4:29-5:2



No.14  
Nigeria  
77 World Watch  
List points

**“PEOPLE HAVE NOTICED A CHANGE. SOME OF THOSE PEOPLE WHO USED TO MOCK ME NOW ASK ME MY SECRET.”**

Forgiveness can be the one of the hardest things we ever have to do. For Esther, the pain of her past is not easy to forget. When she was 17, her village was attacked by a militant Islamic extremist group called Boko Haram who have been targeting Christian areas. In the violence, her dad was injured

and later died. If that wasn't bad enough, Esther and some other girls were taken captive by the militants.

Hidden away in the militants' camps, she faced regular pressure to convert to Islam. But she refused. She suffered severe abuse, and as a result, she became pregnant. She had a little girl called Rebecca – far from the way she had hoped to start a family.

"I had no idea how on earth I would ever be able to love this child... [But] she has become my joy and laughter amidst sadness."

Esther was eventually rescued, but with a baby fathered by a militant fighter, it was hard for her to be accepted her own community, and even her family. Thanks to help from Open Doors partners, Esther is learning to deal with her past and find freedom from her sorrow and pain. She's still clinging onto God. She's learning to forgive those who attacked and abused her: "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.'"

It takes guts for Esther to love her daughter. It takes guts for her to forgive her abusers. Courageous love, courageous forgiveness.

## RESPONSE:

Esther's experiences are horrific and extreme. Hopefully, we'll never know such trauma, but we've all been hurt in some way by other people, and caused hurt ourselves. Jesus taught us to pray 'forgive us, as we forgive those who do wrong to us'. Are there people you need to forgive or seek forgiveness from? Do you have the courage to do it?

## PRAYER:

Father God, thank You for Esther and Rebecca. Help them grow as a loving family and to always know Your acceptance, peace and love. Strengthen and protect the church in Nigeria as it faces growing extremism. Bring tolerance, peace and stability. Help me love and forgive courageously, like Esther, and like Jesus. Amen.

## WHAT'S IT LIKE IN NIGERIA?

- Nigeria is split between a largely Muslim North and largely Christian South.
- Twelve northern states have imposed Islamic law, and the minority of Christians in these states experience exclusion from government services and increasing intimidation and violence
- The Islamic extremist group Boko Haram have targeted Christian villages, attacked and burnt homes, stolen land and kidnapped many
- In other areas Fulani herdsmen, a radical Islamic tribe, target Christian villages and farmland, causing ongoing unrest
- Converts from Islam face rejection by their families and pressure to give up Christianity





# IT TAKES GUTS TO KEEP GOING

GALATIANS 6:9

No.17  
Egypt

70 World Watch  
List points

**IT TAKES GUTS TO KEEP GOING, TO CHOOSE TO STICK WITH YOUR FAITH WHEN LIFE GETS HARD. WE ALL FACE PRESSURES, TRAGEDIES AND DISAPPOINTMENTS, AND IT'S EASY TO WALK AWAY FROM GOD. IT TAKES GUTS AND COURAGE TO KEEP GOING.**

**Christians in Egypt and across the Middle East are showing us the way. When churches are attacked or homes destroyed, when people are killed or kidnapped, many cling to God, knowing His love is bigger than their questions and pain.**

Marian knows this first hand. She's from Egypt, where Christians are facing increasing persecution from violent Muslim extremist groups. When she was just 14, the unthinkable happened. She was at church, and as one service was ending and another beginning, her dad sent her home to make some tea for him. As the water was

heating up, she heard an explosion. She rushed back to the church and found a scene of carnage. Marian found her father; he was barely breathing: "I put his head on my lap... and he asked me to take care of my younger brother and sister. Then he closed his eyes and smiled peacefully, his face shining. Then he went to heaven."

A suicide bomber had walked into the church, and Marian's father had run after him, trying to stop him from detonating his bomb-vest. The attack happened just days before Marian's 15th birthday.

A year later, Marian still misses her dad. But courageously she's still following Jesus, clinging onto Him through pain, trauma and loss. Incredibly she says: *"God takes, but He gives back more. God is love, God is kind, God is merciful. I have experienced this in my most difficult hour"*.

## RESPONSE:

None of us are immune to giving up. Look at Peter, one of the first disciples. He denied Jesus three times when the pressure was on. But with God's grace, we can keep going. Peter became the leader of the early church. What could God do through us if we courageously keep going with Him? Exciting, right? Spend time praying that you'd have the strength to persevere when the going gets tough.

## PRAYER:

Father God, thank You for Marian. I pray You'd encourage and strengthen her. Help her know you as her loving heavenly Father and continue to heal her from the pain she knows. Help her keep going with You. I'm sorry for when I stop following You and give up. Like Peter, help me know Your grace and kindness, and commit to living out my love of You with true guts and courage. Amen.

## WHAT'S IT LIKE IN EGYPT?

- Egypt has the largest population of Christians in the Middle East. There are around 9.5 million Christians; that's about 10% of the population
- Political unrest over the last 6 years has seen a rise in Islamic extremism, and Christians are being squeezed out of society
- The so-called Islamic State are viciously targeting Christians and churches. 128 Christians were killed in 2017
- Church leaders are watched by the state
- It's nearly impossible to change your religion, and many Muslims that do convert face extreme pressure to go back to Islam





# WHAT NOW?

**THOSE ARE SOME INCREDIBLE STORIES. BUT THE POINT IS TO MOVE BEYOND KNOWING INTO ACTION. AND WE THINK THERE ARE TWO RESPONSES WORTH THINKING ABOUT.**

The young people in these stories aren't that different to you and me. They simply believed, and put Jesus first, despite fear, pain, trauma and rejection. Like them, we can have courage to follow Jesus and see God do amazing things in our lives. So, how can you be more courageous in living out your faith?

Now you know these stories, you'll have guessed that there are many, many more like them. Millions of Christians around the world face pressure every day for their faith in Jesus, and they need our love, prayers and support to keep going. Open Doors is committed to standing alongside persecuted Christians, strengthening the church to keep shining God's love. You can help by doing the following:



### **COMMIT TO PRAYING:**

Grab our 'World Watch List Map', stick it up on your wall and pray for the countries and people that you read about. Follow us on Instagram and Facebook for weekly prayer requests and stories.

### **GIVE WHAT YOU CAN:**

Open Doors provides all sorts of things to help persecuted Christians, from delivering Bibles and training church leaders to micro loans for refugees to help them start businesses; from trauma counselling for those that have experienced violence and terror to training church leaders to stand strong - whatever is needed, Open Doors works to provide. You can give to support this work at [opendoorsca.org](http://opendoorsca.org). You might not have much cash, so why not run a

fundraising event or get sponsored to take on a challenge? For more ideas, look at [www.opendoorsca.org/youth](http://www.opendoorsca.org/youth).

### **ENCOURAGE:**

You can send a message to persecuted Christians in the Middle East. Send a picture, video, prayer, Bible passage or comment to Christians facing increasing intimidation and violence. Show them that they are not forgotten! Visit [www.opendoorsca.org/youth](http://www.opendoorsca.org/youth) for more information.

### **TELL OTHERS:**

Pass on this booklet, share the stories of courage with your mates and let the world know that in many places Christians are facing shocking abuse, isolation and violence. Grab some resources from our website (or call in to receive free copies) to give away.





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

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SERVING PERSECUTED CHRISTIANS WORLDWIDE