Hello,

Welcome to your final edition of Frontline Faith for 2019. I can’t believe we’re already approaching the end of the year – and another Christmas.

To me, Christmas is a time for family.

It’s a time when God sent His own Son into the world, in order that He might bring us back into His family, too.

One Church, One Family.

As a global Christian family, we have a bond that transcends the earthly, crossing time and space and impassable borders.

On a trip to Central Asia last year, I got to witness this firsthand.

The group I was travelling with arrived at a house for a meal that our local partner had set up.

The warmth with which we were greeted was breathtaking; the Christian man and his wife gave us warm smiles, friendly hugs and prepared dinner for us.

It wasn’t until we were sitting down and eating our meal, that the husband asked our local partner, “So, who are these people?”

I was blown away. They had never met us, didn’t know who we were or why we were there, and yet greeted us as family.

I believe strongly in the value of the family bonds between the body of Christ, especially between us and the persecuted church.

Like an older sibling providing guidance, I see the persecuted church as some of my most valuable mentors, people who truly realise the cost of following Jesus and boldly choose to do it anyway, in some of the most dangerous places to follow Jesus on the planet.

“Jesus is my closest relative.”

This Central Asian family have an amazing testimony of the radical change that knowing Jesus has wrought in their lives.

The wife came from a strict Muslim family who threatened to kill her, her husband and their children when they became Christians.

Her Muslim relatives had even sent large groups of people to their house, to intimidate and force them to renounce Jesus.

They hurled insults, and mocked the name of Jesus.

Her husband rebuked them and said, “Jesus is my closest relative, and you will not speak about him like that.”

The couple now run a home group with eight people who meet to study God’s Word. They run evangelism classes to Muslims, and support families who are struggling financially.

Though their faith is dangerous in their increasingly Islamic country, they continue to follow Jesus, no matter the cost.

And so, in this edition, we are celebrating ‘Families of Faith,’ because, after all, we are all a family of faith brought together by the blood of Jesus Christ.

This is the global body of Christ at its finest; building one another into committed and courageous followers of Jesus all over the world, no matter the cost.

Thank you for your support of your persecuted brothers and sisters this year.

Mike Gore
CEO Open Doors Australia

P.S. Due to the release of the 2020 World Watch List on 15 January 2020, your January edition of Frontline Faith will arrive after this date.

To make sure you can continue to pray with the persecuted church, we’ve included additional days throughout January in your Prayer Guide. Thank you for faithfully praying with your family in Christ!

“I see the persecuted church as some of my most valuable mentors, people who truly realise the cost of following Jesus and boldly choose to do it anyway.”
Finding Strength To Go On

How do you find the strength to go on when following Jesus costs you everything? Jina was forced to confront this question when her husband, Rober, was kidnapped by extremists in Syria. She hasn’t heard from him in over five years.

Jina remembers her life before the day that changed everything.

“We were very, very happy with our son Apo, we were dreaming about his future,” she said. “We dreamed of having our own house and we wanted to raise our child in a good way.”

On that day [when Rober was kidnapped], he was in a bus with one other Christian, all the others in the bus were Muslim. The bus was stopped by extremists. They knew the names of my husband and the other Christian and they ordered them to come out of the bus. Both were taken.

The other Christian man was released soon after, but Rober never came home.

The kidnappers told Rober to convert to Islam, but he refused, saying, “I have my God and that’s it.”

“I don’t think he would survive,” the other Christian told Jina.

“That was the last thing I heard about my husband,” she said.

Hard To Be Alone

In an instant, Jina’s family changed dramatically. Now, as well as dealing with the pain of losing her husband, she also had to raise their young son by herself.

“Everyone asks me how I manage as a single woman to take care of my son.”

“In the morning, when I wake up, I pray to Jesus. I thank Him that He is giving me a beautiful new day. I am just missing my husband next to me.

Every day I expect him to knock at our door, every time I wake up, I pray, ‘Please Lord, please, I want my husband to return.’”

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Through all the struggles and uncertainty, Jina knows that her strength alone is not enough to get through the hardest times.

Jina said, “My faith in God is very big. I say to Him, ‘May Your will be done, O Lord.’

“I hope God will return my husband back safe and sound. I hope that I can be proud of my son. I want to raise him righteously, that he knows what is in the Bible and teach him to live as a Christian.

“He often asks me, ‘When will it be Friday?,’ the day of the Sunday School. When I ask him why, he says, ‘To know about Jesus.’ He enjoys being there. He tells me what verse they learned from the Bible.”

Jina knows that raising her son to know Jesus will mean that he can find the strength to go on through the toughest of times.

Though her family’s faith cost Jina her husband, she relies on God’s strength to get her through, and looks to a future where she and Apo continue to follow Jesus, no matter the cost.

How Can You Help?

Jina receives help from her local church, which is a Centre of Hope run by our local partners. Here, Christians can receive basic needs and spiritual support and training.

“We get [food] aid, they help us with the cost of diesel,” Jina said. “Life without that help would be suffering.”

You can support Christian parents like Jina as they parent under persecution. Your gift of $40 can help a parent learn Christian parenting skills to raise the next generation in a godly way.

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Jina with her son Apo.
How You’re Helping Families Follow Jesus

All over the world, families from a Muslim background risk everything to follow Jesus.

Often, they are the only Christians in their community, and live under constant pressure to return to Islam. Sometimes they are excluded from their communities, and not allowed to access common spaces or resources.

There is typically little opportunity for Christian fellowship and encouragement outside of their own family, and believers can feel cut-off and isolated.

Your Help Makes A Difference

Your support is strengthening Christian families all over the world to stand strong through persecution and continue to follow Jesus, no matter the cost.

In Iraq, our local partners were able to run a family camp last year, gathering over 100 Christian families from isolated areas, and bringing them together to spend time learning and in fellowship.

Thanks to your generosity, families can come from all around the country, transcending cultural, language and denominational barriers.

One of our local partners said, “Participants come from different ethnic backgrounds. It takes some time to learn to respect and love one another, but here at the camp, we try to live as one family: the family of God’s children.”

“I Thank God For This Time”

Suha* is nine years old, and lives in a neighbourhood where she is the only Christian her age.

“When I hear [the family camp] is coming, I am very, very happy because I know those days will be very special days to meet new friends and be together,” she said.

Throughout the week, the children and their parents play games like tag, soccer and frisbee, and do craft together. The most popular craft is when the men make earrings for their wives, and wives get to choose ties for their husbands.

They also spend time hearing from God’s Word, and in small prayer groups.

Mohieb*, a young father who attended the camp, said, “I was most delighted with the small group prayer time that helped us learn how to get closer to God for ourselves.

“The children felt happy to have small groups, too, and I thank God for this incredibly special time for my family.”

One of the women who helped run the camp said, “Studying together and playing together are both important. Everybody is involved in setting up dinner tables, groups from each city represented take turns serving the food but you also get served as well.

“We are teaching respect, mutual love, valuing each other in a real and tangible way. Isn’t this how Jesus taught us to live?”

A Taste Of Christmas

For many believers from a Muslim background, their dangerous faith in Jesus means that they are unable to celebrate Christian holidays, such as Christmas, openly.

Last Christmas, our local partners helped secret believers in a Muslim-majority country celebrate Christmas – many for the first time.

Over 400 Christians came together to listen to the Word of God, sing Christmas carols, eat Christmas cake, and run games for the children.

One believer who came with his family said, “This is such a big blessing to be able to celebrate the birth of Jesus with many other believers. My family is so happy and blessed to be part of this celebration.”

A church leader attended with his family and some members of his congregation.

“All of the believers under my care had never attended any Christmas party since they came to believe in Jesus,” he said. “Now they have experienced and tasted Christmas! Thank you so much for doing this for us.”

Another family said, “We praise God that He has given us this opportunity to celebrate His birthday with many believers. We felt the love of God in this fellowship. We praise God for your love and care for us.”

Your generous support strengthens families of the persecuted church by giving them opportunities to learn from and encourage one another. With your help they are following Jesus all over the world, no matter the cost.

*Names changed for security reasons.

You can ensure even more families benefit from camps like this. Your gift of $70 sends a child or young adult to a Christian camp. Visit opendoors.org.au/family

2020 Field Trips

China, 7-13 April
Meet with church leaders in a country where Christianity is growing rapidly despite challenges.

Vietnam, 20-28 September
Learn about our projects and enjoy fellowship with believers and church leaders.

For more details, send an enquiry email to gotravel@od.org.au

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For the first time, you can upgrade your Gift to include a beautiful, double-sided A4 print.

GIFTS OF HOPE

Hope, Relief And Courage For Christmas

When you choose Gifts Of Hope, you are strengthening the persecuted church and helping them follow Jesus, no matter the cost.

You’ll receive a card to give your loved one, explaining the impact their gift is making on the frontlines, whether it’s delivering Bibles into the hands of secret believers or giving food to a widow who has lost everything.

Plus, for the first time, you can upgrade your Gift to include a beautiful, double-sided A4 print that your loved one can hang on their wall.

By choosing this Gift Of Hope, you can strengthen the next generation church and give children access to the Bible and education, prepare them for persecution and instil in them a passion for sharing Jesus.

“We when grow up, I want to be an evangelist because I think many children would want to hear about the stories in my Bible.” – Tuan, 10 years old.

A Gift Of Hope For Children All Over The World

In many countries, children are persecuted for their family’s faith before they’re even old enough to understand it. The survival of the church depends on the next generation’s faith.

Make a difference for persecuted Christians this Christmas. Choose Gifts Of Hope for your loved ones by visiting opendoors.org.au/GOH
To Live Is Christ, To Die Is Gain

Four Lessons From Four Families Who Lost Loved Ones To Persecution In Egypt

1. Depend On God’s Grace

Nadia’s husband, Nabil, lost his life when a bomber attacked their church. Nabil’s willingness to follow Jesus, no matter the cost, inspired Nadia and their children.

“My husband was always telling me that we live in the grace of God, that he provides for us,” Nadia said. “Even under these difficult circumstances we have experienced the truth of it.

“God is very close to us; we experience his peace.”

Marian, Nadia’s oldest daughter, added, “People ask me why I look so happy under these circumstances. How I ‘do it’. Then I tell them: ‘I don’t do anything. It’s not me, it’s Him in me.’”

2. Spend Time With God As A Family

Wahib was martyred when he refused to convert to Islam. He left behind his wife, Mariam, and their three young children.

“His absence hurts,” said Mariam. “Especially the fact that my children have to grow up without a father makes me terribly sad.”

Not being able to read and write properly, Wahib and his family used to sing along to psalms on the Christian TV channel.

“And we used to pray together as a family,” said Mariam.

“We haven’t broken that habit, and every time we pray, I think of my husband.”

3. Give Your Burdens To God For He Is More Powerful Than Grief

When Nancy and her extended family took a bus to visit a church, they were attacked by Islamic extremists. Six of her family members family lost their lives, including Nancy’s husband, Reda, and 14-year-old son, Bishoy.

“I think about them a lot,” Nancy said. “When I am sad, I pray and that really helps. Then I am reminded once more that I am not alone, that God is with me.

“Our joy is bigger than our grief. God is close and he comforts us every day.

“One day this family will be reunited in heaven, I am sure of it.”

4. You Are Never Too Young To Inspire Someone Else In Faith

Karam lost his life in the Minya bus attack, where the men were given the choice to deny their faith or die. He chose to hold fast to Jesus and paid the ultimate price.

His father, Atef, misses him terribly. Atef remembered, “He was always talking to me about the Kingdom of God, and he encouraged me to go to church and work on my relationship with God.”

While sons usually learn about God from their father, with Atef and Karam it was the other way around.

“At the bus stop, I stood thinking, ‘What can I do to help him?’” Atef said.

“Now my son is gone, I try to remember his words even more. My faith has really grown.”

Support families as they follow Jesus, no matter the cost, in places where faith can cost everything. Your gift of $130 will help a family attend a training seminar. Find out more at opendoors.org.au/family
When Wako and his family moved to a remote village in Ethiopia to share the gospel, they knew they would experience resistance. But they had no idea how far their persecutors would go to stop them sharing the gospel.

Wako, his wife and their three children live in a small village in a region of Ethiopia that has a growing Islamic presence. Though Ethiopia was one of the first Christian nations in Africa, it is now heavily influenced by surrounding Muslim countries.

Despite some opposition from Muslim missionaries, Wako planted three churches in his village with over one hundred people between them – all in the first year of his ministry.

This caught the attention of the Muslim missionaries.

“They saw my activities as an obstacle to their mission,” Wako said. “I was alerted by some villagers about their antagonistic feelings towards me.”

**Burned To The Ground**

One day, Wako left home in the early hours of the morning to visit some new Christians in a neighbouring village.

Not long after he left, Wako’s house was set on fire.

His wife and three children were still inside.

Some neighbours rescued Wako’s family just before the roof caved in, but everything they had was destroyed.

Wako’s wife, Garo, said, “I heard a distant noise, but I thought I was dreaming. The next thing I knew, people broke through the doors and dragged me and the children from the smoke. I was shocked and speechless.”

Garo had given birth to her third child just one week earlier.

**Heeding God’s Call**

Even in the face of losing everything they owned, Wako, Garo and their family refused to leave the village, and would not stop sharing Jesus.

Wako remembered, “I took my wife’s hands and together we stood in the midst of the ashes and gave thanks to the name of the Lord.

“By His grace I will continue serving Him right here in this village until the day He has helped me reach the entire village.

“I know the purpose of this fire was to destroy me and my family,” Wako said. “But God intervened…God is faithful to His words! As it was written in the book of Isaiah 43:1-3; we will not fear their threats. God is our Redeemer.

“**They thought I would leave the village, but I will not wave from the calling God bestowed on me.**”

Wako and his family’s determination to stay and witness the love of Christ in their community teaches us what it looks like to be bold and courageous believers, who truly know what it means to follow Jesus, no matter the cost.

You can continue to strengthen the persecuted church by joining a movement of Christians who give monthly. Find out more at opendoors.org.au/give-monthly
Letter Writing Campaign
Encourage The Family Of An Abducted Christian

When Christians are kidnapped because of their faith in Jesus, their families are left behind, often not knowing what has happened.

Boko Haram, an extremist Islamic group, abducted 109 girls from a school in Nigeria in February 2018. A month later, most of the girls were released. Leah Sharibu, a Christian, was not.

Leah, who was 15 when she was abducted, was held because she refused to deny her faith in Jesus. Though she was offered the opportunity to leave with her friends if she converted to Islam, she held onto Jesus, no matter the cost.

Leah’s parents, Nathan and Rebecca, are proud of their daughter’s strong faith in Christ, but are constantly worried about her safety and praying for her return.

“I am very sad but also jubilant because my daughter did not denounce Christ,” said Leah’s father.

“The situation has opened my eyes to see and understand that Christianity comes along with suffering and pain. If our master Jesus, who was blameless, was persecuted, how much more will we who are His followers.”

Leah’s mother added, “When I remember that Christians all over the world are praying for Leah, it gives me strength to carry on.”

Nathan and Rebecca have had no news of their daughter since October 2018. Please write to them to encourage them to continue trusting in the Lord amidst fear and uncertainty.

Send your letters by 20 January 2020.

Australia: 11/10 Gladstone Road, Castle Hill NSW 2154

Sixty Second Stories
Short Stories You Can Share

“I have found a Heavenly Father who promised that He would never forsake me.”

— Layla

Layla’s father never returned.

After becoming a Christian, Layla began attending the local church.

At first, her family didn’t mind, but as she grew in faith, they started to threaten and beat her.

“The first two or three years of my walk with the Lord were relatively peaceful and calm,” Layla said.

“But then I began to live in an atmosphere of hatred and rejection from my relatives.”

One day, Layla’s brother locked her up and shaved her head.

“I think they wanted to humiliate me and show that a young lady who believes in Christ is a shame in our culture,” said Layla.

“I could not stand it anymore, so one day I ran away from my house and have not gone back.

“My biological father left me when I was six, but I have found a Heavenly Father who promised that He would never forsake me.”

“I’m not easy... but God gives me peace.”

— Magid

Magid and his wife, Hannan, were at their church in Egypt when an extremist detonated a bomb. Hannan did not survive.

“It has been a nightmare from the start, and I just don’t wake up,” said Magid. “I loved her so much. She was always praying and reading her Bible. She was teaching the children about God.”

“Now I have to raise my children on my own. I try to be like a friend and try to give them as much love as possible. They wanted to share their faith.

“[My dream is] that in every city there will be at least one house church.”

— Ahmed

Ahmed* and his wife came to Christ when they were living with his Muslim parents, as is customary for many young families in Central Asia. It wasn’t long until his parents threw them out.

Since then, he and his wife have founded five underground churches. Their passion for Jesus has not gone unnoticed.

“My house has been raided a couple of times,” said Ahmed. “I have received large fines, I have been threatened by the police, my family, the Muslim community… They say, ‘We will kill you and your family because you are a traitor.’”

When the pressure intensified, Ahmed and his family were forced to flee. They stayed in an Open Doors safe house for some time, but eventually made the decision to return home and continue their ministry.

“My wife and daughters wanted to go back to our hometown as soon as possible. They wanted to share about their faith.

 “[My dream is] that in every city in my country there will be at least one house church.”

*Names changed for security reasons.
2020 World Watch List

Discover the 50 countries where the cost of following Jesus is highest.

opendoors.org.au/wwl