

WORSHIP LIKE A **NORTH KOREAN**

Experience life in North Korea: Imagine, Pray, Act



SMALL GROUP INSPIRATIONAL GUIDE **ISSUE FIVE**



OpenDoors

Serving persecuted **Christians** worldwide

"To crush underfoot all prisoners in the land, to deny people their rights before the Most High, to deprive them of justice – would not the Lord see such things?" – Lamentations 3:34-36

IMAGINE A LAND...

Where the only permitted worship is the worship of the leaders and where all churches are illegal. A land of silence. Where those who dare to disobey sing songs without a sound and raise voices to the minimum level possible. A land where two people meet on a Sunday morning in a remote place. They pause, unspeaking, joined only by the silent understanding that they share the same faith. If they can be certain no one else is near, they share a Bible verse, or a prayer point with each other. And then go home.

This is worshipping in North Korea.

(For more info on this series see p. 4)



PREPARE

THINK

TALK



You can either:

- Set up your house or venue so that everything is blacked out. As people arrive, check them at the door. Halfway through the evening you might arrange for someone to come and interrupt the group. (If it's someone they don't know, even better. They have to decide whether he/she is a spy or not.) You can choose whether to have the electricity on or off – and use candles instead! (In reality, North Korean Christians can't meet in groups, even under conditions like this.)
- Arrange for the group to meet outdoors to reflect on the way some North Korean believers have to meet.

(In either case, keep your meeting as quiet as possible!)

Read: Acts 12:1–19

“The house of Mary... where many had gathered and were praying.”

- What are the similarities between the Church in Jerusalem in the story from Acts 12 and churches in North Korea?
- What do you think about the Church in Jerusalem praying during the night?
- This was an amazing answer to prayer. What answers to prayer have you seen recently?

IMAGINE

Ask the group to prayerfully reflect on the presence of the 'observer'. How did they feel? In the silence think about how it feels to worship in a society where you can't be seen or make a noise.



PRAY

- *"Amazing Grace. That's the song Christians sing the most in North Korea,"* say a North Korean believer. Join with North Korean Christians in singing this song. But sing it as they do – by whispering the words quietly. You can't make a noise!
- The government insists that every North Korean must have images of their leaders in their home. Before praying, North Korean Christians *"cover the portraits of the leaders on the wall and then we kneel down in a circle. We pray for strength and endurance."* Print out a picture of Kim Jong-Il and pass it round the group or hang it on the wall. Then cover it up and kneel in prayer for strength and endurance.
- Hea Woo (see bottom of p. 3) describes how Christians in a labour camp had to worship in a toilet. Try moving your worship time to the toilet or a cupboard under the stairs or a shed. Somewhere secret, and cramped.

ACT

As individuals: Choose which of the actions you will do this month (see p. 4).

As a group: Holy Communion can be practised only once or twice a year in remote areas. Bread and wine are rarely available. Instead, if you feel able, share communion with your group using the normal Korean substitutes: biscuits, fruit and juice.

With Open Doors: Every R280 can help keep 1 believer in North Korea alive with emergency aid and spiritual support. Go to www.opendoors.org.za/giftnk

INSIGHT INTO NORTH KOREA



Worship, North Korean style

Normally, only when an entire family is Christian, they can have a house church service, where they sing, read and pray very softly. Or, if two Christians are not relatives, they go far into the woods or mountains. Hea Woo, a North Korean Christian, spent years in a labour camp because of her faith.

"God used me to lead five people to faith [while imprisoned in a prison camp]. I tried to teach them what I knew. That may not have been much, and I didn't have access to a Bible in the camp. But on Sunday and at Christmas, we met together out of the view of the guards. Often that was in the toilet. There we held a short service. I taught them Bible verses and some songs, which we sang almost inaudibly. All six of us survived the camp, because we took care of one another."

ACTION

Which of these will you do?

- **Follow the leader.**

North Koreans are forced to memorise masses of ideological learning material in praise of their leaders. Read up on Kim Il-Sung, Kim Jong-Il and Kim Jong-Un. Try to memorise what you read. (Imagine memorising hundreds of pages of this information!)

- **Change the picture.**

The government insists that every North Korean must have images of their leaders in their home. Print out a picture of Kim Jong-Il or Kim Jong-Un and hang it on the wall. Then cover it up and kneel in prayer.



The lives of North Koreans are constantly scrutinised. Every Saturday, citizens attend their local Kim Il-Sung research centre where they study the teachings of the great leaders and take part in ‘criticism’ sessions to address the ways they have failed the state. Every citizen is also part of the *Inminban* – a kind of neighbourhood watch system. No North Korean person exists outside the *Inminban* system; everyone is a member. The leaders of these *Inminban* groups write reports on their neighbours: Have their members had visitors? Been away from home for any reason? Are the portraits of the leaders kept clean?

For Christians – who believe that there is a higher authority than the nation’s leaders – life is perilous. “*I was afraid, every day, for my life,*” said one. This is one reason why Christian parents don’t often tell their children about their faith. Children might let something slip, sing a song, say a prayer, which could result in their entire family disappearing, them being executed or more likely sent to labour camps.

Even for those who aren’t locked up, life is incredibly hard. The economy is in a state of collapse. And it’s estimated that famine has killed between two and three million people in

North Korea since the early 1990s.

While living under such conditions, North Korean Christians and citizens alike need much prayer...

In this resource you will find readings and prayers to help you pray with the underground Church in North Korea. The stories you will read show the hardship, pain and suffering of North Korean believers, but also their joy, courage and faith – because, amazingly, despite the secrecy and pressure and fear, the Church is growing!

But what makes this resource different is that it also challenges **you** to live like a North Korean.

Along with Bible readings and prayers, there are actions that will help you experience a little of what North Korean Christians endure every day. You might end up living without electricity (or food). You might bury your Bible or learn long political thoughts of the ‘Dear Leader’. These actions can’t replicate the reality, but they can, with prayerful reflection, provide a window into the world of North Korean Christians.



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