FRONTLINE FAITH

Lessons Of Courageous Christianity From The Persecuted Church

4 Grace In Suffering / 10 World Watch List Map / 12 Three Trends In Persecution
Hello,

Welcome to this special World Watch List edition of Frontline Faith. The World Watch List is one of the most important things that we do here at Open Doors.

At face value, it’s a list of the top 50 most dangerous countries to follow Jesus. But it’s so much more than that.

It represents countless hours of research by world-leading analysts of persecution. It represents that Jesus’ message has always been, and will always be, a controversial one in a world where people don’t all know Him.

But most importantly, it represents people. Brothers and sisters. The global Church, following Jesus all over the world, no matter the cost.

One Body. One Church. One God.

In the last year, 1 in 8 Christians worldwide experienced high or extreme levels of persecution. That’s 260 million Christians in the top 50 countries alone.

Persecution against Christians is growing, both in likelihood and severity. And while it can seem a world away, my experience with the persecuted church has shown me how similar we are here in Australia and New Zealand.

We’re all trying to figure out how to best follow Jesus in today’s world. And none of us can do it alone.

That’s why, since 1955, Open Doors has been helping people follow Jesus all over the world, no matter the cost.

We go to the most dangerous places to follow Jesus and build up the local church so that they can shine the light of Jesus in their communities.

But it doesn’t end there.

Following Jesus All Over The World

From the persecuted church, we hear some of the most incredible lessons of bold faith in the face of oppression, and we bring them back so that we too can remain courageously committed to following Jesus.

I see the persecuted church as some of the greatest mentors for our faith, because the pressure that they face means that they have truly considered the cost of following Jesus... and know that He is worth it.

Their stories and testimonies of faith at great cost help encourage and equip us to walk with Jesus in our own lives.

Taking The Next Step

Have you ever noticed that faith is the only thing in life that grows stronger with age? We downsize our house, our income drops, the kids move out and our health deteriorates, but faith grows stronger.

In the face of rapidly changing freedoms of religion and the increasing cost of faith, our task as followers of Jesus is to simply take the next step and remain courageously committed to Him, no matter the cost.

Thank you for your support of the persecuted church. I pray that their stories will continue to encourage you to take the next step of faith on your own journey.

Mike Gore
CEO Open Doors Australia and New Zealand

P.S. If you’re picking this magazine up for the first time, you can receive it regularly by signing up via:

Website: opendoors.org.au/sign-up  |  opendoors.org.nz/sign-up
Phone: (02) 9451 2999 in Australia  |  (04) 232 7055 in New Zealand
Grace In Suffering

Nigeria is one of the most dangerous places to follow Jesus in the world. The Islamic extremist group, Boko Haram, is responsible for much of the widespread violence, as they target and kidnap believers all over the country. Many more Christians are forced to flee their homes in the wake of these attacks. At just 14 years old, Ijanada experienced the brutality of Boko Haram firsthand.

When extremists swept into Ijanada’s village, her life changed dramatically.

“There were gunshots everywhere,” she remembered. “We fled for our lives.”

After running for some time, the sounds of gunshots stopped, and Ijanada and her family returned home. But the attack resumed. As everyone ran again, Ijanada tried to hide under her bed. But she was too slow, and the attackers discovered her hiding place.

“They came into the room shooting,” she said. “They saw me under the bed and pulled me out.”

“They threatened me, saying if I didn’t denounce Christ, they would kill me.”

The attackers took Ijanada away to a camp where she was forced to marry one of the men. She soon fell pregnant.

Describing her time in the camp, Ijanada said, “I faced so much suffering, hunger, maltreatment and pain. All I kept thinking of was my family and the memories we shared before I was kidnapped.”

A Chance To Escape

Four years later, as a mother of a young child and two months pregnant with her second, Ijanada escaped.

“They had all gone out for an attack. I took my son and started running into the forest without turning back.”

Hours later, Ijanada and her son, Luka, had made it far enough away from the camp to ask for help. With this help, they returned home.

Ijanada’s family welcomed her, but her community did not meet her with the same warmth.

Many villagers believe that children fathered by Boko Haram soldiers carry seeds of the group’s hatred, and never accept them.

“I was not welcome. Most people kept mocking and insulting me,” she remembered. “Luka is always isolated and lonely.”

Despite difficulties, Ijanada remained steadfast in her faith, drawing on God’s love to persevere. She soon gave birth to her daughter, naming her Warasini.

“It means ‘I never knew I would come back home,’” she said. “I gave her this name because of the grace God showed me and the power He demonstrated by bringing me back home.”

Your Help Makes A Difference

Ijanada attended a trauma care program run by our local partners.

She said, “I found new life here. Apart from the prayers, they encouraged us and taught us about genuine forgiveness. I learned how to forgive those who have offended me, and I have forgiven those who mocked me.

“If I hadn’t attended the seminar, I would still be full of bitterness and unforgiveness. I didn’t understand the importance of forgiveness, but now I do, and I have let those feelings go.”

Your generous support helps empower women of the persecuted church, helping them follow Jesus no matter the cost.
Theirs Is The Kingdom Of Heaven: Persecution And The Global Church

The 2020 World Watch List is a reminder of the persecution that the Church endures daily. 1 in 8 Christians face high to extreme levels of persecution all over the world. It can seem a distant struggle, a problem for Christians on the other side of the world to endure. But 1 Corinthians 12 reminds us that we are all part of one body, brought together in the Spirit.

Irene’s Faith

Irene is a 13-year-old girl from Indonesia, which is ranked #49 on the 2020 World Watch List. In May 2018, Irene was in a taxi with her two cousins, Evan and Nathan, just outside their church. As they waited to attend the morning service, a motorbike pulled up behind their taxi and attempted to enter the church property. When stopped by the church security guard, the rider detonated explosives strapped to the motorbike. Irene was injured but survived the blast. Evan and Nathan lost their lives.

“Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” Matthew 5:10

Persecution is a symbol of the world’s opposition to the message of God. Christians living in persecution are constantly reminded that following Jesus comes with a cost. In some cases, this can be financial hardship or family conflict. In other cases, like Irene’s, this can mean facing death.

John tells us that as Jesus prayed in the garden of Gethsemane, he prayed for a unified church. In his final hours before he would face persecution and death, Jesus prayed for the unity of his people. As the body of Christ, we are united throughout the whole world. If one part of the body suffers, then the whole body suffers. As believers in Australia and New Zealand, Jesus calls us to unity with the persecuted church all over the world.

“If you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name.” 2 Peter 4:16

In 2 Corinthians 1, Paul informs the church of his trials, knowing that he will be delivered as they pray. By prayerfully and financially supporting the persecuted church, you are standing with them as brothers and sisters in Christ. In turn, the lessons that their bold faith teach us strengthen our own faith. This is the body of Christ at its best, building one another into authentic and courageous followers of Jesus, no matter the cost.

We visited Irene after she had been released from hospital. She said that when she was lying in hospital and as the global church was praying, she found that her faith was the strongest it had ever been.

“I know that from these people around us, we will always have persecution. Now I am learning to love them.”

– Christian from Pakistan, #5 on the 2020 World Watch List

“In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.” 2 Timothy 3:12

Your support of the persecuted church helps people follow Jesus all over the world, no matter the cost. Christians have faced persecution since Jesus died on the cross, and persecution will continue to exist until Jesus returns. Yet the persecuted church is one of the most hope-filled things on the planet, because their unwavering commitment to faith proclaims that Jesus is worth it.

Irene’s faith is an incredible inspiration to every Christian. She left us with the following message to share with the global Church:

“Do not be scared of persecution. God has a plan for you.”

“I am not afraid of anything because you are with me.” – Isaiah 41:10

Inspire and challenge your walk with Jesus. Hear lessons of courageous faith from our passionate and experienced speakers at your church service or event.

opendoors.org.au/book-a-speaker
opendoors.org.nz/book-a-speaker
Lessons From Persecuted Christians In The Five Most Dangerous Places To Follow Jesus

**Find Your Value Through Jesus, Not Earthly Things.**

Pakistan #5 on the 2020 World Watch List

Shahzad was given a Christian name when he was born, but he didn’t know Jesus. To get casual jobs as a labourer, Shahzad would change his name to avoid discrimination. Lost and lacking meaning, he came to know Jesus while receiving vocational training. One of them came to Jesus, and we believe the other four are on their way.

“I believe in the future they will take the gospel forward.”

**Deep Roots Bear Fruit.**

Somalia #3 on the 2020 World Watch List

In the Horn of Africa, Muktar* disciples believers of Somali descent. In Somalia, there is no safe place for the tiny Christian population, who are violently attacked if their faith is discovered.

“Discipleship training has been conducted for more than two years now,” Muktar said. “Because of that, believers have become deeply rooted in Jesus and stand strong in persecution.

“They are also able to share the gospel with other people. One of our younger disciples recently had the opportunity to share the gospel with five fellow students at school. One of them came to Jesus, and we believe the other four are on their way.

“I believe in the future they will take the gospel forward.”

**Listen To God And Follow His Calling.**

North Korea, #1 on the 2020 World Watch List

North Korea is the most dangerous place on the planet to follow Jesus. It has been for 19 years. In such a dark place, it can be easy to lose sight of the ways that God is working. But Hana*, a secret believer, said, “Of course, God is at work! I am such a weak person. I hardly had any Bible knowledge, but God used me to explain the gospel to others.

“Sometimes, God sent me on the road. I saw some stranger, and I knew this was the person I needed to talk to. I said what I needed to say and went home. Do you think that would be possible without God?”

Despite our weaknesses, God has a plan to use us powerfully for His own purposes. All we have to do is listen to God and follow His call.

**Find Hope In God’s Promises.**

Afghanistan, #2 on the 2020 World Watch List

Believers in Afghanistan must live their faith in utter secrecy. Those who are discovered may be beaten, sent to a mental institution or lose their lives at the hands of extremist groups or even their own families.

Amid situations that could bring fear, Afghani Christians are clinging to Jesus.

A secret believer said, “We are not afraid but strong and hopeful. We know Jesus will come again. That is why there is so much pain and suffering. That is why there is persecution.

“He is coming back, and those who do not know Him need Him in their lives. For now, we, His followers, need to live with thankful, prayerful hearts.”

**Never Stop Pursuing God’s Heart.**

Libya #4 on the 2020 World Watch List

Rania* is one of just an estimated 150 local Christians in Libya. Despite the risks associated with being a Christian in Libya, Rania shared her faith with her mother and two sisters, who also came to know Jesus.

Hungry to know more, the family continued to seek out Jesus, and found another Christian they could contact on the phone.

“They asked very practical questions… How do I live as a Christian? How often do I need to pray, and how should I do that? How does fasting work?”

Even though they live in one of the most dangerous places to be a Christian, Rania’s family continued to seek answers about God and faith, to learn more about Him and more closely align their hearts to His.

**Cyclists in North Korea, ranked 1st on the 2020 World Watch List**

**Somalia is ranked 3rd on the 2020 World Watch List**

*Names changed for security purposes.
Three Trends In Persecution

In the 2020 World Watch List, some trends in persecution emerged. While Christians are targeted in many ways depending on their location, background, age, gender, ethnicity and so many other factors, these are some common threads from around the world.

1. Rising Islamic Extremism In Sub-Saharan Africa

“We began to hear gunshots everywhere. My children all came to my room and asked what was going on? My heart was already in my mouth. My husband wasn’t far off, but I sensed that he was in trouble.

“The shooting stopped after about two hours. Then I saw [our] pastor coming towards us. As soon as the pastor caught his breath, he said, panting, ‘Naomi, take heart. Your husband is dead.’ My world came to a standstill.” – Naomi, Burkina Faso, #28 on the 2020 World Watch List.

The influence of extremist Islamic ideology has spread across Sub-Saharan Africa, where violent attacks are increasing, including many in places where Christianity has previously existed relatively peacefully.

Burkina Faso appears in the 2020 World Watch List for the first time ever. A series of violent incidents targeting Christians have been reported, including many in sub-Saharan Africa.

Other countries notably affected: Nigeria (12), Mauritania (24), Central African Republic (25), Mali (29), Cameroon (48), Niger (50).

2. Technology And Surveillance

“Initially I was really frustrated by the government’s attempts to shut us down, but recently I have embraced this as a new season in which God will bring to us those who are truly hungry for Him.

“Many young people are too scared to attend our meetings, so we are trying new, creative ways to fellowship together. We take every opportunity to pray for one another and share scriptures that make us strong and give us hope.” – Titus*, China, #23 on the 2020 World Watch List.

The increasing saturation of technology into daily life means that in many places, governments can now watch their citizens more closely than ever before. Surveillance cameras, facial recognition software and biometric-based systems have been used to monitor and target Christians across many countries.

China has the most surveillance cameras of any country worldwide, and by the end of 2020, will have roughly one camera for every two citizens. These can be used to report on church members’ activities, intimidate them, and keep young people under the age of 18 out of churches.

Other countries notably affected: India (10).

3. Christians Forced To Flee In The Middle East

“After the recent crisis, the church community is traumatised and dispersed. Many Iraqi Christians, even leaders, have left the country.

“Going back to how things were is not possible. We need to make a new start with those who stayed, giving them new hope.” – Shefa*, Iraq, #15 on the 2020 World Watch List.

Years of conflict in Syria and Iraq have continued to devastate Christian communities. Islamic extremism, limited resources and the targeting of religious minorities have forced believers to flee.

In Iraq, the Christian community fell by 87% in a single generation. Two years after the city of Mosul’s liberation from the Islamic State, only 50-75 Christians are thought to remain.

Those who do return home face difficulties with jobs, security, education, health, food, water and fuel shortages.

Other countries notably affected: Syria (11).
15-year-old Tara* found Jesus when a friend shared the gospel with her while she was ill. After praying at a local church, she was healed and dedicated her life to Christ. But when Tara’s family discovered her faith in Jesus, they rejected her. They stopped speaking with her and wouldn’t even allow her into the kitchen for fear that she would pollute their food and water with her ‘unclean faith’.

Tara said, “My parents told me, ‘You are a shame to the family. Our community detests us because you go to church. Either leave Jesus or forget the relationship with us.’

“Today I still live in my home with my parents and the rest of my siblings, but I am totally rejected. My family is well off, yet I have to work hard as a daily wages labourer to survive.”

Tara now receives support from local partners of Open Doors, who help her receive a better education and supply her with basic daily needs. But Tara still longs for her family to know Jesus as she does.

“All things are possible for those who believe.”

— Tara* (India)

When Paul* discovered a community of believers while working in a military camp in Eritrea, he came to know Jesus. It wasn’t long until they were all jailed because they refused to deny Christ.

In prison, Christians like Paul are often treated more harshly and receive violent punishments for practicing their faith. They can be denied food, proper hygiene and medical care. Paul faced these conditions for 10 years.

“I thought I would die,” he said, “Then I thought, ‘What if I die? Where will I go? Where is my hope? Is it not in heaven?’ I realised that my hope was definitely not on earth. This really revived my soul.

“From that moment on, I decided to never stop thinking about my home in Heaven, but to keep my mind on spiritual things.”

Paul returned home after a decade in prison, only to find that he had lost both his parents and many of his friends and family had moved on. Though he struggled to adjust to daily life, his steadfast hope in the Lord has given him peace and allowed him to encourage other believers through his testimony.

“He said, “The Lord comforts and gives me hope. I want to continue to live for him.””

— Paul* (Eritrea)

Somali Christians living in the Horn of Africa, this question is a sad reality. Their faith is seen as a betrayal and is often met with harassment and extreme violence, even from those they are closest to. Somalia is the 3rd most dangerous country to follow Jesus in 2020.

“Who can do this if not God?”

Momina* left Islam when she came to know Jesus. She began praying, reading the Bible and attending church. But when Momina’s family viewed a telecast of a church service she attended, her husband threw her out of their home and turned her family against her. Others in her village threatened her, pressuring her to leave her Christian faith.

Desperate to follow Christ, Momina fled with her two sons.

In her new town, Momina was supported by a local church partner of Open Doors, enabled by your generous support. They provided her family with discipleship training, food, education, and helped them rent a new home.

“From that moment on, I decided to never stop thinking about my home in Heaven, but to keep my mind on spiritual things.”

Though her life looked different than it had before, Momina continued to find her hope in the Lord.

“I had money before, but I did not know rest and peace. I never slept well. But now, I sleep well.”

Her pastor remarked, “It has been such a pleasure to see them pray to the Lord with confidence.

“Momina’s story is a reminder that when we are unified, we can have hope for the future, together. Your support of Open Doors helps believers like Momina follow Jesus all over the world, no matter the cost.

Her pastor remarked, “It has been such a pleasure to see them pray to the Lord with confidence.

“Her pastor remarked, “It has been such a pleasure to see them pray to the Lord with confidence.

“Her pastor remarked, “It has been such a pleasure to see them pray to the Lord with confidence.

“Her pastor remarked, “It has been such a pleasure to see them pray to the Lord with confidence.

“Her pastor remarked, “It has been such a pleasure to see them pray to the Lord with confidence.

“Her pastor remarked, “It has been such a pleasure to see them pray to the Lord with confidence.

“Her pastor remarked, “It has been such a pleasure to see them pray to the Lord with confidence.

“Her pastor remarked, “It has been such a pleasure to see them pray to the Lord with confidence.

“Her pastor remarked, “It has been such a pleasure to see them pray to the Lord with confidence.

“Her pastor remarked, “It has been such a pleasure to see them pray to the Lord with confidence.

“Her pastor remarked, “It has been such a pleasure to see them pray to the Lord with confidence.

“Her pastor remarked, “It has been such a pleasure to see them pray to the Lord with confidence.

“Her pastor remarked, “It has been such a pleasure to see them pray to the Lord with confidence.

“Her pastor remarked, “It has been such a pleasure to see them pray to the Lord with confidence.

“Her pastor remarked, “It has been such a pleasure to see them pray to the Lord with confidence.

“Her pastor remarked, “It has been such a pleasure to see them pray to the Lord with confidence.

“Her pastor remarked, “It has been such a pleasure to see them pray to the Lord with confidence.

“Her pastor remarked, “It has been such a pleasure to see them pray to the Lord with confidence.

“Her pastor remarked, “It has been such a pleasure to see them pray to the Lord with confidence.

“Her pastor remarked, “It has been such a pleasure to see them pray to the Lord with confidence.

“Her pastor remarked, “It has been such a pleasure to see them pray to the Lord with confidence.

“Her pastor remarked, “It has been such a pleasure to see them pray to the Lord with confidence.

“Her pastor remarked, “It has been such a pleasure to see them pray to the Lord with confidence.

“Her pastor remarked, “It has been such a pleasure to see them pray to the Lord with confidence.

“Her pastor remarked, “It has been such a pleasure to see them pray to the Lord with confidence.

“Her pastor remarked, “It has been such a pleasure to see them pray to the Lord with confidence.

“Her pastor remarked, “It has been such a pleasure to see them pray to the Lord with confidence.

“Her pastor remarked, “It has been such a pleasure to see them pray to the Lord with confidence.

“Her pastor remarked, “It has been such a pleasure to see them pray to the Lord with confidence.

“Her pastor remarked, “It has been such a pleasure to see them pray to the Lord with confidence.

“Her pastor remarked, “It has been such a pleasure to see them pray to the Lord with confidence.

“Her pastor remarked, “It has been such a pleasure to see them pray to the Lord with confidence.

“Her pastor remarked, “It has been such a pleasure to see them pray to the Lord with confidence.

“Her pastor remarked, “It has been such a pleasure to see them pray to the Lord with confidence.

“Her pastor remarked, “It has been such a pleasure to see them pray to the Lord with confidence.

“Her pastor remarked, “It has been such a pleasure to see them pray to the Lord with confidence.

“A New Life

India is the 10th most dangerous country to follow Jesus in 2020.

“Please pray for my family, that they may know the Lord soon and accept me,” she said. “I really miss them. All things are possible for those who believe.”

India is the 10th most dangerous country to follow Jesus in 2020.

“Names changed for security purposes.

“Names changed for security purposes.

“Names changed for security purposes.

“Names changed for security purposes.

“Names changed for security purposes.

“Names changed for security purposes.

“Names changed for security purposes.

“Names changed for security purposes.

“Names changed for security purposes.

“Names changed for security purposes.

“Names changed for security purposes.

“Names changed for security purposes.

“Names changed for security purposes.

“Names changed for security purposes.

“Names changed for security purposes.

“Names changed for security purposes.

“Names changed for security purposes.

“Names changed for security purposes.

“Names changed for security purposes.

“Names changed for security purposes.

“Names changed for security purposes.

“Names changed for security purposes.

“Names changed for security purposes.

“Names changed for security purposes.

“Names changed for security purposes.

“Names changed for security purposes.

“Names changed for security purposes.

“Names changed for security purposes.

“Names changed for security purposes.

“Names changed for security purposes.

“Names changed for security purposes.

“Names changed for security purposes.

“Names changed for security purposes.

“Names changed for security purposes.

“Names changed for security purposes.

“Names changed for security purposes.

“Names changed for security purposes.

“Names changed for security purposes.

“Names changed for security purposes.

“Names changed for security purposes.

“Names changed for security purposes.

“Names changed for security purposes.

“Names changed for security purposes.

“Names changed for security purposes.

“Names changed for security purposes.

“Names changed for security purposes.
Join The Movement

We are one body, one Church, and we serve one God. Join a movement of Christians who give monthly to help people follow Jesus, no matter the cost.

As you support the persecuted church, their stories of bold faith will strengthen your own.

Join today: opendoors.org.au/one | opendoors.org.nz/one