



IMAGINE...

- being arrested for possessing a Bible
- arriving for a service to find that the government has closed your church
- being denied education or employment because you have a 'Christian' name
- finding yourself in prison because you talked to someone about Jesus
- having to leave your home or village because of your faith
- living in a country where there is absolutely no freedom of belief.

This is the reality for many Christians around the world. This booklet describes the top ten countries on the Open Doors World Watch List, which ranks the 50 countries where Christians face the most extreme persecution.

For Christians, these are places of darkness and danger. But they are also places of amazing courage and hope.

IMAGE Smoke on the horizon; the Mattai monastery overlooks the Nineveh plains, Iraq.

WHY ARE CHRISTIANS PERSECUTED?

When Jesus was alive, some people hated Him. Today they hate His followers. But why?

Because dictators want to be divine.

Totalitarian leaders demand to be worshipped – so anyone who says 'Jesus is Lord' is a traitor.

Because ultra-nationalists preach that religion equals race.

In many countries, nationalist media and politicians seek to drive out followers of other faiths. So, Indians 'have' to be Hindu; Pakistanis 'have' to be Muslim; Sri Lankans 'have' to be Buddhist.

Because extremists try to get to paradise by killing people.

They call themselves by many names – Islamic State, Boko Haram, Islamic Jihad – but they all believe that they will be rewarded for acts of hatred and violence.

Because Christians can be easy targets.

Christians are often poor and in the minority, making them easy to bully and to blame. Women and girls are especially vulnerable – raped, abducted, forcibly married.

Because following Jesus brings freedom.

The truth sets people free. Which is the last thing that enemies of Christianity want.

Ultimately, though, there is one main reason why Christians are persecuted.

Because Christ has the victory.

And nothing makes a bully more angry than knowing that they cannot win.

The persecuted Christians of the world are victimised, but they are also victorious.

They are standing against the darkness. But they don't have to stand alone.



1. NORTH KOREA

North Korea is the most difficult and dangerous place in the world to be a Christian.

If your faith is discovered, then you – and your family – will be sent to a labour camp, or even killed on the spot. So bury your faith deep. If you have a Bible, hide it. Don't tell your children about your faith, in case they tell their teachers.

"Christians are sometimes killed or locked up for the rest of their lives in concentration camps," says Hea Woo, who spent three years in a North Korean labour camp because of her faith in Jesus. An estimated 50,000 - 70,000 Christian are imprisoned in labour camps; most will die there.

"The guards were merciless," she recalls. "They kicked me and beat me with sticks. Death was a part of our daily life." And yet, even in this darkness, there is light. "God helped me to survive. God used me to lead five people to faith. We met together out of the view of the guards. Often that was in the toilet. There we held a short service. I taught them Bible verses and some songs, which we sang almost inaudibly."

THE COST

North Korea has been number one on the Open Doors World Watch List for the past 18 years. Christians are viewed as spies and traitors. They face arrest, torture, imprisonment, and perhaps even public execution.

North Korea's leaders are worshipped as gods. People are indoctrinated from cradle

to grave. Your neighbour, your family – even your children – will be encouraged to report any suspicious or disloyal behaviour.

THE COURAGE

Amazingly, the church in North Korea is not only surviving, but growing. North Korean Christians believe that one day the borders will open and they will 'bring the gospel to some of the darkest places on this earth'.

Despite widespread famine, many North Korean Christians follow the concept of 'holy rice', setting aside some of their rice to give to people who are even worse off than them. Their Christlike behaviour leads others to faith, even in the horrific labour camps. "I stood out among the other prisoners, because I helped them," Hea Woo remembers. "Sometimes I shared some rice with the sick. Occasionally, I washed their clothes, too."

Open Doors' underground networks reach 60,000 secret believers with food, medicine and clothes to help them to survive and be salt and light in North Korea.

Lord Jesus, strengthen and encourage North Korean believers. Help them to live out the truth of the kingdom of God in the midst of a kingdom of death. Protect Open Doors underground workers as they smuggle vital aid and Bibles into the country.

Be inspired by the faith of secret believers.
Go to www.opendoorsuk.org/northkorea
for videos and stories and to find out how
your support changes lives.

