

OPEN DOORS

MAGAZINE



ESCAPE FROM IRAN

2021 | Issue 2

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LOAVES RAISED FOR THE PERSECUTED CHURCH



What's been the biggest lesson you've learnt during lockdown? As well as finding out how to bake sourdough, navigate Zoom and cut your own hair, you may also be one of the many people who've realised just how much God has made us for connection with each other.

This was the revelation that made a fundraising activity by two Open Doors supporters especially exciting. Dietmar and Jutta from England broke the monotony of lockdown by making artisan sourdough bread to raise funds for persecuted Christians.

“We are humbled by the bravery of Christians around the world”

“We enjoy baking, and for some years we and a group of friends baked pizzas for charity, featuring at local events,” they explained. “This was not possible last year and so we were looking for other opportunities.”

It's here that the persecuted church came to mind. “We are humbled by the bravery of Christians around the world in the face of imprisonment, torture and even death,” they said. “And during the pandemic, we've heard that Christians are often the last to be given aid, sometimes

none at all.”

Once the initiative began, friends jumped on board to help with the bread delivery – much to the personal blessing of Dietmar and Jutta. “The most exciting aspect was being able to connect with our friends and church family, who helped in practical ways and gave encouragement. We united for a good cause.”

It's therefore fitting that at the heart of the idea was bread, which features prominently in the Gospels and often in community. With hungry crowds and little food to go around, bread was broken and miraculously multiplied (Mark 6:30-44). And when the last supper took place, Jesus – amongst friends – broke bread, a symbol of His broken body (Luke 22:7-38).

“Bread is about sharing, about blessing and about being blessed,” the couple added. “We wanted to make a small contribution to bless our brothers and sisters who are persecuted for their faith.”

Over two weekends, 120 loaves were baked, raising £2,445!

A Letter from the Editor

Truth proclaimers

“They never stopped teaching and proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the Messiah.”

ACTS 5:42

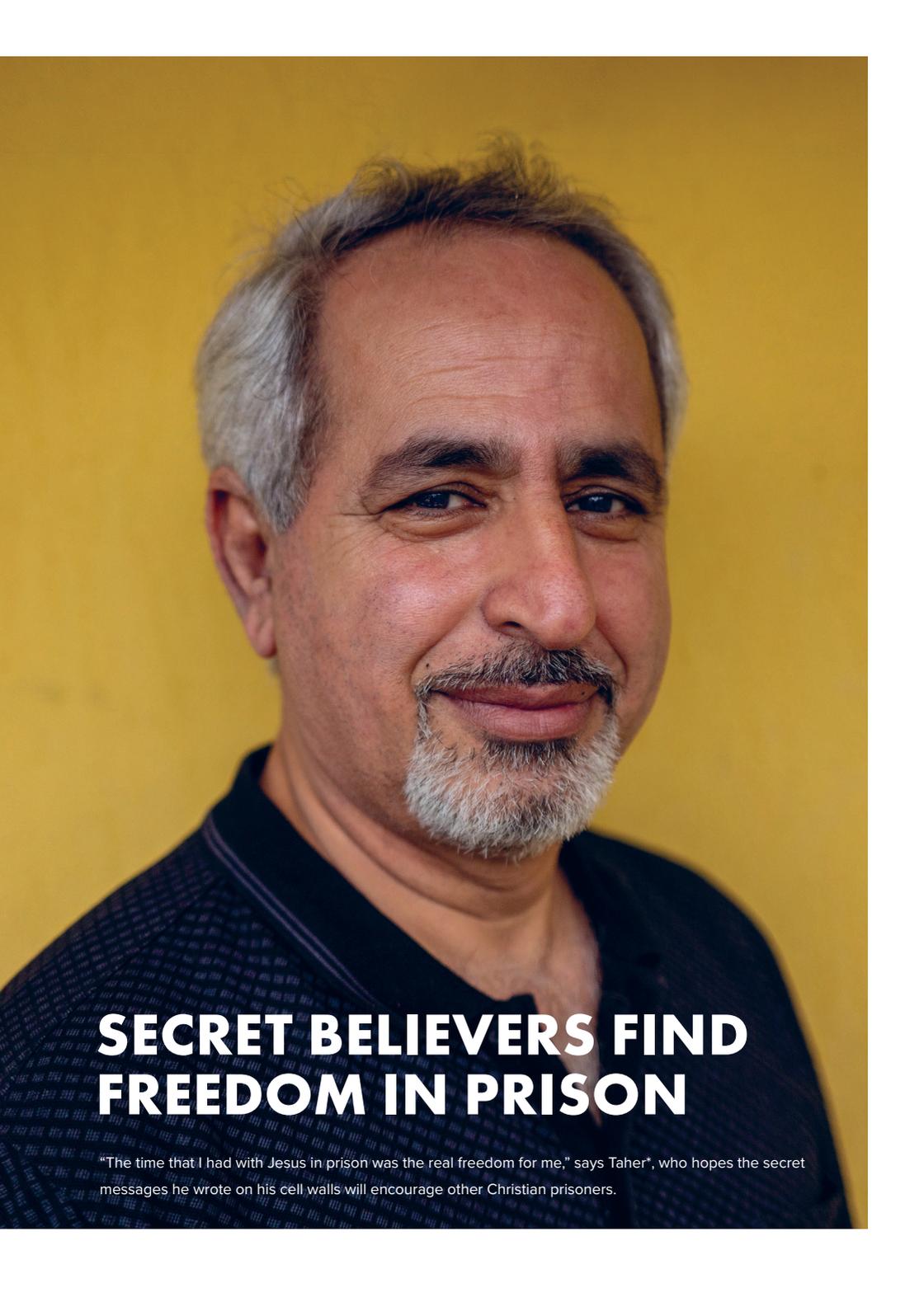
How many times you have attended church in person since last year? Every Sunday, I sit in front of the laptop and watch our church's online service – perhaps you've been doing the same. Should we close the windows, so our singing doesn't disturb our neighbours?

That's when it really struck me. Many of our brothers and sisters are worried about keeping the windows closed for a far riskier reason. Being overheard wouldn't just annoy the neighbours – they could be sent to prison, or even killed.

In this magazine, you'll find the story of an extraordinary couple called Taher and Donya (see p.4). As secret believers in the Middle East, they knew the risks involved in meeting with other Christians. Their home was raided by the secret service, and Taher was arrested and relentlessly interrogated. Even after all that, he still continued to speak about Jesus to his friends and neighbours – like the disciples in Acts 5, who kept sharing the gospel after they were miraculously released from prison. Taher's faith and passion for sharing

Jesus in the face of persecution are a profound challenge and encouragement to me.

Together, we can stand with our church family in countries where openly following Jesus is so difficult and so dangerous. Let's keep being people who proclaim the truth: the truth of the gospel, and the truth about the persecution and discrimination our persecuted family face. Through prayer, support and speaking out, you can make sure your brothers and sisters are never alone.



SECRET BELIEVERS FIND FREEDOM IN PRISON

"The time that I had with Jesus in prison was the real freedom for me," says Taher*, who hopes the secret messages he wrote on his cell walls will encourage other Christian prisoners.

Miracles, dreams and TV shows are bringing Muslims in the Middle East to Christ. The church is growing, but the threat of rejection, violence and imprisonment is rising. These believers need their worldwide family to stand alongside them.

“Taher*. You need to come home, now.” The call came from the Iranian secret police. They were in Taher’s house with his wife and two daughters, ransacking the place for evidence of his Christian faith.

There was plenty to find, because Taher loved to share his faith in Jesus. In front of his family, he was handcuffed, blindfolded and bundled into a car.

“Even though you can’t put an arm around them: nobody should face persecution alone.”

For the next week he survived in a tiny cell, interrogated every night between midnight and 4am. He was given paper and pen and instructed to write down the names of the Christians he knew.

He never wrote a single name.

All over the Middle East, God is revealing himself to new believers. These converts from Islam live with the constant threat of rejection, violence and imprisonment. Open Doors helps them to grow and build healthy faith communities.

Message of strength

Taher may not have written the names of his fellow believers in the interrogation room, but he did quietly slide a pen from the table into his pocket. When the guards returned him to his cell,



he began to scribble in the cracks of the wall.

“Ask, seek, knock, and it will be given to you,” he wrote, with reference to Matthew 7:7.

He desperately hoped these words would encourage Christians just like him—believers from the Iran underground church who would be arrested and find themselves in this same cell. Perhaps these faint messages would give others courage to stay strong in the face of their interrogators.

The secret service eventually released Taher on bail. Months later, during his sentencing, the judge decided to have mercy on Taher and released him under one condition—he stop evangelizing. If the authorities arrested him again, the judge would have no leniency, and the conviction would be execution.

Never stop ministering

However, the warning to stop preaching didn’t deter his calling. Taher says simply, “I went back home and started ministering again.”

Eventually, the situation in Iran became too dangerous for Taher and his family. The secret service followed them everywhere. He couldn’t find a job and the regular harassment become overwhelming. One night, they met as a family and made the prayerful decision to leave Iran.

Today, Taher and his family are refugees in Turkey, but they hope to return someday if God opens a door for them. Believers from a

**Name changed for security reasons*



Secret believers in the Middle East rely on prayer from the global church to stay strong under persecution.

Muslim background across the Middle East face persecution not only from the police and the authorities, but their own families and communities too. As a consequence, they hide their faith and suffer from severe isolation. Open Doors aims to connect believers online, as well as in person where possible, to help secret believers know they are not alone.

Community online

He continues, “Community really is the key word here. Having others to share your faith with helps you to endure persecution. If you know that there are people like you, if you know that there are people praying for you: then you can stand strong.”

“If you know there are people praying for you, you can stand strong.”

Jonathan, an Open Doors field worker, says, “We have a lot of online programmes to reach new believers. We give them pastoral care, help them grow in faith and connect them to a community of believers if possible.”

During the Covid-19 restrictions, the dangers of isolation became more acute. Trapped inside with their potential persecutors, secret believers found it harder to hide their faith. Peter, another Open Doors worker, reports that during lockdown, government surveillance increased leading to a higher number of arrests and the imprisonment of believers.



Yet perhaps the greatest danger is to leave these secret believers in the Middle East without prayer and without support. Jonathan explains, “When we don’t support the Christian community in the Middle East to grow in faith and stand strong in the face of persecution, many will fall back into their old faith. This is also a hindrance in the maturing of the church.”

“Most importantly we need our supporters to not cease their prayers. It helps secret believers to know that people are praying for them. Even though you don’t speak their language, you can’t put an arm around them: nobody should face persecution alone.”

Stand with secret believers in the Middle East who live under the threat of imprisonment and persecution.

PLEASE PRAY

Pray for secret believers whose house churches are raided, for those whose family members are violent against them, those who have lost their jobs because their employer found out about their faith. Pray as the Holy Spirit guides you.

PLEASE GIVE

Every HK\$390 could provide counselling training for a secret believer, so they can support fellow Christians facing persecution.

Every HK\$700 can provide two secret believers who’ve fled to a neighbouring country with practical and spiritual support at a Christian community centre.

Every HK\$775 could provide online training for ten secret church leaders to develop their leadership skills, so they can better disciple their churches.

PLEASE WRITE

Please use the power of your pen to write a message of encouragement to secret believers. Please go to p.15.



Be prepared to escape

When the secret service raided Saghar's church in Iran, she knew what to do. She'd been to gatherings to prepare for persecution – but she still relied on God to save her.



Saghar thanks God for her dramatic escape from the secret police.

A crowbar forced the door open, but no voices were raised. The secret service had thought through every detail of their raid on the house church meeting. But Saghar, the church's pastor, was prepared too.

Saghar had recently been to meetings to prepare Iranian Christians to endure a raid.

So, when Saghar was bundled into the living room for interrogation, she held her nerve. The room was full of burly men, one of them filming everything. Saghar was terrified. But she remembered her training and knew what to do.

“No Christian should face persecution unprepared.”

Her first step was to ask to use the bathroom. There, she grabbed her phone, snapped a selfie and sent it to the outside world. Her message: “Please pray for us, our church is being raided!”

Delete the evidence

Next, she began to delete all evidence of her Christian faith from her phone. One of the female secret service officers pushed on the toilet door, trying to force it open. But Saghar firmly explained her rights, forcing the officer to back off.

As the interrogation continued, officers told Saghar she was under arrest. But she remembered what she'd learned: they couldn't arrest her without a warrant. When they told her they'd intercepted her passport, she recognised the bluff.

Three days later she arrived at the airport, petrified: surely her arrest warrant had been processed by now.

As she joined the queue to board the plane, her

heart skipped a beat. Checking documents was one of the secret agents who had raided her house only days ago.

This was the toughest moment in her life.

Ask for a miracle

Alone, no fellow Christians to help her. She realised that only God could save her. Like Peter stepping out of the boat, Saghar stepped to the front of the queue. And while the agent's eyes were turned, a miracle happened: Saghar was allowed to board the plane.

As she found her seat, her name echoed through the airport. The security service had just received a warrant for her arrest.

But it was too late. Saghar's plane took off safely.

Four years later, in a country of refuge, Saghar still suffers occasional flashbacks to the raid. But the regular nightmares come less often now. Her terrifying experience has left scars, but she is aware it would've been much worse in prison.

“I wouldn't be sitting here talking to you if it wasn't for my preparation,” she says. “No Christian should face persecution unprepared, and no Christian should go through it without prayer from the worldwide church.”

Please pray for secret believers:

- to find strength to act boldly under threat, as Saghar did
- who've fled their country because it was no longer safe for them to stay
- who've been imprisoned for their faith

CHILDREN WITH A FUTURE AND A HOPE



HOW YOUR PRAYERS AND SUPPORT HAVE BROUGHT COMFORT AND JOY TO PERSECUTED CHILDREN

Thank you so much for all of your prayers and gifts for persecuted Christian children during our Christmas appeal last year. You have brought comfort and joy to thousands of children around the world! Here are just a few ways...

BRIDGE TO A BETTER FUTURE

In India, Open Doors partners run 'bridge schools' for children who struggle with studies at school. One local partner, David*, shares, "Most of the children who attend these tuition classes are from persecuted families. These children often have to help their family with chores in the household; in some cases, they also work part of the day to help their family earn a little extra money."

"All this makes it difficult for them to cope with studies at school. Their family members are also mostly uneducated and so are not able to support them." In many instances, these difficulties lead to children dropping out of school as their families can't afford it. This impacts the future earning and livelihoods of vulnerable Christians, many of whom are in India's lowest social castes. "These free tuition centres have helped several Christian children to do better at school and understand the value of education," adds David.

"In the bridge schools, we not only provide help with their school studies, but we also provide them

"The entire family got down on their knees and thanked the Lord for the provision"

with biblical moral guidance and supply them with necessary stationery material, sports equipment, and other school items."

When visiting schools, Open Doors partners also discovered some families in desperate need of food, because of Covid-19, and were able to provide this. David says, "We found out that they didn't have sufficient food because they had no work, as most of the families were daily wage workers. So, we arranged for a trip to these tuition centres where we spent time with them, praying and doing some fun activities. We met in very small groups [due to Covid restrictions]. We also visited the houses of these children, where we also provided grocery packets to their families."

"In one family there were four children, and when we gave them the groceries, the entire family got down on their knees and thanked the Lord for





the provision,” says David. “The youngest girl led everyone in prayer, saying: “Thank you Lord; You provided us this food in time of need. We are so happy now as there will be no more scarcity of food in our house.”

BIBLES AND BLESSINGS

Your prayers and gifts also meant that 26,000 children’s Bibles were distributed to thousands of

children in Syria over the Christmas season! Thank you.



And in Nigeria, Open Doors partners were able to visit and catch up with the four Christian boys who were among the students kidnapped from their school and subsequently released in December 2020. Hanna*, one of Open Doors’ local partners, shares, “The parents were very thankful for our visit, the money we gave them to help them with supplies, and the children’s Bibles we gave the boys.”

CHILDREN IN CENTRAL ASIA RECEIVE PRESENTS FOR THE FIRST TIME

In December, Open Doors partners in Central Asia travelled to remote mountainous areas to distribute Christmas presents to children.

They shared that the trip was hard, because of the weather conditions and local features, but really blessed.

One of the team says, “We distributed 500 Christmas gifts in the area where people never heard about Jesus and the children never got presents for

Christmas and New Year. We organised celebrations in schools – songs, performances and games.”

However, difficulties soon arose. The partner explains, “In one of the schools, officers from local security services came and arrested our team. We were detained in the prison cell for several hours and threatened with imprisonment for ‘illegal religious activity with children’. But thank God, after several hours we were released; we just paid a fine and left that place.”

Praise God that He was able to work that situation for good!

Thank you so much for your support – these children and so many more are growing stronger physically and spiritually because of you. Please keep praying for them, their families and the Open Doors partners supporting them.

PRAY

- Praise God for the amazing faith of these children! Pray that they will continue to grow ‘in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God’ like Jesus (Luke 2:52)
- For God’s continued provision and protection for these children and their families as they continue to face challenges over the coming year
- That God would continue to make a way for Open Doors partners to serve and bless persecuted Christian children.

*Names changed for security reasons

PHOTOS: You have brought Christmas joy to persecuted children from Syria to Central Asia!



SIXTY SECOND SHORT STORIES TO READ AND SHARE



A Dangerous Mission

Oliver lived in one of the countries on the Arabian Peninsula where it was forbidden to convert Muslims to Christianity. Giving them a Bible was certainly illegal. He could end up being deported, or imprisoned. But the danger didn't stop Oliver from spreading God's word. He had to share it, even if it cost him his life.

In the middle of the night, he would drive into Muslim villages and walk the streets placing Bibles on the doorstep of every home. Four months later, Oliver saw the fruit of his work.

A Muslim man shared that he found a Bible on his doorstep, and had been reading it ever since.





Loving Those Who Persecute You

For more than 35 years, Laga Uly has been evangelising and preaching in Muslim villages in West and East Java, Indonesia. Despite repeated threats, the destruction of his church and a vicious knifing attack that almost took his life, he continues to share the gospel.

"My ear, they almost cut it off...they slashed seven parts of my body...I never blame them. God helped me to forgive them, because God is love, and I love Muslims.

"I cannot explain my love for the Muslims," he said. "All I can say is that God has called me to share the Gospel with them. Jesus loves me so much that He gave His life for me. Now, I want to show the same love to those who need Him."

One Dream Brings A Family To Jesus

A large Muslim family lived on a farm in the mountains, where following Christ was forbidden. When the father passed away, his son had a dream.

In the dream, his father told him that Jesus appeared to him on his deathbed and said, "If you believe in Me, I will give you real life."

"Yes, I believe in you," his father replied, "But please go to my family." He then surrendered his life to Jesus and passed away.

When the son woke, he gathered the family for a meeting, but his little sister refused. She was afraid; "I had a special dream," she said. Both the son and sister shared the identical dreams they had. The whole family was moved and gave their lives to Jesus Christ.

When Prayer Comes to Life

Pray as if our persecuted brothers and sisters are right across the table.

A few years ago, an Open Doors staff learned a lesson that completely changed the way he pray:

I had the opportunity to go to a country in Asia to meet with some of our persecuted brothers and sisters there. This particular country had been on my heart for several years, so I was excited to make the trip. I had been praying for Christians in this country since I was young, and it was exciting to meet several of them.

I knew that I would hear some difficult stories, but I thought it would be helpful in guiding my prayers for the persecuted...but it did more than that.



We met one brother who lived in an area where his faith had to be completely hidden.

He told us how he would do baptisms in the middle of the night and how his church would meet deep in the woods. After hearing his story and praying, we had dinner together. We talked about life, faith and family. He had become a friend.

Which made it all the more difficult when I heard that he was forced to be on the run just a few months later. He had to go to a different part of the region, and his family wasn't able to see him for months.

It changed the way I prayed for the persecuted. I imagined them all as close friends or my actual brothers and sisters. I wanted each prayer request to impact me like it was someone I knew and cared about. And it has been amazing to pray this way.

"Let's pray urgently, fervently and deeply for our brothers and sisters as if they were right across the table."

Because in God's eyes, that's exactly where they are. Thank you for praying for our brothers and sisters who face so much for our faith.

Writing a Letter of Encouragement



Taher (father), Donya (mother), Arezoo (26, married and has a 1-year-old son) and Farah (16).

A song dear to the heart of everyone in this family:

**All to Jesus I surrender
All to Him I freely give
I will ever love and trust Him
In His presence daily live
I surrender all
I surrender all**

This Christian family with Muslim background has been through a lot of hardship in Iran. One of the things that happened to them was the arrest of father Taher. After his release they had to flee the country.

Now they live as refugees in Turkey, which comes with a lot of challenges. We invite supporters to write them letters of encouragement. Let them know they are not alone.

Mail your letter to us by 31 August 2021:

Open Doors Hong Kong

P.O. Box 78516, Mongkong Post Office, Kowloon, Hong Kong

Writing Guidelines

- Write about 200 words in English.
- Greeting cards, children's artwork, and postcards are best.
- Please do not dwell on the recipient's plight, or share about the blessings of life in your country.
- Do not criticise a country's religion or religious extremists, its government, judicial system or political leaders.
- Please do not mention Open Doors in your letters. If writing a postcard, send it in an envelope and do not write the Open Doors' address on the postcard.
- You can include your first name and country but not your address.
- Do not send money or make proposals to help.



The secret police demanded Taher* name his Christian friends. He bravely chose to leave the page blank.

The secret police arrested Taher, because he used to be a Muslim, but now he believes in Jesus. Under interrogation, he was pressurised to reveal his friends' names.

Taher bravely refused and instead chose to use a smuggled pen to write words of encouragement on his prison cell wall. He stayed strong in his faith till, miraculously, he was released. He has now escaped with his family.

Secret believers in the Middle East face great risks. They need your prayers and support today.

Every HK\$700 can provide two secret believers who have fled to a neighbouring country with practical and spiritual support at a Christian community centre.

**Name changed for security reasons*

Please act today:
www.opendoors.org.hk

Thank You!

We are a tax-exempt charity (under Section 88 of the Inland Revenue)

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