

# OPEN DOORS

MAGAZINE



## Extreme Love

Risking everything to follow Jesus

2023 | Issue 1

### Extreme Love

*Risking everything*

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*5 stories of brave faith*

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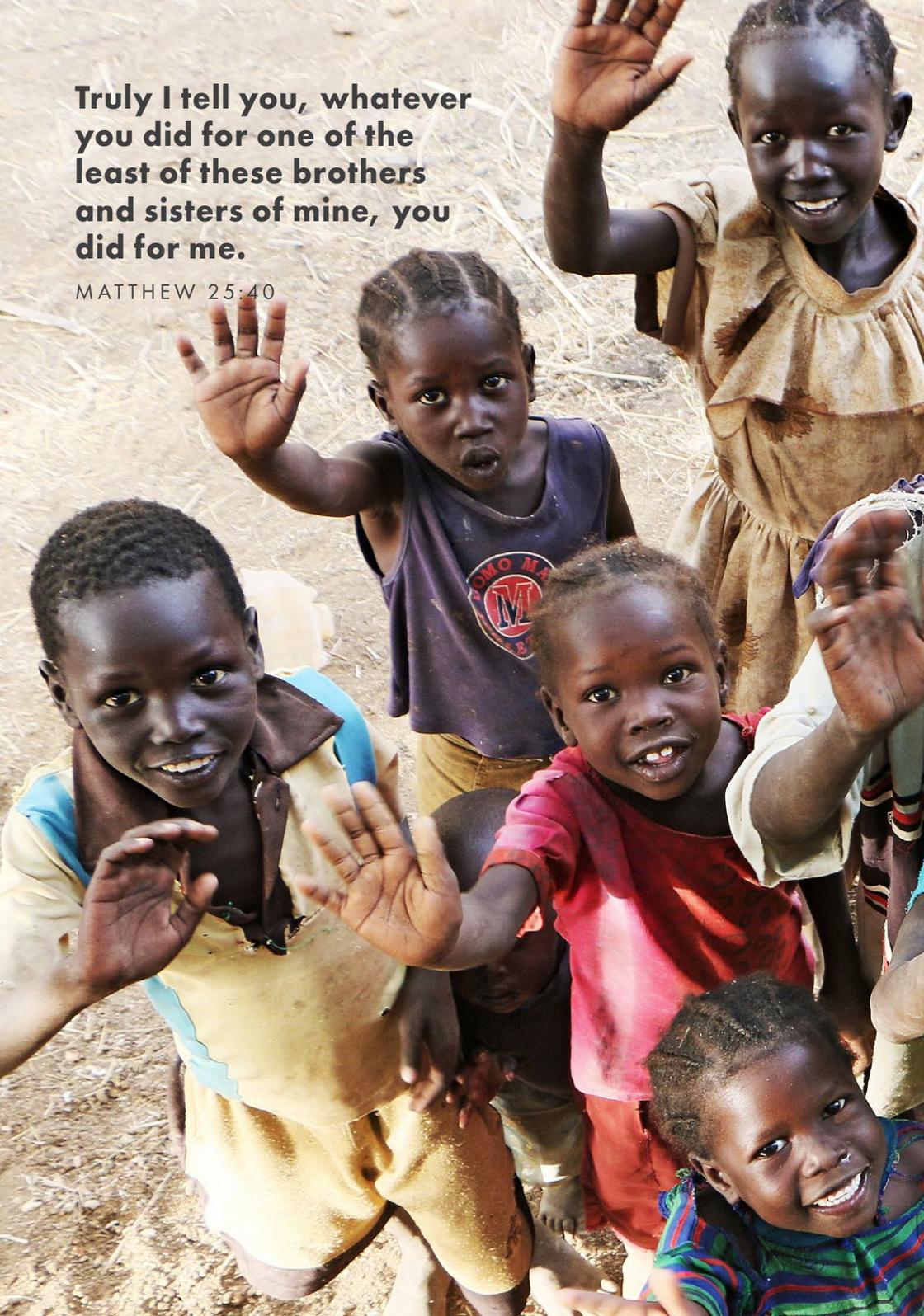
### Your Impact

*in Afghanistan*

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**Truly I tell you, whatever  
you did for one of the  
least of these brothers  
and sisters of mine, you  
did for me.**

MATTHEW 25:40





# A Letter from the Editor

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When was the last time you helped someone, even with the threat of danger?

It's not always easy to help someone, especially when the person is in a perilous situation. But this has been the testimony of Rebecca\*, an Open Doors worker helping North Korean women who escaped from their country for survival. She loves these women so much that she risks *everything* just to be able to serve them, and most importantly, show them how much Jesus loves them.

This year, in its 30th edition, North Korea is back at the #1 spot in the annual World Watch List - Open Doors' list of 50 countries where Christians are most persecuted.

Globally, millions of Jesus' followers face extreme persecution, but it doesn't change the fact that they are extremely loved by our heavenly Father. This is the love that overflows from Rebecca for the women she meets. This is the love Open Doors seeks to continue to show the persecuted church. And this is the love that you exemplify each time you remember them in your prayers and support.

This new year, may we be refreshed by the extreme love of God for us in Jesus, and may we be given opportunities to channel this love to those who extremely need it.

A blessed 2023 to all!

*\*Name changed for security reasons*



# EXTREME LOVE

## As persecution of Christians around the world intensifies, Open Doors workers are risking everything to stand with them. But it can only happen with your support...

Rebecca\* speeds along a darkened track in illegal transportation, deep in the countryside. She's keeping a look-out for the police, who would ask questions and demand to see her ID. The journey has taken hours; she's come a different route from previous trips.

This brave woman is on her way to a secret location to visit her 'sisters', as she calls them, a group of North Korean women who've fled or been trafficked into this country.

The trip is fraught with danger. But for Rebecca, it's worth it – *because the women she's going to meet are risking everything to follow Jesus.*

**"Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me."**

**MATTHEW 25:40**

"Others like me have been caught and imprisoned," says Rebecca. "But it's a risk I'm willing to take to share the gospel. After all, the women I'm going to see take a far worse risk in coming to hear it."

Rebecca is one of Open Doors extraordinary workers ministering to Christians who are at risk of the most extreme persecution. If the North Korean



North Korean women risk death to follow Jesus.

women are caught meeting Rebecca, they could be deported back to North Korea and sent to a prison camp. If they are discovered with a Bible, their whole families could be jailed. There's even a risk the women could be executed.

### **Dangerous places**

North Korea is among the top 10 most dangerous places in the world to be a Christian. Globally, persecution is becoming more extreme and increasingly violent. In countries like Afghanistan, Iran, Somalia and Eritrea, followers of Jesus can be imprisoned, brutally tortured or even killed if their faith is discovered.

Today, more Christians are murdered for their faith than at any time in the last 30 years.



Joy, faith and fellowship: At their secret meetings with Open Doors partner, Rebecca, the women read the Bible together.

It's a shockingly high price to pay – but for believers like the North Korean refugee women, it's a risk they will take.

### **'Overflowing with hope'**

"The ladies have a really miserable life," says Sister J\*, who works alongside Rebecca. Many women have been sold by traffickers to men they have never met before, to become wives or bear children. They have no legal status or freedom here.

### **"I would make the journey every time. Even for one."**

"But even though they are suffering and hiding, the women are full of joy in Christ," said Sister J. "They do not complain about their circumstances but give thanks for everything. They

are overflowing with joy and hope. That is only possible because God really walks with them."

And as faith grows among the refugee women, so the North Korean church will be strengthened. Sister R\*, another Open Doors field worker, told us, "These women symbolise the women of North Korea. We cannot go inside the country, but these women will eventually form a church in North Korea."

### **Stand with them**

For more than 25 years, Open Doors has been providing practical and spiritual support to North Korean believers. But today, your support and prayers are needed more than ever.

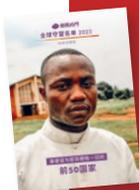
As Sister J says, "We are a team..."

we go out to share the gospel, but you send us there. God gives you a heart to support us. Without your support and prayers, we cannot do anything.” It’s up to us to stand with Open Doors workers risking everything to help our persecuted brothers and sisters.

For Rebecca, arriving in the darkness at her secret meeting place, there’s the usual jolt of fear. Is she too late? Have the women been found out? Every moment of this furtive gathering is risky. But extreme persecution demands extreme love – and Rebecca would choose nothing else.

## **“These women will eventually form a church in North Korea.”**

“God compels our love and our call to serve each other, despite the danger. Being with the women is my greatest joy,” she says. “I would make the journey every time. Even for one.”



**Find out about the top 10 most dangerous places to be a Christian. Look out for the World Watch List 2023, out on 18 January. Visit [www.opendoors.org.hk](http://www.opendoors.org.hk)**

*\*Names changed and representative images used to protect identities.*

## **Will you stand with Christians risking everything to follow Jesus?**

### **PLEASE PRAY**

- For God’s protection on workers like Rebecca, courageously supporting persecuted Christians.
- For opportunities to reach believers in the most dangerous places, to strengthen the church and grow faith.
- That the global church would stand in unity against persecution, in solidarity and prayer with our brothers and sisters.

### **PLEASE GIVE**

**Every HK\$240** could give a Bible each to five believers fleeing extreme persecution.

**Every HK\$430** could provide refugees fleeing extreme persecution with a food package and essential medicine to help them survive.

**Every HK\$550** could provide spiritual and financial support for three believers fleeing extreme persecution.

# WORLD WATCH LIST 2023



## ABOUT THE LIST

The World Watch List is compiled by Open Doors' analysts using real-world data from experts on the ground in 150 countries. Persecution in each country is recorded using a points system which tracks violence and pressure. This measures the number and severity of violent incidents against Christians and the degree of pressure exerted against the practice of their faith in 5 spheres of life.

VIOLENCE



PRIVATE LIFE



FAMILY LIFE



COMMUNITY LIFE



NATIONAL LIFE



CHURCH LIFE



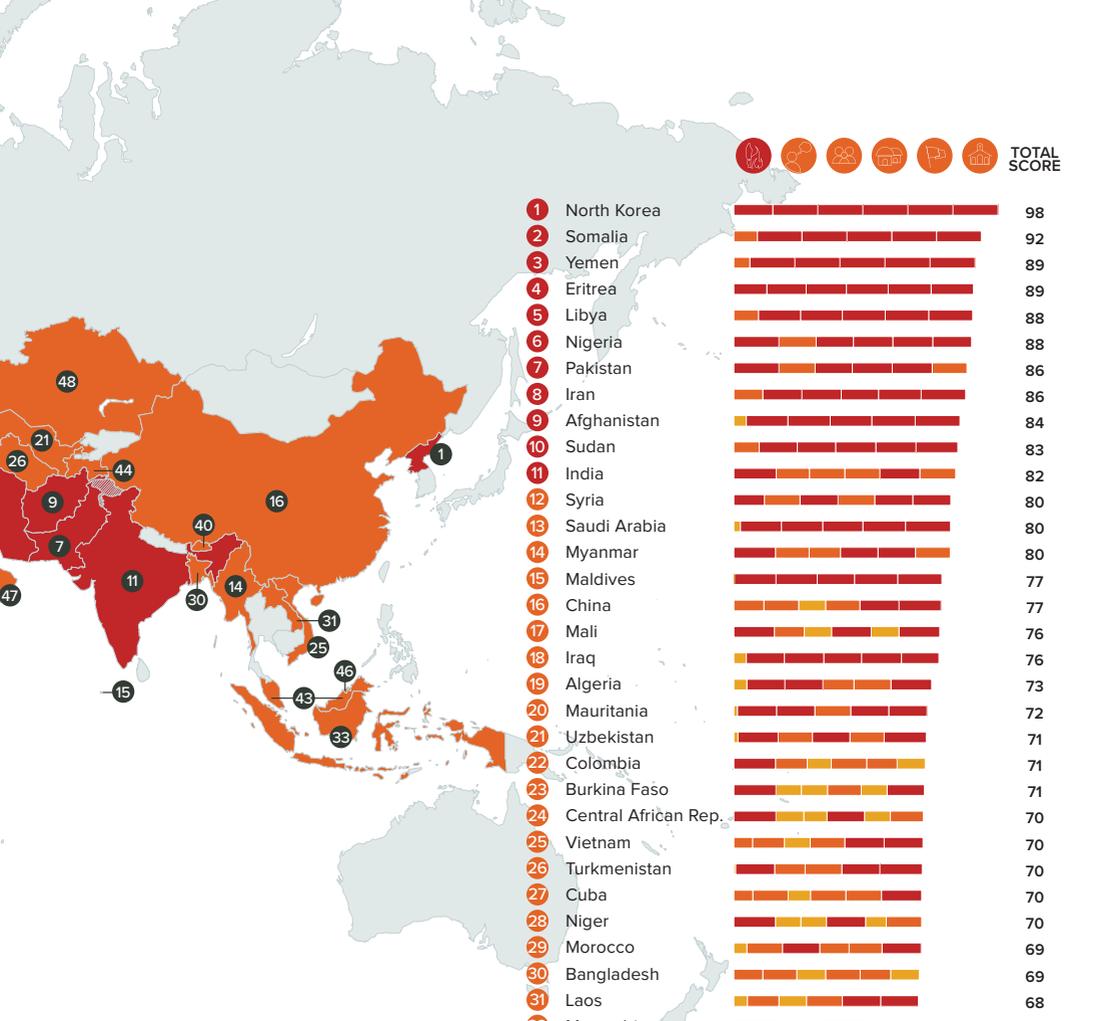
## PERSECUTION

**HIGH**  
41-60 points

For the third year, very high or extreme intensity of persecution.

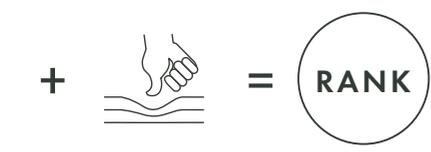


Maximum score for each is 16.7, maximum total of 100 when combined. Each country's ranking is determined by its total score out of 100, giving an indication of severity of persecution.



**PERSECUTION LEVELS**

... in a row, every country on the list is ranked as having extreme levels of persecution, showing the continued persecution against Christians.



# COURAGEOUS

## Christians

At Open Doors we know the example of the persecuted church has the power to dramatically change and even ignite a relationship with Jesus. So, telling stories of brave faith is something Open Doors is passionate about.

These believers are bravely following Jesus despite enormous opposition; they are the persecuted church, our worldwide family of Christians.



**BAE\***  
NORTH KOREA

**“The thing I give thanks for the most is that Father God uses me to work as His servant. I desire to dedicate my life, until death, to glorify Him.”**

Bae and her husband were sent to a remote village because they follow Jesus. But here, the secret church they are leading is flourishing.

*\*Names changed and representative images used to protect identities.*



**NALA\***  
SOMALIA

**“Jesus has changed me. I realize that I didn’t choose Him, but He chose me. I didn’t go out looking for Him, but He found me. Previously I didn’t have happiness, but now I have joy.”**

Nala, a Somali woman in her 20s, came to faith in Christ, it was the end of life as she knew it. Leaving Islam meant she lost her country, her home and her family. It may even cost her life.



**MOHAMMAD\***  
YEMEN

**“I couldn’t read the Bible at home; that would not be safe. I had to hide the book and read it outside the house. I thought I was the only believer in Yemen. For a long time, I didn’t know any other Christians. Now I know many, and there are many more like us.”**

Mohammad found a Bible in a second-hand shop, became a follower of Jesus.



**SHIDEN\***  
ERITREA

**“I will serve the Lord until I die; I want to serve the Lord for the rest of my days; I want to be a hero of the faith, too, and one day in the future claim the crown of righteousness that is laid up for me, which the Lord will award to me on that day.”**

Shiden was imprisoned for more than a decade—simply for worshipping Jesus.



**PASTOR ANDREW**  
NIGERIA

**“We are pleading for your prayers, especially for myself and my family... And we will fix our minds on the work ahead of us, and work towards spreading the gospel.”**

After a devastating attack by Boko Haram, Pastor Andrew and his Christian community picked up the pieces and rebuilt to remain a light in Nigeria through the help of your prayer and support.



YOUR IMPACT

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# Holding on to Jesus

Since the Taliban seized control of Afghanistan, almost 18 months ago, life for Christians has become perilous. But believers hold on to Jesus – and your support and prayers bring hope.

“The Christian is a ‘kafir’ – sinner or infidel. If a man is found to be a Christian, they would kill him immediately. And not only him, *but his whole family...*”

Nilofer\*, a refugee, is explaining the horrific cost of following Jesus in her homeland, Afghanistan. She’s one of many believers who fled when the Taliban swept into Kabul and seized power in August 2021. “If I was in Afghanistan now, I would not be alive today, for sure,” added Nilofer.

## **“God has been faithful to Afghan Christians.”**

Last year, Afghanistan topped Open Doors World Watch List as the most dangerous place in the world to be a Christian. Today, the Afghan church is depleted and hidden, suffering intense persecution.

Taliban soldiers roamed villages, going door-to-door in search of believers and unleashing violent attacks. Girls no longer attend school, and women who refuse to wear the hijab are beaten, even killed.

But you stood with our Afghan brothers and sisters when it mattered most.

Your prayers give strength and courage to the Christians who remain. Open Doors partner Hana\* said, “Afghan believers carry the responsibility to be the light of Christ in a very dark world, and many die for their faith.”

## **“You came to help us, you have not let us disappear into the darkness.”**

She added, “Christians in this country stay to be the light of Christ and so God will bless their homeland even if their fellow

citizens are hostile to them. Though there are only a handful of believers, God has been faithful to them. He answers their prayers, gives them strength to endure suffering, and He leads the global church, like you, to pray.”

Your gifts also provide vital practical help to Christian refugees. Open Doors partner Miranda\* visited families sheltering in an apartment together, in a secret location. “All of them sold everything they owned to come here,” said Miranda. “But life is difficult. They are professional doctors and nurses but they cannot work, and must pay to renew their refugee status every year.”

“You came to help us, you have not let us disappear into the darkness,” said one believer. Your gifts supply food and essentials to families in need – and, above all, your support means Afghan Christians know they are not alone.

*\*Names changed to protect identities*



### **PLEASE PRAY**

- Pray urgently for the safety of Christians in Afghanistan.
- Pray that believers will have access to education and medical help.
- Give thanks for our workers, risking everything to be with our persecuted family.
- Pray for a bold, thriving, faithful Afghan church, even in dark times.

## ONE REASON TO PRAY TODAY FOR NORTH KOREA

For the 30 years Open Doors World Watch List has been in existence, North Korea has been number 1 for 15 years as the most dangerous place on earth to be a Christian.

You might not be on the frontline in the most dangerous places to be a Christian – but when you pray and give, you are part of the team.



*“Be on your guard; stand firm in the faith; be courageous; be strong.”*

1 COR 16:13

**“We are a team... people like me go out to share the gospel, but you send us there.”**

Sister J\*, Open Doors field worker serving North Korean refugees.

## The top 10 countries where Christians face the most extreme persecution

Believers are risking everything to follow Jesus, and Open Doors will do whatever it takes to stand with them.

- |                |                |
|----------------|----------------|
| 1. NORTH KOREA | 6. NIGERIA     |
| 2. SOMALIA     | 7. PAKISTAN    |
| 3. YEMEN       | 8. IRAN        |
| 4. ERITREA     | 9. AFGHANISTAN |
| 5. LIBYA       | 10. SUDAN      |



**“Don’t say ‘take care’. Take risks!”**

BROTHER  
ANDREW,  
1926-2022

ORDER YOUR  
FREE 2023  
WORLD WATCH  
LIST **Top 50**  
**Guidebook**



Discover the top 50 countries where following Jesus costs the most with our World Watch List guidebook for you and churches. Packed with the latest information and stories of courageous faith to help you pray for and support your persecuted family around the world.

Order your **FREE** copies today at:  
[enquiryhk@od.org](mailto:enquiryhk@od.org)



Persecution of Christians is becoming more extreme and increasingly violent.

**VIOLENCE** RECORDED AGAINST  
CHRISTIANS IN 2022



**5,621**

Christians were killed for faith-related reasons



**2,110**

Churches and other Christian buildings were attacked



**4,542**

Christians were detained without trial, arrested, sentenced and imprisoned



**5,259**

Christians were abducted

Explore Open Doors' World Watch List 2023 report to stir up the church to prayer and action against extreme persecution.  
[www.opendoors.org.hk](http://www.opendoors.org.hk)

# Extreme persecution requires extreme **love**

Rebecca\* will stop at nothing to secretly help North Korean women who long to follow Jesus.

The risks are huge. Capture could lead to imprisonment.

But for Rebecca, an Open Doors field worker, it's worth it. "It's a risk I'm willing to take to share the gospel," she said. "The women risk far worse in coming to hear it."

Christians around the world face extreme violence, abuse and hardship – and it's getting worse.

## Will you stand with them?

Every HK\$550 could provide spiritual & financial support for three believers fleeing extreme persecution.

Please pray – and if you are able, please give.

*Thank you.*

**Stand with them.**

*\*Name changed for security reasons and representative image used.*

Which countries are most dangerous places on earth to be a Christian?



Find out in this year's World Watch List, out on 18 January 2023.

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