Lessons Of Courageous Christianity From The Persecuted Church

03 Tips For Your House Church / 11 Jesus Above All Else
A Letter From Mike

Hello,

Welcome to your first-ever, digital-only issue of Frontline Faith. This is one of the ways our own world at Open Doors has changed in light of the last few months. But it's not just us. In many ways, the whole world around us has changed.

Christians across our own country and the world are confronted with the reality of church that looks different than it ever has before. But could it be that the isolation we’re now facing is actually the kickstart our faith desperately needed?

The Unexpected Churches

I've certainly seen some unconventional churches in my time.

I've worshipped with secret believers in a Middle Eastern desert and removed the batteries from my mobile phone to avoid being followed to a church service in Asia.

I've literally climbed a mountainside in North Africa to visit a Christian man in a remote village, and knocked secret patterns on doors to be let inside.

But even after seeing how churches across the world adapt to an inability to meet in the open, I could never have imagined how the local church here in Australia could transform so drastically overnight.

As our places of worship have been forced to shut their doors, the church is facing a phase of decentralisation, where gathering in our homes and online are the new normal.

But we must remember – this is only our new normal.
Always Present

In many countries, persecuted Christians have been meeting in house churches and online for years – even decades.

Where laws, customs and families prevent believers from meeting together, God is no less present. Neither is the global body of Christ. Believers may be isolated, but they are never alone.

As one church leader in China said, “Before the early 1960’s, we practiced Christianity in churches and hardly anywhere else. After we were scattered, we practiced in our homes and therefore everywhere else.”

This is a unique opportunity for us to not just “do” church, but to be the Church. To truly live out the faith we profess. To be the light in a world that for many, might feel dark and cold. To share the hope that people are so desperately searching for.

We’re Standing With You

As we enter this new season of faith and the beginning of a new house and online church movement, we’ve launched House Church By Open Doors. We’re releasing weekly resources including videos, podcasts, discussion questions and even children’s activities to help you and your church follow Jesus alongside one another in this uncertain time.

Sign up to receive these free resources at opendoors.org.au/housechurch

So, as we learn to navigate this new season of faith together, let us not be afraid, but hopeful in knowing that God is here and He is working. We are one body, one family, one Church, and we are stronger together.

Mike Gore
CEO Open Doors Australia

@_MikeGore  |  michaelg@od.org.au

P.S. I hope you enjoy this, our first-ever digital-only edition of Frontline Faith! As businesses and organisations in Australia hit hard times, we’ve made this change to ensure that we can continue helping people follow Jesus all over the world for years to come. If you’d like to download a text-only version to print at home, you can find it here.
In seasons of instability and uncertainty, the persecuted church are the perfect mentors for our faith. Across the world, persecution has driven churches into homes and online, yet generations of bold and faithful followers have emerged. Their lessons of courageous faith teach us how we can follow Jesus as the one body of Christ, no matter the season.
Yemen | Follow In Christ’s Footsteps

In Yemen, to become a Christian is viewed as the ultimate betrayal, forcing churches underground. Food shortages and civil war add additional pressure to Christians who struggle to reach one another.

Secret believer, Mohammad* said, “We were always challenged, getting our daily food, finding work, surviving in war.

“But for God, nothing is impossible. Christ said whoever wants to follow Him needs to take up their cross and follow Him. That means we need to follow Him even if it costs us everything.”

North Africa | Fight The Good Fight

For believers throughout North Africa, strict laws and threats of violence have given rise to an underground house church movement. Even when seeking safety, followers understand the necessity of connecting with one another.

“We must fight,” said Marwan*, a secret house church member. “The one who has seen the light will never return to darkness.

“I see it as a God-given task to press on. When you become a Christian, you are given a task. We see the church growing and this encourages us greatly.”
**Middle East | Meet Panic With Peace**

In the Middle East, conflict and heavy monitoring from authorities have scattered the church, forcing believers to meet in secret house gatherings. But in the chaos and disorder, Middle Eastern Christians have learnt what it means to meet panic with peace.

“Believers just want to connect,” Middle Eastern house church host, Suri* said. “The work I do is so important.

“People are searching for answers everywhere. They seek God, as only with Him do they feel the peace they’ve been searching for.”

**China | Value One Another**

Coming together as the body of Christ, in any form, is an essential part of a believer’s walk of faith. Chinese believer, Ruby*, understands first hand what it means to gather amidst restrictions.

“The local authorities monitor religious activities tightly, so we have to be cautious when we meet... But the good thing is that we can still connect with some brothers and sisters.”

Even when meetings are what we would consider unconventional, God calls us to have fellowship, and we must value one another by continuing to gather, however we can.

*Names changed for security purposes.*

---

**House Church By Open Doors**

Free weekly resources, helping you and your church follow Jesus.

In this time of uncertainty, as the church is forced into homes and online, we’re standing with you. We are releasing weekly content to help you and your church follow Jesus in this uncertain time, including videos, podcasts, lessons and children’s activities.

Sign Up Now: opendoors.org.au/housechurch
Sofia knew that choosing Jesus could cost her everything. Despite the consequences, she chose to courageously follow Christ. This decision led to isolation, ostracism from her family and a life of secrecy.
“My mother spent twelve hours, including beatings, cursing and physical abuse.

“I was trusting God to strengthen me. I saw a vision of a desert and a lovely place and God was saying to me, ‘You choose which place.’ I remembered Abram and Lot who had to choose to live with God in the desert or live in a nice place without Him. So, I told my mother, ‘I would rather die than return.’”

A Family-Forced Isolation

“I met with other Christians secretly for a year before my father found out. He shouted loud and long, but I had made my choice. I had decided to follow the joy and peace that Jesus brings. To this day my father will not speak to me.”

Shortly after the confrontation, Sofia fell in love with a young pastor, and they were soon married in a secret ceremony. But for her family, marrying a non-Muslim was unacceptable and seen as an act of rebellion, bringing shame and dishonour.

“Because my family considered me to have been ‘stolen’, my mother came to me crying and pleading with me to come home and return to Islam,” Sofia recalled.
Community In Isolation

Sofia was willing to sacrifice her family and security for Jesus. For believers in Central Asia, walking with God each day isn’t easy.

“Persecution continues to increase,” Sofia said. “Every Saturday there is a program on TV warning people to watch out for Christians sharing the gospel. Police will arrest us if we are seen with a Bible. If the police suspect you have Christian books, they will break into your house.”

Believers encounter great loneliness as they risk arrest from authorities if they are found to be Christian, which makes meeting together incredibly difficult. Yet believers like Sofia continue to commit themselves to joining together in worship. Facing isolation, the value of building community focused around Christ increases in importance, as they sustain one another despite the challenges they face.

“At every meeting, we read some Scripture and each of us shares what God has revealed to us,” Sofia explained. According to Sofia, these are the essential questions asked at each meeting:

What is your relationship with God right now?
What’s your current relationship with people around the world?
What is your relationship like with fellow believers?
What are you in need of confessing?

As we face a similar isolation to Sofia, could we not use the same questions to build our communities of faith?
Growing up in Southeast Asia, Sebastian thought he was a lost cause. He began to deal drugs, ending up on death row for his crimes. While in solitary confinement, a man appeared in Sebastian’s cell. He was in shining white robes with a face so bright it couldn’t be seen. A short time later, Sebastian’s charge was dismissed in court and he was released.

He planned on returning to his former life, but the man appeared to him once again, this time saying, “Trust in me; I am the only God.” Sebastian saw the wounds on his hands and knew it was Jesus.

Sebastian’s life changed forever. He quit smoking, left his job, sold his belongings and was baptised.

But life didn’t become any easier once Sebastian found Jesus. In fact, it became harder. As pressure from authorities and family increased, Sebastian found reassurance that Christ would continue to perform wonders in his life, just as He had before. Despite his isolation, Sebastian was comforted by the presence of Christ.

“It’s not easy to serve the Lord here,” Sebastian said. “But our Lord suffered; He was beaten and died for us. If the boss suffered, won’t the workers suffer too?”

*Name changed for security purposes.
When Fatuma left her family behind to go to university, her health deteriorated. She was told the spirits were punishing her for her disobedience, and in desperation, Fatuma began seeking healing wherever she could find it.

One day, a Christian friend brought her to church. There, Fatuma found not only physical healing, but also a spiritual renewal as she gave her life to Jesus.

Her family soon discovered Fatuma’s faith and kidnapped her, locking her in a room for four months.

But one day, something changed.

“My sister opened the door and asked me to forgive her,” Fatuma said. “She told me that she was taking me to the mosque and left the door open. I knew that was God’s opening.”

Fatuma fled. A Christian friend helped raise money for a plane ticket and Fatuma soon left the country. She was taken in by a Christian woman who cared for her and helped her understand the Bible at home.

“I read the Bible often,” Fatuma said. “Psalm 23:6 is my favourite verse. It says, ‘Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever.’”

*Name changed for security purposes.
In India, opposition to Christianity has reached unprecedented levels. Branches of government openly support Hindu extremist groups and encourage the persecution of Christians. Communities are hostile towards Christians in their villages with persecution ranging from verbal threats to life-threatening attacks.

Kirti* experienced this persecution firsthand but remained convinced that it was all worth enduring for Christ.
A Circle Of Opposition

Kirti, a young mother, left her Hindu faith behind and came to know Jesus when she was healed during a church service. Within a week, she and her husband were called before the village elders to explain themselves.

“They told me to stand in the middle. They told us to stop going to church or they would beat us.”

But Kirti and her husband refused to stop worshipping. The elders were frustrated and continued for another three nights. At the last meeting, they brought bamboo sticks and threatened violence. At that moment, out of fear, Kirti and her husband agreed to stop attending church.

But their faith wasn’t diminished. Kirti and her husband started a secret gathering in their house. The small group began to grow and through their prayers, a young man was healed. Unfortunately, this was brought to the attention of the village elders, who confronted the young man and beat him.

“This is what you get for following Jesus,” they said.

Violence And Heartbreak

Suddenly, the threats on Kirti’s village became reality.

“The mob came into my house. They searched for my Bible. They threatened to kill me if I continued to worship Jesus,” she recounted. They then dragged her out of her home, along with her husband, and began to beat them as they yelled, “Leave Jesus!”.

Eventually they found Kirti’s Bible. They burned it in front of her then stole all her food and livestock. That evening, the elders held a feast in the middle of the village and ate all they had just stolen.
Isolated

Kirti suffered a broken back and spent two weeks in hospital. When she and her husband returned home, villagers refused to talk to them. They were no longer allowed to draw water from the community well, let alone continue their house church. But over time, a few Christians in the village returned to their home for prayer.

When the village leaders heard about this, they were furious. They sent a group of men to Kirti’s house in the middle of the night. The men surrounded the house and kidnapped her husband before locking Kirti inside her own home. It was hours before other Christians in the village heard her cries.

Kirti searched the villages looking for her husband. When she found him, she discovered he had been martyred for his faith. The mob who abducted her husband were never charged.

A Light For Christ

After this traumatic event, Kirti left the village with her children for a safe house. There she received support and spiritual care from Open Doors and her children were placed in school.

“When I feel sad, I remember the Word of God,” Kirti explained. In all my trials, He helps me. I cannot read or write, but I memorise what the pastor teaches me. I’m stable in my faith.”

But Kirti refused to stay in safety. After a time of recovery, she returned to her village, to the people who were responsible for her husband’s death, to be a light in the community. “My village people want to chase me out,” Kirti said.

“ The people often threaten to kill me. But I pray for the salvation of my village and I believe that my village will receive that salvation.”

*Name changed for security purposes.*

Women walking through Mysore streets, India.
Encourage The Isolated Church

The persecuted church need our support more than ever before, as they face increased persecution during this pandemic. Not only are they facing discrimination and isolation for their faith, but many persecuted believers are the last to receive access to medical supplies and emergency relief.

You can encourage the persecuted church and impact the lives of believers who share our faith but not our freedom.

Give Monthly
Subscribe to the survival of the persecuted church.
You can ensure the survival of the persecuted church for generations to come, through discipleship, emergency relief and community development.

For $39 a month, you can have a life-changing impact on persecuted believers, by helping them follow Jesus, no matter the cost. Click here to subscribe to the persecuted church.

Crochet Hugs
by Knot Forgotten
Exclusive patterns to give a “hug” to a child in need.
Get creative and bring joy to a child in need, all without leaving your home. Hugs By Knot Forgotten is a brand-new pattern book, with three exclusive patterns, available for a limited time!

Order your Hugs pattern book by clicking here.

Experience
A Dedicated Faith
Live a day in the life of a Christian in the Muslim World.
Spend a day living as a persecuted Christian during Ramadan. Fast and pray for the persecuted Christians in the Muslim World, then virtually gather as a community to break your fast.

We are also asking you to give $30 to help Christians make Jesus known in the Middle East. Click here to get involved.
In northern Nigeria, violent attacks from extremist groups have uprooted the lives of Christians. Attacks often end in loss of life, physical injuries, the destruction of property, and kidnappings. But for Nigerian believer, Rikiya, her name serves as a reminder of who she is, even in the midst of suffering; Rikiya means ‘exalted by the Lord.’

Soon after her husband’s passing, Rikiya heard that Boko Haram, an extremist group widely known for their acts of violent persecution against Christians, was fast approaching her village. She fled with her three children, leaving everything behind.

After two months, Rikiya and her family returned to a home they no longer recognised.

“When I came back, it was not easy for me,” Rikiya said. “I was a widow with three children. It wasn’t easy. I was so traumatised. My husband was gone, and Boko Haram had captured our village.”

You can encourage Rikiya as she raises her three children while grieving the loss of her husband and home.

Your letters will remind her that she is not alone, connecting her to the global body of Christ as she continues to follow Christ.

Please send your letters by 30 June, 2020 to:
11/10 Gladstone Road, Castle Hill NSW 2154
Thank you for reading this edition of Frontline Faith!

We hope these stories were an encouragement to you during this time of isolation.