

Open*Doors*

MAGAZINE

JANUARY | FEBRUARY 2024

**EVEN IN
NORTH KOREA,
GOD IS NOT
SILENT**

STRENGTHENING CHRISTIANS WHERE FAITH COSTS THE MOST

www.opendoorscanada.org



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Cover image: Christian persecution is becoming more severe and more widespread. But even in the most dangerous places, God is not silent – and believers need your support. Read more on page 4.

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GARY'S TAKE

Dear Friend,

With all the antagonism that exists in our world today, we often forget the role of prayer in the life of the believer. The need for prayer has never been greater and the beginning of a new year is a good time to renew our commitment to prayer for our persecuted family.

My interactions with persecuted Christians have taught me some important lessons on prayer, especially in situations where my faith is put to the test.

- 1. Prayer helps me display the character of Christ.** 1 Thessalonians 5:17-18 exhorts us to, “never stop praying. Be thankful in all circumstances, for this is God’s will for you who belong to Christ Jesus.” When my natural instincts cry for revenge, prayer reminds me that a greater testimony is found in offering forgiveness and praying for our persecutors.
- 2. Prayer builds my faith.** There have been many times when prayer was my only defense, a shared experience with our persecuted family members. Jude 20 says, “But you, dear friends, must build up your lives ever more strongly upon the foundation of our holy faith, learning to pray in the power and strength of the Holy Spirit.”
- 3. Prayer invites God to work.** 1 John 5:14 says, “This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us.” Through prayer, the Church is strengthened. Governments shift and conflicts cease. People find healing and discover purpose. We are given new hearts. And in answered prayer, we are reminded of God’s faithfulness.

Thank you for praying. My prayer is that 2024 will be a breakthrough year for the global church and for you personally.

Grace & Peace,

Pastor Gary Stagg
Executive Director





LIGHT IN THE DARKEST PLACES

Ji Ho came to faith when she heard the words of Jesus on a tiny radio in North Korea. Believers like her need your support.

*Image is representative

Christian persecution is becoming more severe and more widespread. But even in the most dangerous places, God is not silent – and believers need your support.

Uniformed policemen tore apart the small house in North Korea, ransacking drawers and smashing crockery. Others dug furiously in the garden, their shovels spraying dirt.

These officials needed evidence. Proof that the quiet man cowering in the corner with his daughter was a Christian. They got what they came for...

“The men found a Bible wrapped in plastic, buried in the garden,” said Ji Ho*, who was a schoolgirl at the time. “A policeman triumphantly threw the book at my father’s feet. We both sobbed. In that moment, we knew we’d never see each other again.”

Ji Ho’s father was bundled outside and led away. Ji Ho was all alone.

MOST DANGEROUS PLACE

North Korea is the most dangerous place in the world to follow Jesus. The country again tops Open Doors’ World Watch List and Christians there are in a perilous situation. In this repressive regime, owning a Bible could lead to jail and faith could put you in a labour camp. Believers risk torture and even execution if discovered.

But even in North Korea, the voice of God cannot be silenced. Ji Ho doesn’t know what happened to her father, but years after he was taken, this young woman made an incredible discovery...

‘WORDS OF JESUS’

Every night Ji Ho tuned into her father’s secret transistor radio, desperate for news of food so she wouldn’t starve like her neighbours. One day, a new voice interrupted the airwaves.

“I heard a man speaking Korean. It was unlike any state program. ‘You are the salt of the earth,’ the voice said. ‘These are the words of Jesus, and they remind us never to lose our love for others.’”

Ji Ho was stunned, overcome by a powerful memory. “I nearly dropped my tea,” she said. “This was what my father told me, almost word for word, many years ago.”

FAITH, DESPITE THE COST

From then on, Ji Ho listened... and God spoke. “I became convinced,” she said. “This Jesus was the teacher my father had been trying to tell me about.”

Ji Ho gave her life to Christ. But like the estimated 400,000 believers in North Korea, her faith remains secret and she faces a daily struggle for survival. Poverty is rife

across the nation, and although customs doors have opened with Russia and China since the COVID-19 pandemic, food imports are directed first towards the elite and the military. Half the population has no secure food supply.

It's a desperate situation – both spiritually and physically. Ji Ho says, "I might be the only Christian in my country."

Believers like Ji Ho need to know they are not alone. Only the love, prayers and support of their global church family can help courageous Christians follow Jesus in the darkest places.

LIFE AND DEATH

For 25 years, Open Doors has stood with North Korean believers, working through secret networks to provide food and medicine. In fact, 100,000 Christians receive vital spiritual support thanks to your generosity. Now more than

ever, believers like Ji Ho depend on you for their survival.

Your support can broadcast daily gospel radio programs to strengthen the faith of isolated believers like Ji Ho, and provide emergency food to keep North Korean Christians from starvation. Your gifts and prayers are critical.

"Now I realize why my father was taken," says Ji Ho. "Our leaders don't want us to worship anyone besides them, and my father had a Lord who was bigger than our country's leaders."

She added, "I'm a Christian now, like my father. I hope someday I can meet another follower of Jesus. For now, I'll keep listening to the radio. I'll keep following Jesus. And I'll keep being salt and light. Just like my father told me."

**Ji Ho represents the real experiences of secret believers in North Korea, whose accounts of true events have been combined to protect their identities.*



80,000

North Korean Christians are kept alive with food aid, thanks to you



100,000

Christians receive spiritual support, thanks to your gifts



400,000

Christians estimated to live in North Korea today



Will you help Christians survive in the darkest places?

PLEASE PRAY

- For Christians like Ji Ho. Ask God to strengthen and be with them, so they will not feel alone.
- For Christians in North Korea facing starvation this winter, that support will reach them through Open Doors secret networks.
- For North Korean believers bravely passing on faith to their children. Pray for wisdom and courage.

PLEASE GIVE

Every \$35 provides a food package to a North Korean believer to keep them alive.

Every \$75 means an isolated believer could hear God speak through a regular radio broadcast.

Every \$115 trains a Christian to withstand persecution in one of the world's darkest places.

DISCOVER THE TOP 50 MOST DANGEROUS PLACES TO BE A CHRISTIAN

Look out for the World Watch List 2024, out on January 17. Visit www.worldwatchlist.ca

WORLD WATCH LIST 2024

An annual ranking of the top 50 most dangerous countries in which to live as a Christian. **COMING JANUARY 17**

1 INVITE YOUR MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT TO A SPECIAL PRESENTATION OF THE 2024 WORLD WATCH LIST AT PARLIAMENT

On March 19th, we will be heading to Ottawa once again to present the 2024 World Watch List to our parliamentarians.

This special presentation of the World Watch List is our opportunity to inform the Canadian Government about the current realities for the more than 360 million Christians worldwide who experience high levels of persecution and engage them in championing policies that promote freedom of religion and protect persecuted believers.

You have been instrumental to the success of this event in the past. In previous years you have sent post cards, written emails and made phone calls inviting your Members of Parliament asking them to attend. In fact, last year was our most attended parliament event to date! Would you do it again?

Enclosed with this magazine, we have included a postcard for you to fill out and send to your MP. Sending an invitation is easy!



1. Grab the post card included in this magazine
2. Fill out your MP's name, your name and postal code
3. And lastly, drop it in the mailbox – no stamp required!

You can also send your MP an invite by email by visiting:
www.opendoorscanada.org/inviteyourmp

2 YOU ARE INVITED to the online 2024 World Watch List release event on Tuesday, January 16, 7pm EST

VIEW ONLINE AT:

www.youtube.com/OpenDoorsCanada

3 DOWNLOAD A FREE COPY OF THE 2024 WORLD WATCH LIST



Visit www.opendoorscanada.org/WorldWatchList to download your free guide. (Available for download on January 17).

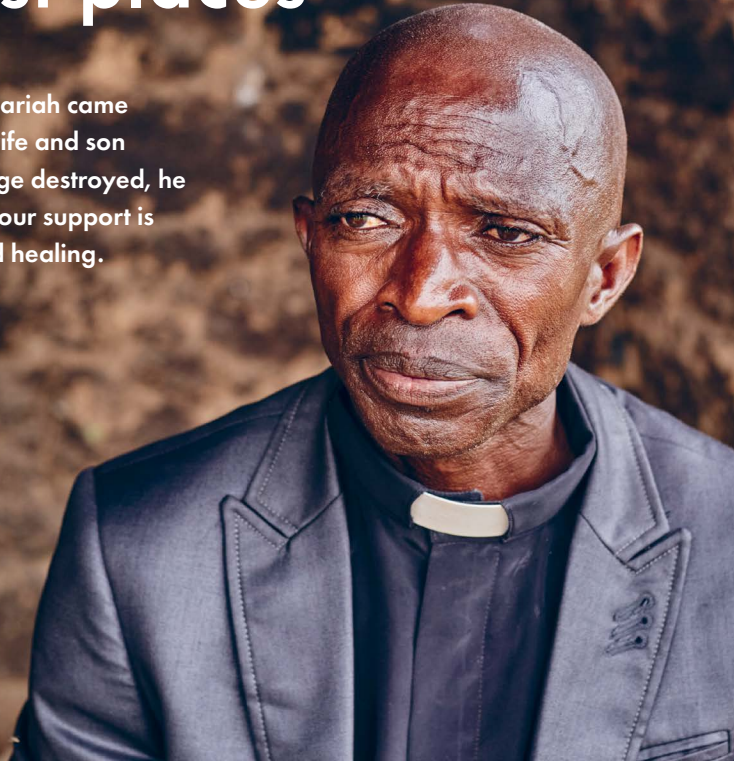
Contact our office if you would prefer a hard copy of the 2024 World Watch List guidebook free of charge.*

Call: (905) 636-0944
Email: opendoors@odcan.org

*Shipping to Canadian addresses only

Your support in the darkest places

When Pastor Zachariah came home to find his wife and son dead and his village destroyed, he was broken. But your support is bringing hope and healing.



Pastor Zachariah can't forget the day his life changed forever. Returning to his village in central Nigeria after a night away, he saw people coming towards him...

"Most of them were barefoot. Their bodies were covered in mud because they'd been crawling to escape. The closer I got to home,

the more I saw people with injuries. And then, dead bodies beside the road."

The scene was horrifying. But nothing prepared Pastor Zachariah for what he discovered next.

"My house was completely burnt down. I searched for my wife and

son, checking the rooms. I found their lifeless bodies in the kitchen. That moment, I cried like never before. Death was truly painful."

Pastor Zachariah's village, in Plateau state, had been attacked by Fulani militants who (we believe) were seeking to forcefully displace Christians. It was one of 27 villages in the Mangu area destroyed in May 2023, and 125 people were killed. The brutality of the attack reflects the extreme violence of persecution in Nigeria, which is among the world's most dangerous places to follow Jesus.

For Pastor Zachariah, what happened was devastating. "I felt as if God had forsaken me. Why would he allow these people to attack us? I couldn't sleep and, no matter what I was doing, I kept thinking about it."

Your gifts and prayers are bringing hope in this dark place, so that persecuted Christians know they are not alone.

Thanks to your support, Pastor Zachariah was invited to Open Doors trauma centre in Nigeria – and at last, he's finding peace. "Since I came to the centre, my mind is at rest," he said.

This faithful leader is now able to encourage and support his congregation, urging them to stay close to God. Remarkably, Pastor

Zachariah has even found the strength to forgive the men who murdered his beloved wife and son. "Right now, I am asking God to forgive the attackers, and for them to enter the Kingdom of God and not to die in their sins," he said.

Pastor Zachariah added, "My prayer is that we rely on God because He is everything we live for. If we believe He can do all things, then we will not be broken."



PLEASE PRAY

- Pray that God will meet Pastor Zachariah in his grief and bring healing and courage.
- For Christians around Mangu who are traumatized and displaced. Ask God to comfort them.
- For people attending the Open Doors trauma centre, that their faith will be strengthened and hope restored.

Saleh's dangerous faith and your amazing support

In Yemen, one of the most dangerous places to follow Jesus, your support is helping a remarkable man to bravely lead the underground church.

Saleh's* phone beeps ominously. He picks it up... Another death threat. "They are searching for you," the message reads. "You are dead. Your days are numbered."

The words are shockingly sinister. But they won't stop this courageous Yemeni evangelist from telling people about Jesus.

"If we sit at home and do nothing, we would be safe," says Saleh* with a shrug. "But what kind of Christians would we be if we weren't risking our life for others to know Life?"

Saleh is one of Open Doors remarkable partners in Yemen, the most dangerous country in the Middle East for followers of Jesus – and the third most dangerous in the world (according to Open Doors' World Watch List).

In this Islamic state, it's impossible to live as a Christian. Persecution comes from government, family and community, and the influence of

extreme and violent Islamic groups is growing. Around 70% of believers keep their faith secret and never meet another believer. If their faith is discovered, Christians risk abuse, imprisonment, torture and even death.

So how is it possible for Saleh, in this context, to share the good news of Jesus? The answer: with your support.

'THE PERSON WHO KNOWS JESUS'

Saleh was in a refugee camp in a neighbouring country, having fled Yemen's civil war, when he decided to start a house church network in his homeland. He'd come to faith as a student in Yemen and had developed a reputation as a bold evangelist.

"In the refugee camp I became known as the person who knows Jesus," recalls Saleh. "Many people came to know Christ as their Saviour

and I encouraged them to return to Yemen to serve. We went to a safer part of the country and started a church, where leaders could come to train and be launched into ministry."

Starting a church was a step of faith – but it was perilous. It wasn't long before Saleh's brother and another believer were captured by the Yemeni authorities and thrown into jail.

GOING UNDERGROUND

Saleh, at risk because of his high profile, went into hiding – and that's when your prayers sustained him.

"I cried in my room for hours," says Saleh. "Some days I was hopeful and strong. Others, I felt weak, guilty and depressed. In those dark times, I felt God's presence. I received messages from brothers and sisters in the global church, encouraging me that they were praying."

After two months, those prayers were answered. Saleh's brother and the other Christian were released from jail. "God did a miracle!" said Saleh. "He even brought several prisoners to faith through my brother!" And Saleh was able to safely escape from Yemen.

'THE MADMAN'

Today, Saleh travels regularly into Yemen to disciple, teach and pastor

other believers. Thanks to your gifts and prayers, he delivers medical help, transport, food packages and training to 70 Yemeni Christian families.

"We are grateful for you," said Saleh. "Without these resources, we won't be able to serve the church. Your prayers are important and uplifting, giving us strength to keep going."

With you standing alongside him, Saleh perseveres in faith and the church in Yemen is strengthened. "I am usually nicknamed 'The Madman' because people know the threats I receive. But all these incidents renew my determination to proclaim the message of Christ," he said.

And Saleh's vision for the future? "I hope soon there will be Christians in every corner of Yemen."

**name changed for security reasons*

PLEASE PRAY



- Pray for hope and joy within the church in Yemen, and strength and encouragement.
- Ask for God's protection over Saleh and other leaders, and wisdom in ministry.
- Pray our brothers and sisters will be guided by the Holy Spirit to bravely share the message of salvation with those who are ready to hear it.

BECAUSE OF YOU...

YOU ARE STRENGTHENING CHRISTIANS IN MALAYSIA



Open Doors partners ran a program in 2023 that trained Malaysian believers in electrical wiring, a skill that is in demand in their communities. Thanks to you, Christians in remote areas of Malaysia have more employment opportunities!

Training like this opens the door for employment opportunities and improved living conditions for persecuted Christians! All the participants were eager to learn, and each passed their oral and practical exams with flying colours. Following the training, they were able to get official certification for electrical work. As a result, they are better positioned to generate income and improve their quality of living, meaning the Christian community can remain in that part of Malaysia and be a light for Jesus.

A SINGLE MOTHER HAS A LIVELIHOOD THANKS TO YOU



Thanks to your support, Blessing was able to receive vocational training and today she is a resilient believer and a true entrepreneur.*

This sewing business is just one of the entrepreneurial endeavours that Blessing uses to support herself. Thanks to your support, she is self-reliant and growing in her faith! A Christian from coastal Kenya, when Blessing refused to convert to Islam, her Muslim husband abandoned her and her unborn child. Now, she has hope again. The training she received empowered her to open a seamstress workshop, a small roadside café and she even sells fuel to motorcyclists in the area. She dreams of helping others too: “Pray that I [will] be able to grow in my business...so that I can earn more to employ others to also rise to this level.”

BECAUSE OF YOU, MARGINALIZED CHRISTIANS ARE BEING DISCIPLED



Open Doors partners were able to conduct discipleship meetings for deaf believers, encouraging them and helping them work towards healing. Thank you for your generosity that makes programs like this possible.

Open Doors partners were able to visit the deaf community in Central Asia that includes many Christians. In this part of the world, deaf individuals experience significant marginalization. For those who follow Jesus, this means discrimination for both their faith and their disability. The participants were encouraged to remember that God works with every person and does not see them as less than whole. Repairing broken dishes was one tangible object lesson the participants used as a reminder of this truth. One participant mentioned that this meeting was the first time in her life she had felt true family love.

COME AND MEET YOUR FAMILY THROUGH PRESENCE MINISTRY

2024 trips are now open to register!

North Africa: April 2024

Contact us for more details (905) 636-0944 or email: travel@odcan.org

**EVEN IN THE
DARKEST
PLACES,
GOD'S VOICE
CAN'T BE
SILENCED.**

Ji Ho* hasn't seen her father since his secret Bible was discovered by North Korean security agents.

She grew up alone. Struggling to survive. Often starving.

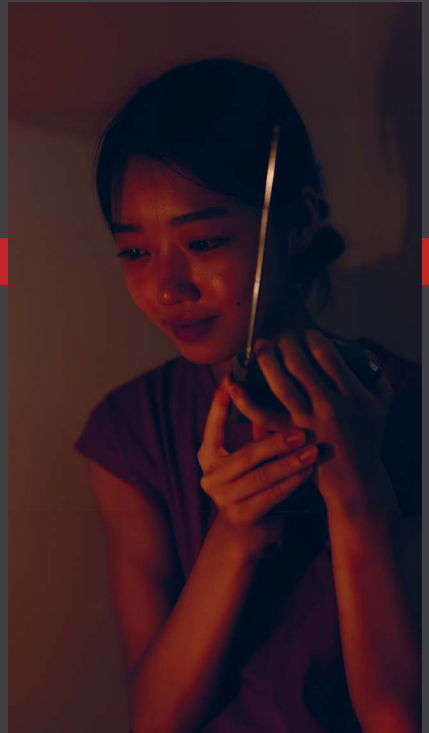
Then one day Ji Ho found her father's tiny radio hidden in her home – and she heard God speak...

"I'm a Christian now, serving the same Jesus as my father," says Ji Ho. "I might be the only Christian in North Korea."

Ji Ho needs your support and prayers today.

Please, will you help Christians survive in the darkest places on earth?

Every \$75 helps another isolated believer hear God speak through a regular radio broadcast.



Christians counting the cost of faith are counting on you. Please give using the response form, phone (905) 636-0944 or visit www.opendoorscanada.org.

Thank you

**name changed for security reasons and image is representative*

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