



# North Korea

I L L U S T R A T E D



OpenDoors



Open Doors is an international ministry serving persecuted Christians and churches worldwide. Working in over 60 countries, we supply Bibles, train church leaders, provide practical support and emergency relief. To find out how you can partner with us to help persecuted Christians to survive and thrive, please visit:

[www.opendoors.org](http://www.opendoors.org)

Each story within this magazine is about actual events and real people.

All names are pseudonyms, used to help protect the identity and ensure the safety of all involved.





# Story + creativity = connection

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North Korea Illustrated brings together the creative disciplines of *writing, photography, illustration and design* to create a magazine that conveys the truth and beauty of the persecuted church in North Korea.

The stories shared will provide you with a unique and authentic window into the lives of our persecuted brothers and sisters – stories which bring challenge, messages of hope and show what God can do.

By using creative approaches to storytelling, we hope that you will be moved to action. To ponder, to share, to pray, to give, to advocate – to take action that will unite the global family of Christ to stand together, strengthened to face all forms of persecution.

*Tim*

**Creative Story Lead**  
Open Doors International

# Introduction

*North Korea  
is the most  
dangerous  
place in the  
world to be a  
Christian.*



The nation is ruled with an iron fist by Kim Jong-un, the grandson of the founder of North Korea, Kim Il-sung. Kim Jong-un and his father and grandfather are worshiped like gods. There are hundreds of giant statues of them across North Korea, and the people of the nation are expected to bow down before them. Every house, school, factory and office must have portraits of the Kims hung on the walls.

The authority of the Kims is absolute, and the people of North Korea are expected to show them complete devotion. The secret police and neighbourhood watch groups are always looking for signs that someone may not be completely loyal to the nation's leaders – even children are encouraged to report their family members.

Because Christians believe that Jesus is a higher authority than the Kims, they are seen as enemies of the state. They must hide their Bibles, pray in silence, and meet in secret. If a Christian is discovered, they will be arrested and tortured. Most are sent to horrific labour camps, similar to the concentration camps of the Second World War. Few make it out alive.

And yet, despite the incredible dangers they face, Open Doors estimates that there are between 200,000 and 400,000 Christians in North Korea. Between 50,000 and 70,000 are imprisoned, while the rest courageously

follow Jesus in secret. The church in North Korea is not only surviving under the most extreme persecution, but growing.

In this magazine, you will read the stories of seven North Korean believers who have put their trust in the one they call 'Hananim', the Korean word for 'God'. They have all escaped from North Korea – this is how they have been able to tell us their stories. But they represent the thousands of Christians who are still in the country, shining as lights in the darkest places on earth. We have changed their names and withheld some details about their lives to protect their relatives who still live in North Korea.

As you read the stories of these believers, I hope and pray that you will be inspired by their courageous faith, and moved to stand with your North Korean brothers and sisters in prayer and action. At times it can feel like there is nothing we can do to help our church family in North Korea. But there is nowhere so dark and so dangerous that the hand of God cannot reach it, and God is working through the prayers and actions of His people to strengthen His church in North Korea.

*Your sister in Christ,*

*Beth*

**Editor**

*Open Doors*



발견

[Discovery]

SANG-HWA'S STORY

# Discovering the family secret

**T**he first words any North Korean child is supposed to learn are 'Thank you Father Kim Il-sung'. Children are taught to worship the Kim family, and be afraid of Christians. In their school books there are stories about missionaries attacking children with acid, and they are shown films about Christians who kidnap children and take their blood.

*This is the world Sang-hwa grew up in. She believed that Christians were enemies of the state, and to be feared.*

*But that started to change one day, when she was 12. Here, she tells her story.*

In our house was a hidden closet. When I was 12, I accidentally found it. I don't know why, but I started to feel inside the cabinet with my hand and I felt a book. I pulled it out, opened the book and began to read. 'In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth...'

I dropped the book. I immediately recognized this was illegal, because it didn't describe the Big Bang and the



evolution theory. I began to shiver – I was so scared. My discovery could cost me my life. I was afraid to touch the book, but I couldn't just leave it there. I closed my eyes, picked up the book and put it back.

I considered my options. Should I tell my teacher? Should I visit the local security official? For 15 days I couldn't think about anything else. I knew it was my duty to report this illegal book. But it was my own family that was involved. And I also had all these questions: Who or what was this God?

Finally, I had the guts to ask my father about the book. He was very surprised by my question. What I didn't know then was that he had been praying for five years for an opportunity to share the gospel with me. My parents couldn't share any Christian stories with my siblings and me before, as it was too dangerous – we could have accidentally betrayed our parents' faith with disastrous results. But he did want me to know about Jesus, so I think he was glad this day had come.

He asked me, "Do you see those old trees?" I nodded. "Who made those?" I said I didn't know. He explained the story of creation to me, including how God had made Adam and Eve.

Then he turned to me and asked me another question. "What is the most dangerous animal?"

I did not know why, but I answered, "The snake."

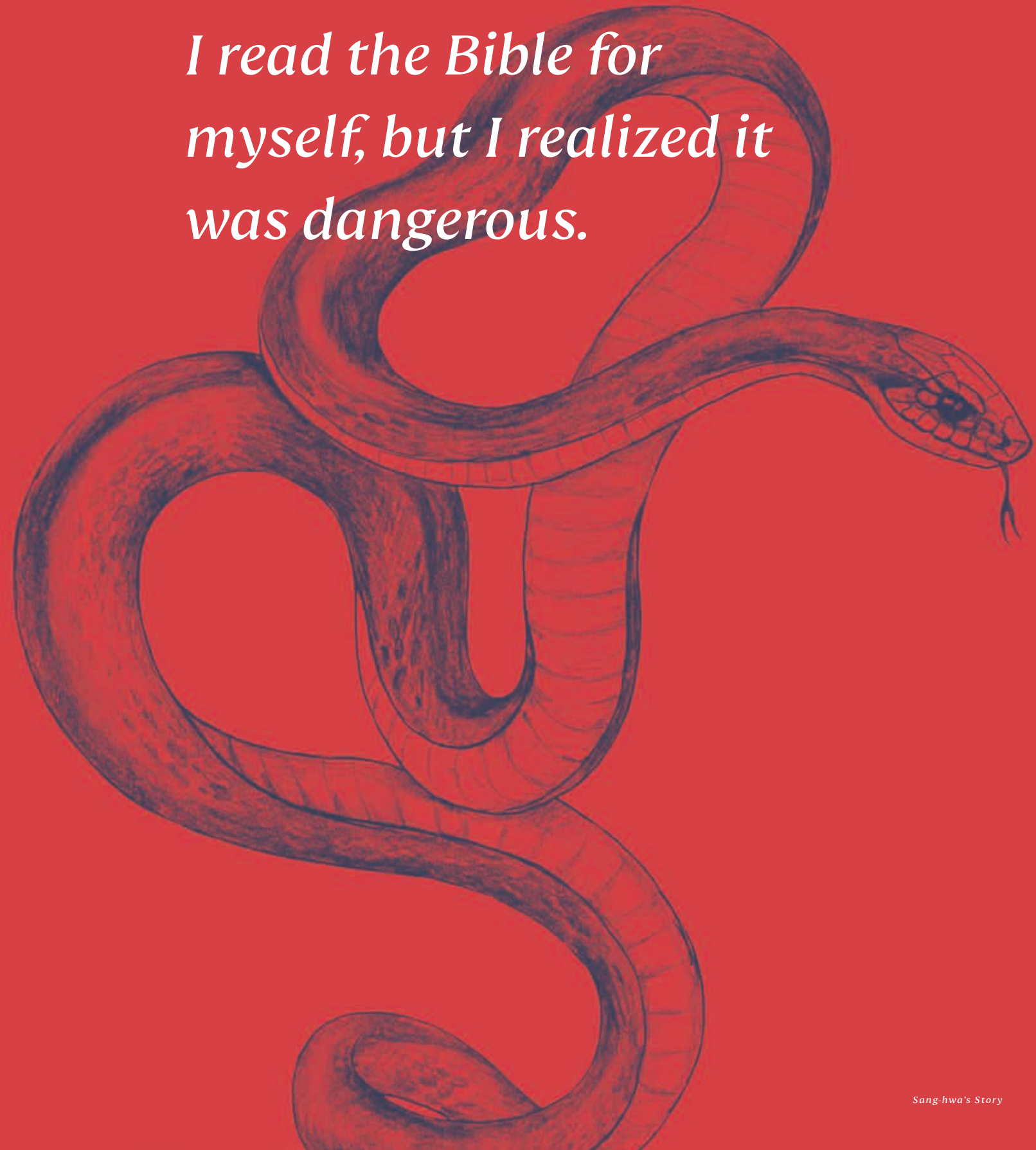
"That's right," he replied, and told me how sin came into the world. It was the first of many conversations we had about the Bible, about God, Jesus and the gospel. He explained many Bible stories to me. I was not a real believer yet, but they did make a lot of sense to me. I felt sorry for all those people who didn't know the truth. Even my older siblings were unaware.

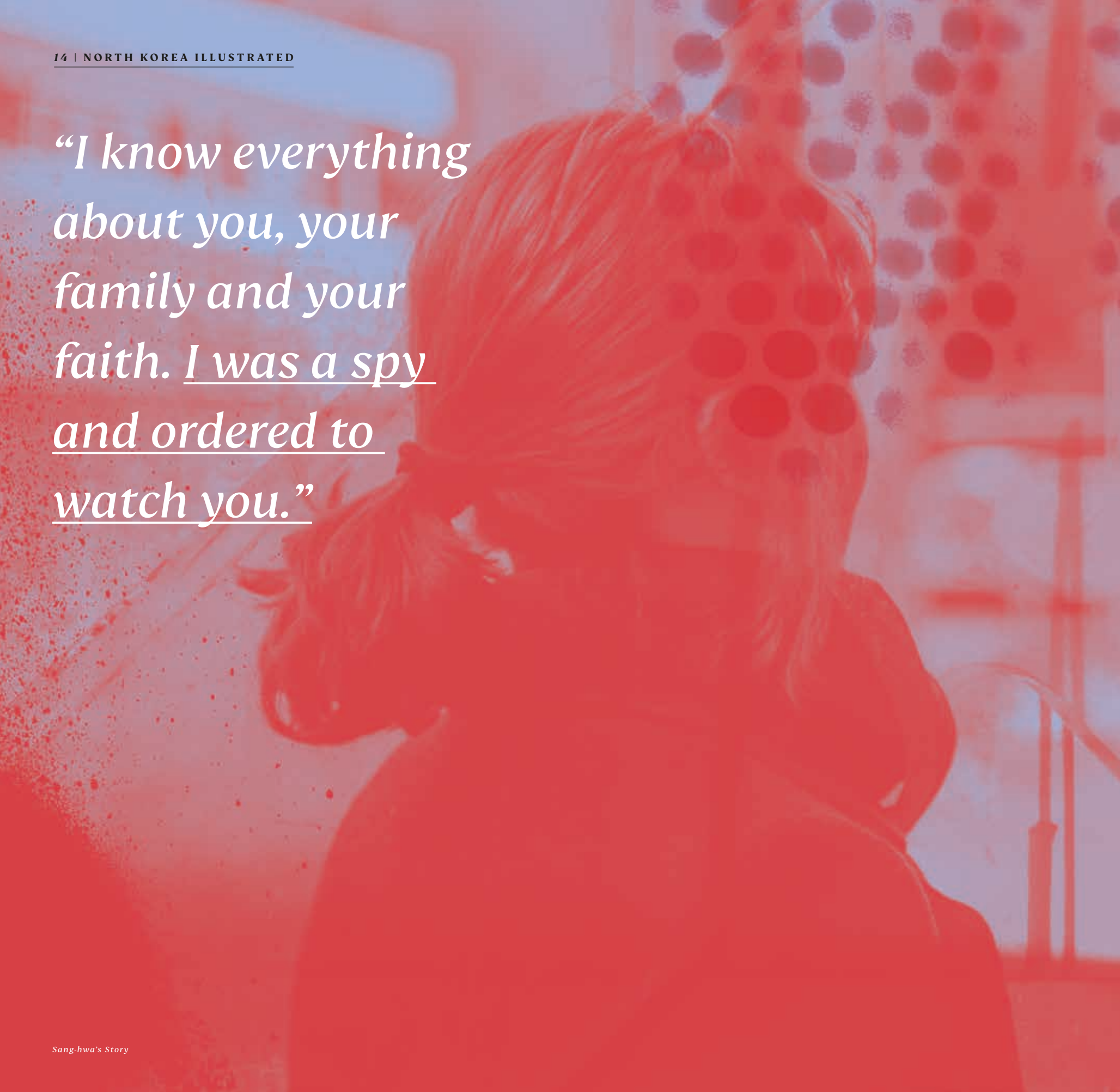
My mother taught me to memorize Bible verses and the Apostolic Creed and also explained the full gospel to me. My grandfather showed me how to pray. "It is just talking to God. Nothing more, nothing less." He spoke a lot about Jesus' Second Coming. He really longed for that.

To me all those stories and ideas were so interesting. I read the Bible for myself, but I realized it was dangerous. My father always emphasized that I should not share anything with anyone else. Then he would start to pray in whispers, "Father, help the North Korean people to seek Your kingdom first."

Sometimes my father met people in a secret location. Many children of believers came to that location too and learned about the Bible. We prayed together.

*I read the Bible for myself, but I realized it was dangerous.*





*“I know everything about you, your family and your faith. I was a spy and ordered to watch you.”*

Among the people visiting the secret meetings were some non-believers too, even spies for the government. When one of those visitors was dying, my father went to see him on his death bed.

He confessed, “I know everything about you, your family and your faith. I was a spy and ordered to watch you. You are a good man. I never told anyone you were a Christian. Tell me how I can become a Christian too.”

In the final moments of his life, this man repented and entered the kingdom of God. My father was able to lead him there.

God protected us time and time again. Once there was a random house check and it seemed this man also knew we were Christians. But this official never gave us away. All this strengthened my father's faith in God. He always experienced so much peace. I really think most believers in North Korea experience more peace and trust God more than believers in free countries.

Eventually I got married. My husband was not a believer, but he was a good man.



I wish I could go back to North Korea and share the gospel.

One day, we discovered we were about to be banished to a remote area – my husband’s brother was a high official, and he warned us. My husband and I were devastated. It felt as if my life was over. My father tried to encourage me and told us God would come through for us. Other people who knew what was about to happen reassured us that everything would be okay. We were not convinced.

We managed to escape to China. There were hard times, but my husband came to faith after Chinese Christians took care of us. Eventually we arrived in South Korea.

My dreams and hopes haven’t changed much since I left North Korea. There is much more freedom here in the South, but our beliefs are the same. I wish I could go back to North Korea and share the gospel with the people there and have fellowship with the local believers. I love their faith. I’d be ready to die for the gospel. I think that if I didn’t have a family here in South Korea, I would have returned already to help the people in need.

*“If you don’t pray, who will?”*

My father always told me to seek the kingdom first. That will always be his prayer for his country and all believers. This is also what I pray. But sometimes I’m discouraged. It seems like nothing is changing in North Korea. The situation only gets worse. When I pray, I often ask God, “What’s the point? Why do you want me to keep on praying for North Korea?” But then God reminds me, “You know North Korea better than anyone else. You know the people and their suffering. If you won’t pray, who will? Rely on Me. Believe in Me.”

## Going deeper



**How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them?**

– ROMANS 10:14

Sang-hwa first heard the gospel from her family, even though it was a risk for them to share their faith with her at a young age. Who first shared the gospel with you? Were they risking anything to do that? Take some time to thank God for them.

When we have been walking with Jesus for some time, we can start to take some things about our faith for granted. Can you remember something that really amazed or excited you about your faith when you were a new believer? Ask God to help you rediscover those things afresh.

**READ ROMANS 10:14**

Ask God how he wants you to help others hear the good news for the first time.



기도  
[Prayer]

HANNAH'S STORY

# One prayer

HANNAH'S MOTHER WAS A SECRET BELIEVER  
IN NORTH KOREA. HANNAH KNEW LITTLE  
ABOUT HER MOTHER'S FAITH AS SHE GREW  
UP, BUT SHE DID LEARN ONE PRAYER. HERE,  
HANNAH SHARES HER STORY.






**D**espite the dangers, my mother prayed every day, sometimes quite openly. Even on her deathbed, she told us to always be thankful and always pray. “Life is trouble,” she said. “If there’s trouble, you should pray.” But she never explained to us how to pray.

All we could make out was, “Hananim! Hananim! Lord! Lord! Help...” And then we couldn’t understand her phrases anymore, because she spoke so fast. Praying was so important for my mother, that she even washed her hair and put on her nicest clothes. “We approach God with the deepest reverence,” she said.

Because of my mother’s prayers, I was never as indoctrinated by the ruling ideology as other North Korean people, especially after she confessed to me how I was born. My mother was unable to conceive, but someone told her that if she prayed to Jesus she would have a baby. So she prayed. For almost eight years she prayed. And then, I was born. My mother never explained the full gospel to me, but when I got married in my early 20s, my mother shared this story with me. And I knew I was a gift of faith. I also knew that life was hard. I bore six children, but two of them died.

A dark, atmospheric illustration of a city at night. The scene is dominated by a grid pattern, likely representing a city street layout or a digital interface. The background is a deep, dark blue, with numerous small, glowing orange and yellow particles scattered throughout, creating a sense of light and movement. The overall mood is mysterious and contemplative.

*“If there’s trouble,  
you should pray.”*

I still have three daughters and a son. My husband used to work in a factory, but the economy collapsed and there was no more work. I had all kinds of jobs, working in a factory, but also selling stuff on the black market. Sometimes I carried heavy, frozen meat up the mountains, so I could later sell it on the black market.

We couldn't survive any more in North Korea. After my mother had died, my oldest daughters were the first to decide to flee to China – it is illegal to leave North Korea, but trying to survive in the country was so hard, it was worth the risk.

But my daughters were betrayed. They were supposed to meet with a relative of my husband, but were sold into marriage to poor Chinese farmers. Fortunately, they were sold to families in the same village and they were able to stay in touch with each other.

When we didn't hear from them, my husband decided to go after them. My husband didn't come back, so a year later, I also made the illegal journey into China. At first, I couldn't locate my husband. I worked on a Chinese farm as a maid, but didn't receive any money. I had lost everything that was dear to me. I prayed to God with the only words I knew, "Hananim, Hananim! Lord, Lord! Please help!"

Finally, I found my husband, but my daughters were still missing. My husband

### ***It is illegal to leave North Korea, but trying to survive in the country was so hard, it was worth the risk.***

decided to go back to North Korea and bring back our two remaining children, who were staying with family. He succeeded. Somehow my husband had also been able to get information about our two oldest daughters. He said he would try to find them. And he did! A few weeks later our entire family was reunited in China.

My husband's relative brought us to church and this is where we first heard the entire gospel. We had seen the faith in the life of my mother, but now we understood it. All of us accepted Jesus Christ on that day. We felt peace in our hearts and an unexplainable joy. It was so refreshing, as if the dirt in my eyes was washed away and I could finally see God. Now I could follow Him like my mother had.

The church pastor taught us about Christ and the Christian life. Our faith grew very fast, because we had been prepared all our lives for this moment.

After two weeks, my oldest daughters had to go back to the Chinese families they had been sold to. They were safer there, but we promised each other to stay in touch.

***"Hananim, Hananim!  
Lord, Lord! Please help!"***

HANNAH'S STORY



But soon our lives changed from hope to despair. Me, my husband, our youngest daughter and son were discovered by Chinese secret agents and arrested – the Chinese government works with North Korea to find illegal ‘defectors’ and send them back. They moved us from prison to prison until finally we were sent to a prison in North Korea.

My daughter and I were put in the female wing and my husband and son – who was only a teenager – in a cell with men. We were all called for interrogation and questioned. They’d beat us so hard. When there was no interrogation, we had to kneel in our cells from 5am to 12pm and not speak.

My husband confessed to the guards that he had become a believer – later he said he had no other choice but to tell the truth, as they had threatened to kill us all. After his confession, all four of us were locked up in solitary confinement: a small cage. We didn’t receive any food or water and were not able to sleep.

Prisoners in solitary confinement were badly beaten up. Nobody dared to resist, because you’d only make the torture

worse. But my husband was different. The more they tortured him, the harder he defended his faith. He yelled at them, “If believing in God is a sin, I’d rather die! Just kill me! It’s my mission to live according to God’s will!”

They beat me in front of my daughter. All my daughter could do was cry silently, which she did day and night.

Of course, all the time in prison, we prayed too. One day, our entire family was called out of our prison cells. While my daughter and I were walking to the office where we’d hear about our fate, we prayed silently. I prayed that God would change this prison into a church.

When we got to the office, there were two male prisoners too. One I recognized as my son, but I didn’t recognize my husband and he didn’t recognize me. That’s how horrendous we looked from all the torture. His ribs and collarbone were broken, so he couldn’t even stand up straight.

In our minds we all desperately prayed for a miracle. We didn’t want to suffer and die in a labor camp.

## *In our minds we all desperately prayed for a miracle.*

God answered our prayer. The deputy gave us a special amnesty – we’re not sure why. It could only have been the grace of God. When we walked out of the prison that night and were finally free and alone, we quietly sang a hymn.

Eventually, I was able to escape once again, and I now live in South Korea and serve God here. In North Korea, my mother only taught me one prayer. But I still pray it every day for my country. “Hanim, Hanim! Lord, Lord, please help!”

## Going deeper



**And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord’s people.**

– EPHESIANS 6:18

Hannah’s mother would wash her hair and put on her nicest clothes to pray, but Hannah prayed in some of her most wretched moments. What do you think about these different ways of praying?

The prayer Hannah’s mother taught her can be summarized in one word: Help! Are there any other one-word prayers that you could pray throughout the day?

Ephesians encourages us to ‘always keep on praying for all the Lord’s people’. Is there something you could do to help you pray regularly for other believers – those you know, or those like the believers in North Korea, who you may never meet?

용기

[Courage]

KYUNG-SO'S STORY

# The courage of secret believers

**I**n North Korea, the word for God, 'Hananim', is only used publicly as a swear word. Kyung-so, who grew up in North Korea, remembers first hearing the word in a film. He says, "In that film, someone says, 'Oh my God'. 'Oh my God' is a phrase that people use in North Korea, often when things go wrong. They hear it in films. No one thought of the word as referring to God. We thought it was a superstitious utterance, addressing the skies above. It is understood to be a complaint against the heavens."

But one day, when Kyung-so was finishing his studies and about to enter the workforce, he met a man who used the word 'Hananim' differently. "Among

all the faces in North Korea, I found his face to be very kind. Though he was much older than me, he treated me kindly, like a friend.

"Whenever we met up to talk, he kept bringing up 'Hananim'. At first, I did not know what he was talking about.

"When it rained, he would say, 'Hananim is giving us rain.' I would say, 'Of course rain falls from the sky. Why would Hananim give rain instead? Rain comes from the sky.'

"He replied, 'No, Hananim provides the rain.' He separated the concept of 'the heavens' from 'Hananim'. And so I asked him what 'Hananim' meant.

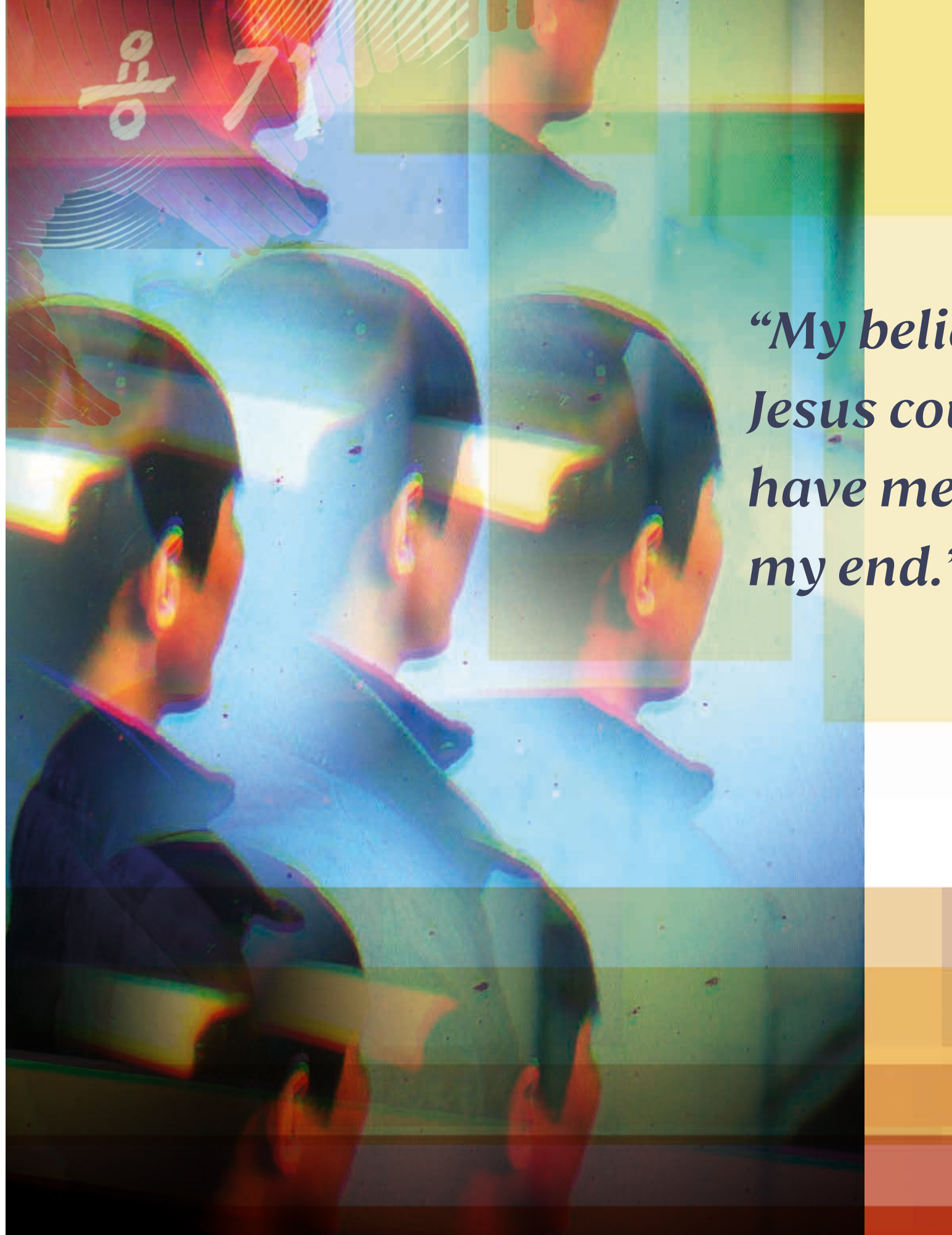


“That is how we started talking about God back and forth. This was around the time the two of us first met. Afterwards, we talked about God whenever the two of us got together.”

Although Kyung-so didn't know it at first, this man was one of North Korea's secret Christians. As their friendship continued, this believer went on to explain the gospel to Kyung-so.

But they had to be discreet, and only have these conversations about God when they couldn't be overheard. “I mostly heard about God and the gospel in the mountains,” Kyung-so says. He knew that what his new friend was doing was dangerous and illegal, and there would be severe consequences if he was caught.

“He had a big family that I knew very well would all be dragged off to prison. I had someone's life in my hands. If I had believed in the North Korean government, a quick solution would have been to report him, risk-free, in exchange for a reward.”



**“My belief in Jesus could have meant my end.”**

But Kyung-so had little faith in the North Korean government after seeing the difference between the propaganda messages spread by the authorities, and the realities of life in North Korea. He had lived through the severe famine of the 90s, and knew many people who had starved to death.

“That is why I did not report him, but instead listened to the gospel while engaging in debates with him.”

Kyung-so was also moved by the way that this Christian was willing to risk his life to tell him about his faith. “He had handed his life to me, and I was touched. I took it as a precious thing.”

Eventually, after many discussions with his friend, Kyung-so decided to follow Jesus too. He knew this was dangerous. “I personally know of three people who were executed for spreading the gospel. My belief in Jesus could have meant my end.”

But he decided that following Jesus was worth the risk. His wife and son eventually came to faith too.

*“North Korean Christians are like the tree stumps of faith that our Lord has let remain.”*

KYUNG-SO'S STORY

*“My fellow Christians and I had already put our lives in each other's hands.”*

Kyung-so says, “I found myself living as part of the underground church, taking part in spreading the Word. My contact with other Christians grew in frequency. I constantly met up with them and spent time with them.”

But eventually, Kyung-so's faith was discovered. “The North Korean government caught on to the fact that I believed in Jesus Christ. I was arrested.

“The government tried to eliminate all the believers I knew through me. They nearly killed me and pressured me, wanting to find out what I knew about Christians.

“My fellow Christians and I had already put our lives in each other's hands. They had given me their lives and I had given mine to them. I did not reveal any evidence about Christians in prison.” Kyung-so paid a price for keeping the secret – he was seriously injured during his imprisonment.

After some time, he and his wife were put before a public trial, known as a People's Court. Kyung-so says, “The People's Court is a scary thing. If someone had decided to put us before a firing squad, they could have stood up and shouted, ‘They are traitors to the people. Shoot them!’ We would have been shot.

“No one shouted such a thing at our trial. We would not be shot or incarcerated, but only have our home and properties taken and be banished.”

Kyung-so and his family were banished to the mountains, which was not a light punishment. “When I lost my home, I thought that God did not mean for me to live in North Korea, but wanted to use me to spread the message of persecuted Christians to the world. Accepting God's answer to my prayer, I decided to escape North Korea.”

Eventually, Kyung-So managed to escape to China, and he made his way to South Korea, where Kyung-so and his family live today.

He asks us to support the church in North Korea. “North Korean Christians are like the tree stumps of faith that our Lord has let remain. Pray for them. Pray for those that do missionary work, and assist them. Please pray for human rights and the freedom for North Koreans to worship Jesus Christ.”



## Going deeper



**Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go.**

– JOSHUA 1:9

The man who shared the gospel with Kyung-so was incredibly courageous. What do you think helped to stop him from being afraid?

Even when sharing our faith doesn't mean risking our lives, we can sometimes be afraid to speak about it. What has stopped you from speaking about your faith in the past?

Spend some time praying for our church family in North Korea using Joshua 1:9 to inspire your prayers. Then use this verse to pray for yourself and the church in your own nation.

성경  
[Bible]

HYE'S STORY

# A dangerous book

**H**ye learned about Kim Il-sung at school, but about God at home. Her family have a long Christian heritage, and her parents and grandparents were Christians. She explains, "My grandmother was a member of a Baptist church, which was closed down after Kim Il-sung came into power. However, she secretly kept meeting with other Christians."

There were meetings in Hye's home when she was a child. Her father had a job which required him to meet a lot of people, so visitors were not suspicious. "The people would gather in a small room in our home. They were almost silent. Children like me had to go outside and

play. We also had to watch out for other people. As soon as someone came near to our house I ran home to warn my grandmother. She was the leader of the group and also the preacher."

Hye's grandmother owned a very old Chinese Bible and her father had a Korean Bible. "They read from the Bible of course, and sang songs too, but there was almost no sound coming from their mouths. The other Christians didn't own a Bible. They shared books which my grandmother had written by hand."

Owning a Bible is forbidden in North Korea. "My grandmother hid her Bible in a basket where she placed her socks and other things."

But one day, Hye left for school in the morning without realizing she would never see her father again. “Security agents raided our house during a worship meeting. My father was arrested and taken away.”

“When I came home, I expected my father to open the door. I was the youngest. He always greeted me as soon as I came back from school. He wasn’t there. I looked for him in his room, but he wasn’t there. My family told me he was taken away.”

Hye was devastated. She can still hardly talk about these events. All she can say is, “The house was chaos.”

Only two weeks later, her grandmother passed away. Before she did, she told Hye and the other family members not to worry. “We all have to die. We don’t belong to this world, we belong to heaven.”

Her grandmother instructed Hye’s mother to get her Bible. “We knew they were coming for us. We had to burn it. My grandmother said it was okay as long as we stayed true to our faith in God. But when the flames devoured the pages, my grandmother wept intensely.”

*“We don’t belong to this world, we belong to heaven.”*

Not long after Hye’s grandmother died, Hye’s family was taken in for questioning by security agents. “We told them we had no clue about my father reading the Bible, that we thought that book was for his work.”

That was when the agents started to play the tape. “They had broken into our house and placed a bug in our old clock.” There was no denying that everyone knew about the Christian faith of Hye’s father.

For some reason, the family was banished to a remote area, not sent to a labor camp. “We were grateful that God had saved our lives. Life wasn’t easy of course. Many people died of starvation in our area. However, we were somewhat better off than the others because we lived close to the mountains, where we could find plants and trees. God fed us this way. We maintained our faith but lost all contact with other believers. We couldn’t look for anyone back then.”





## “My sister wrote whatever she remembered on paper and hid it somewhere in secret.”

With her father’s Bible confiscated and her grandmother’s Bible burned there were no scriptures left – except for what was in their heads. “My sister wrote whatever she remembered on paper and hid it somewhere in secret. She would look at those papers whenever she was going through difficult times.”

Hye’s family lived like this for more than ten years – they were barely surviving. Then one day, a man showed up at their door. He said a Chinese-Korean pastor had sent him. “This pastor used to visit our house when my father was still with us. But we did not trust the person who came to our house. We thought he was a

secret agent, and we wanted to send him back. However, he had walked almost four hours to come to our house and we listened to him.”

The man called the pastor they knew in China with a mobile phone. Finally, they believed him when the pastor told them Hye’s mother’s name, which was very unusual.

“He told us to come to China and also told me that there were many North Korean defectors in his church too. I replied that my mother was already very old. I did not want to leave her.”

But the pastor did not give in. Hye spoke to her mother about his plan. “She said that she was old and wanted me to go. I was sure I would never see her again, but I could not cry about it inside the house. Perhaps we were still being tapped. And I could not cry outside the house, or someone would become suspicious.”

Hye had to walk for six hours to the border. “I safely crossed the river. The pastor and his wife were waiting for me in the car at the other side.”

Later, they took her to their church, where a service was taking place. “As soon as I stepped inside, I burst into tears. So many things shot through my head. I couldn’t stop thinking about my grandmother and father. They would have longed for this service too.” After some time, Hye managed to reach South Korea. As soon as Hye was accepted as a legal refugee, she paid people to look for her family and try to get them to South Korea too.

“One day someone called me on my phone. I picked up and heard a voice I thought I would never hear again. It was my mother. She told me she was at the Chinese border and would cross the river that night. I was so surprised and happy!”

“My whole family is now in South Korea. It feels unreal. God made this possible.”

## Going deeper



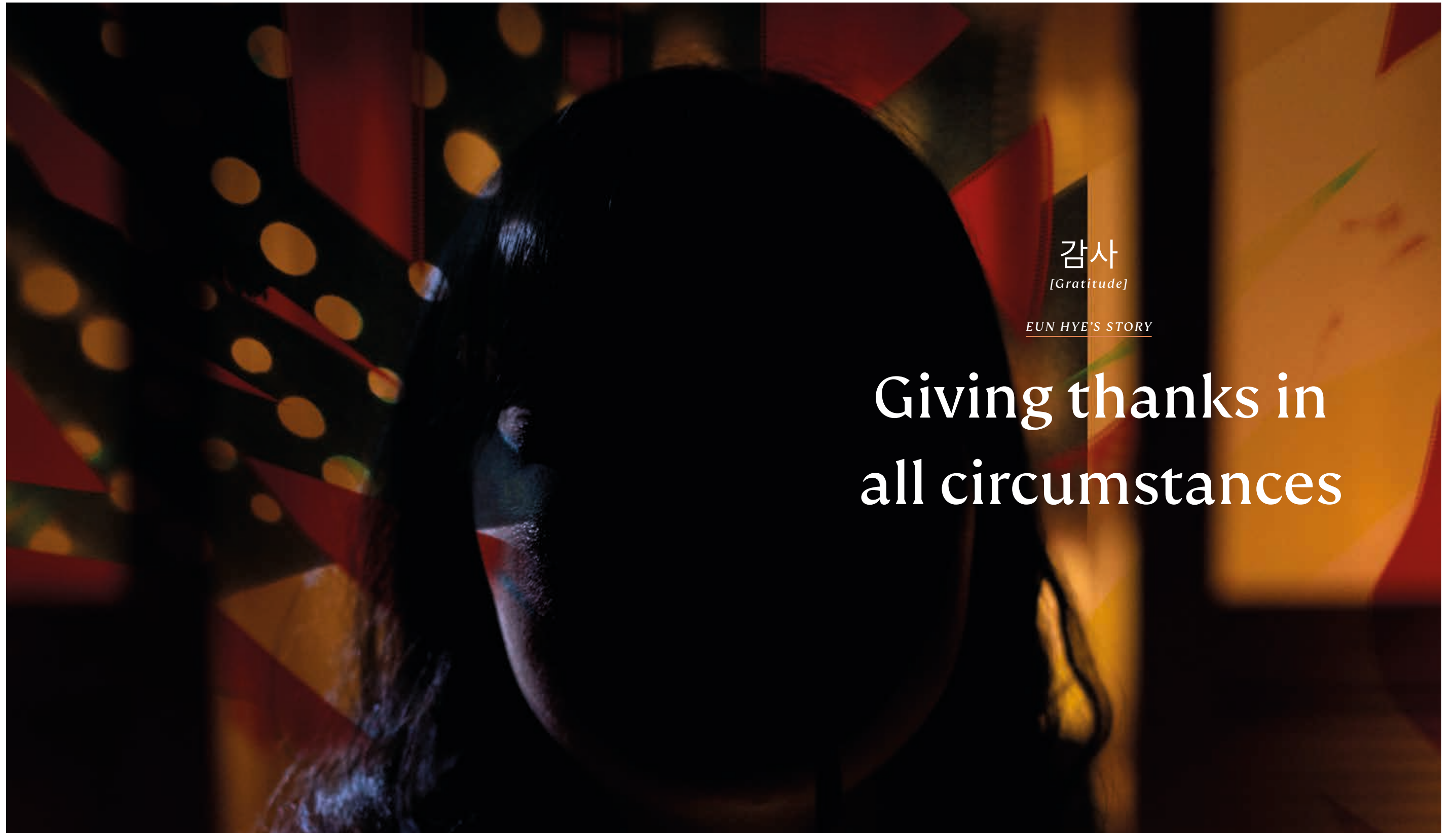
**“I have hidden your word in my heart.”**

– PSALM 119:11A

When Hye’s family were banished, her sister wrote out all the words of scripture that she could remember. Try this yourself – if you suddenly had no access to the Bible, how many verses would you be able to remember?

Is there a verse of scripture that you would like to commit to memory? Write it out and put it somewhere where you will see it every day – perhaps on your fridge, a mirror or a desk.

Praise God that you have the freedom to read His Word. Ask God to protect those who are smuggling Bibles into places around the world where they are banned.



감사  
[Gratitude]

EUN HYE'S STORY

# Giving thanks in all circumstances





**16**-year-old Eun Hye closed the toilet door behind her. She was now in the safest and the dirtiest place in the camp for street children. Her parents and sisters were in China, her younger brother with an uncle. She had survived the Great Famine of the 1990s, when three out of every five of her classmates died, but at this point, she wished she had died too.

There was nothing left to live for. Not even someone to talk to. Nobody. Except for the God of her grandmother. Could this invisible Father save her?

Now, in this orphanage of death, she whispered the words she had heard her grandmother whisper on so many occasions. "Hananim, please save me. Please rescue me. Bring me back to my family."

Months before, her parents had taken Eun Hye and her brother to an uncle, while they went to look for their oldest daughters who had gone missing in China. With his niece and nephew under his roof, the uncle now had to take care of five people. At first there was rice soup, but that was soon gone and the family had to eat grass soup.

When Eun Hye's parents didn't return, the uncle told Eun Hye he could only take care of one of them. There simply wasn't enough food for everyone.

Eun Hye left the house and tried her luck on the streets. She had no home and no plan. There was nowhere to go.

This was when she prayed to the God of her grandmother for the first time. "Father, I am left without my parents, my siblings and my house. My life is so dark. Please save me from this hardship, death and suffering."

It was a prayer without conviction. Not a prayer of hope, but a prayer of despair.

Only a few weeks later she was caught by the police and brought to the camp for street children. It was a crowded place with over 2,000 children. Eun Hye had to stay in a small building that housed 200 children. There wasn't even enough room to sit. She had to stand day and night, making her legs swell up.

She received five potatoes three times a day. The potatoes were tiny, the size of marbles. Eun Hye quickly learned how to catch and eat a rat. There were plenty of rats in the camp.

## Eun Hye came to appreciate those precious moments alone with the God of her grandmother.

Nobody wanted to go to the bathroom unless they had no choice. But Eun Hye came to appreciate those precious moments alone with the God of her grandmother. “Lord, save me from this pain, sadness and death.”

Two months after her arrival in the camp, the guards asked for volunteers to collect chestnuts by climbing up trees in the mountains. It meant a long, difficult journey. Eun Hye had no intention of participating in what could become a walk of death. But then she heard a voice in her head.

“Go. Volunteer.”

Somehow she knew that this was the answer to her bathroom prayers. She joined the group.

They walked for several days and traveled about a 100 kilometers until they reached the mountains. They had to cross a large

reservoir in small boats. Then she was placed in a unit of four children. Two went up the trees to pick the chestnuts, while two others stayed down to collect them.

Eun Hye made sure she didn’t have to climb up the trees. There was no way to escape from there. Instead she looked at the older girl next to her. “Do you want to escape?”

“Yes,” the girl replied.

They would get caught if they tried to steal a boat and take it to cross the water.

“Can you swim?” Eun Hye asked. The girl shook her head.

Once again, Eun Hye prayed for help.

They ran away from the tree and followed the trail down the mountain. They found a rope, and when they arrived at the reservoir, they tied the ropes around their waists. Eun Hye used all the strength she had to swim to the other side, dragging her friend through the water.

Somehow, they reached the shore safely. Then they went their separate ways.

Eventually, Eun Hye reached her hometown. She went to an older couple she had known before. They had lost a son due to starvation and could only

*“God, I have no place to go.  
My future looks so bleak.  
Please guide me.”*

EUN HYE'S STORY



take care of Eun Hye for a few days. She prayed, “God, I have no place to go. My future looks so bleak. Please guide me.”

She left and went to the countryside. There she stumbled upon piles of corn husks, each with a few pieces of corn inside. They helped her to survive.

Then a farmer’s family took her in. She was safe for a while. Her prayers shifted from survival to finding her family. “Thank you, Lord, for what you’ve done for me. May I please continue to live here? And please help me find my family.”

One day, a family in North Korea who knew about Eun Hye’s whereabouts contacted her. “Your father is with us,” they said.

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## Her prayers shifted from survival to finding her family.

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She had prayed without faith. She thought she had lost her family forever. And now her father was back from China to get her!

Once they were reunited, her father explained that he and Eun Hye’s mother had been living with her Chinese aunt. “She is a believer and attends church.”

Eun Hye had no clue who this God whom she called ‘Hananim’ was. Her father, himself only a young believer, explained

to her what he knew. “The only way to live from now on is to pray to God. Ask Him to help us return to China safely, so that our family can be whole again.”

They went to the river that borders North Korea and China. Her father tied her brother to himself with a rope, while Eun Hye swam by herself.

When they finally arrived at her aunt’s house in China, there was a celebration. Eun Hye told her mother about her prayers in North Korea.

That Sunday, Eun Hye went to church. She could see other people praying.

They prayed with the same gestures and the same words as her grandmother had, so many years ago.

She didn’t understand the sermon, but she felt at home. She realized that the prayers of her grandmother, of her mother, of her father and the prayers of other believers had allowed her to make it safely to China. “I was so thankful.”

## Going deeper



**Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.**

– 1 THESSALONIANS 5:16-17

It would have been easy for Eun Hye to have been bitter and angry about all that she had to go through at such a young age. And yet, Eun Hye speaks of her thankfulness after being taken in by the farmer’s family, and after making it to China. What do you think of her response?

**READ 1 THESSALONIANS 5:16-17.**

The passage says ‘Give thanks in all circumstances.’ Whatever circumstances you’re facing, what can you give thanks for today?





자유  
[Freedom]

*A PRISONER'S STORY*

# Ambassadors in chains





**T**he name I was born with was the first thing they took away from me when I arrived here. My name is 'Prisoner 42'.

Every morning they call for '42'. When I stand up, I'm not allowed to look at the guards. I have to get up, put my hands behind my back and follow them to the interrogation room.

I'm in there for hours each day. Every day they ask the same questions. Why were you in China? Who did you meet? Did you go to church? Did you have a Bible? Did you meet any South Koreans? Are you a Christian?

Am I a Christian? Yes. I love Jesus. But I deny everything. If I admit it, I will be killed, either quickly or slowly. But they will murder me.

At the end of the day they bring me back to my cell. My cell is warm during the day, cold at night. It's so small, I can barely lie down. I'm not allowed to lie down much. I have to sit on my knees, with closed fists. I'm not even allowed to open my hands.

I am in solitary confinement, because they think that I believe in God.

I try to distract myself from the pain and the loneliness by thinking back. I think about my grandfather. He believed in God, though I didn't realise it when I was a girl. On Sundays, he often told me to leave the house and play outside. I didn't understand why.

When I fled to China because of the famine in North Korea, I met Christians who took care of me and shared the gospel with me.

Then, one night, I dreamt of my grandfather. I saw him sitting in a circle with other men. There was a Bible in the middle and all of them were praying. In my dream, I shouted at him, "I am a believer too!"

I had thought I was the first one in the family to really follow God. Then I realized God was showing me I came from a Christian family.

But one day, everything went wrong. I was walking along the street in China and a black car pulled up next to me. The driver and other men stepped out of the vehicle and grabbed me.

I resisted but couldn't get away. They pushed me into the car and, when the door closed and the car drove away, I realized that my life was over.

After a few weeks in a Chinese prison cell I was handed over to the North Korean authorities. They brought me to this prison. I had to strip off all my clothes and they searched every part of my body to see if I had hidden anything.

Then I was ordered to put on different clothes that didn't fit and didn't match, probably from a previous prisoner. They shaved all my hair off and brought me to this prison cell.

I'm so alone here. I know there are other prisoners. I can hear their voices, but I never see them. But I can pray. Never out loud, only in my heart.

It's been a year now. I don't know how long I will survive. One day they will call me and I won't move. I will have died here. They will dispose of my body and the first new prisoner that comes in will be 'Prisoner 42' and will wear my clothes.

\*\*\*\*\*

I was wrong – somehow, I survived. But I am no longer 'Prisoner 42'. I am now number '1445'.

Two years ago they called me out of my prison cell and took me to court.

My persistence paid off. They did not find me guilty of being a Christian.

At the court, there was no lawyer to represent me. I just stood in front of the judge with guards behind me.

My husband was there too. He looked at me with the saddest eyes I have ever seen. He had clearly been crying. I wanted to say so much and I know he wanted to talk too, but we couldn't say a single word.

# They would all be punished if he didn't divorce me.

The judge asked him if he wanted to divorce me. He said, "Yes."

It broke my heart. But he had to make this decision for his sake and for the sake of our children. They would all be punished if he didn't divorce me.

Then I was sentenced to four years in a labor camp.

I had spent one year in the prison and for that one year I didn't see sunlight. Just to be taken from the prison, be taken outside and to feel the wind was amazing. But that happiness disappeared when I arrived at the camp. I saw moving, shapeless forms. It took me a moment to realize these were people. Some were bent over. Others had an arm or a leg missing. I looked at my own arms and legs, thin like matches. I didn't look much better than the other inmates.

In the camp, I work 12 hours a day. Sometimes more. Every day is just one long nightmare. But at least I am not alone in a cell anymore.

One day I was sick and allowed to stay in my barracks, the building where hundreds of us are crammed in to sleep. I thought I was all by myself when I noticed a blanket in the corner. It was moving. I studied it and realized there was a person underneath.

*"For that one year I  
didn't see sunlight."*

A PRISONER'S STORY



I tiptoed towards the blanket and listened intently. The sounds were hardly audible, yet, they sounded familiar.

Suddenly I realized what was happening. There was a woman and she was praying. I went back to my mattress.

I watched her for days. One day, we were working outside. When nobody was nearby I walked up to her and said, "Greetings in Jesus' name."

**She almost had a heart attack. That's how shocked she was to meet another believer.**

She almost had a heart attack. That's how shocked she was to meet another believer. Fortunately, I could calm her down quickly.

We formed a secret church inside the camp. When we met and felt safe enough, we prayed the Lord's Prayer.

She was actually much braver than I was. She spoke to others about Christ as well.

That's why one day a car came to pick her up. When I saw her leave, I knew they were taking her to a maximum security prison. Nobody survives there.

I'm here in my barracks. But not for long. God has been with me. Yesterday, it was announced that I would be released. I don't know why, as I have only served two years.

The first thing I'll do when I get out is find my husband and children. They are much bigger now. We haven't seen each other in years.

But God has watched over me and I pray and believe that he also watches over them. I need to tell them about my loving God.

## Going deeper



**Because of my chains, most of the brothers and sisters have become confident in the Lord and dare all the more to proclaim the gospel without fear.**

– PHILIPPIANS 1:14

Open Doors estimates that there are between 50,000 and 70,000 Christians in prison in North Korea. It can seem like there is nothing we can do to help them. But the founder of Open Doors, Brother Andrew, says, "Our prayers can go where we cannot... There are no borders, no prison walls, no doors that are closed to us when we pray."

Spend some time praying for the thousands of believers who are in prison in North Korea. Pray that they will know God's love and presence with them, even in the darkest places on earth. Pray for protection for those who courageously share their faith with their fellow prisoners. Pray for their freedom.

**READ PHILIPPIANS 1:14.** Pray that when believers around the world hear about what Christians in North Korea are suffering for Jesus, it will inspire those with greater freedoms to become more bold in living out and sharing their faith.





복종

[Obedience]

MIN-SOO'S STORY

# God works through His people

MIN-SOO REMEMBERS THE FIRST TIME HE HEARD ABOUT GOD. IT WASN'T LONG AFTER HE HAD ESCAPED FROM NORTH KOREA - A DANGEROUS AND ILLEGAL JOURNEY THAT MADE HIM A 'DEFECTOR' IN THE EYES OF THE NORTH KOREAN STATE. HE WAS LIVING IN THE MOUNTAINS IN CHINA. HE DIDN'T HAVE MUCH, BUT ONE THING THAT HE DID HAVE WAS A RADIO.



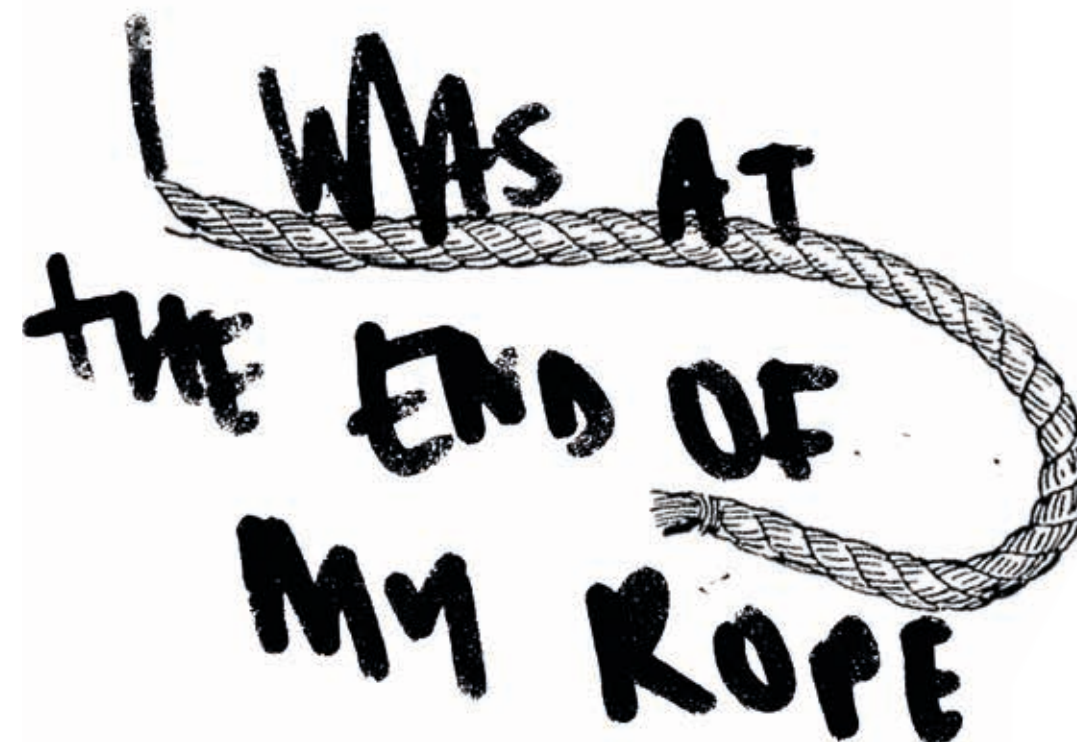
**“I went on my knees and prayed.”**

“I couldn’t sleep at night, and I was fiddling with the radio when I heard a Far East Broadcasting Company program. Even now I still remember the pastor’s sermon on the program. The sermon told a story of a person who tripped in the mountains and fell off a cliff. The person grabbed a tree branch as he fell. He started praying for his life to God.

“As I heard this sermon, I realized that it perfectly described my situation at the time. I went on my knees and prayed. I had no real recognition of God, but I still prayed to the heavens every night, nonetheless.”

Min-soo was suffering from an illness. He made his way to Beijing because he had heard that there was a hospital operated by Koreans there, and hoped he could find help. But when he arrived in Beijing, he couldn’t find the hospital. “I hailed a taxi on the streets, not knowing where I could find the hospital. I thought that a taxi driver would know where it might be. I hailed 20 cabs, and every driver told me they had no idea how to find such a hospital.”

Eventually, someone was able to direct him to a Korean church. But when Min-soo arrived at the church, it was surrounded by high fences and barbed wire. Min-soo says, “I had put absolutely everything into purchasing a ticket to Beijing. I was at the end of my rope.



I WAS AT  
THE END OF  
MY ROPE

My body hurt all over from my illness. I thought I would die.

“I knelt and prayed to the heavens. ‘God, save my life. I’m only 26 years old and I want to live.’

“I lay down there outside, thinking that I would die and never see another sunrise.” But Min-soo was wrong.

“My eyes opened again. God had sent someone to me.”

Min-soo was able to have his illness treated, and he was cared for by the church. God had answered Min-soo’s prayer. But now Min-soo wanted to know more about Him.

“I began to develop a craving to know more about God and the truth. I had been granted a chance to be saved from death, but knowing that one day I would face my final day on this earth, I wondered what I would live for until that day came. I wanted to know the reason for living.”

Min-soo’s search for truth eventually led him to an Open Doors safe house in China, where he stayed for three and a half years. “Putting my mind to the task of getting to know God for myself, I spent eight hours every day reading the Bible.”

Life at the safe house could be challenging. Min-soo explains, “The men at the safe house got into a lot of fights.





*“To evade arrest for  
over three years is an  
act of grace by God.  
He protected us.”*

North Korean escapees can have rough personalities. With five or six men to a room, we got into some bloody fights. After these fights, we would read the Bible and repent for not loving our fellow brothers enough. That is how we were smoothed out.”

Considering the traumatic experiences that many of those who have escaped from North Korea have been through – often including imprisonment and torture – it’s no surprise that some of this trauma was expressed through aggressive behavior. They were also always living under the constant threat that they could be discovered and sent back to North Korea – the Chinese authorities work with North Korea to return ‘defectors’.

“I think our group was blessed by God. To evade arrest for over three years is an act of grace by God. He protected us.”

Overall, Min-soo thinks that living together in the safe house was good for them. “Living and sharing meals with others in the Open Doors safe house brought our personalities out into the open, becoming a great training opportunity for our character and devotion.



***“I did not know this at the time, but these safe houses perform a critical work.”***



“Five of us studied in one room. We later all became pastors, save for one.”

Min-soo believes that these safe houses are vitally important. He explains, “I think you can think of them in two ways. Firstly, when I first entered the safe house, even though I had questions about God and faith, I entered the safe house primarily because I needed a place to live. Given that there must be many North Koreans wandering China at this moment, I think firstly that we need places like this to protect those people.

“Another important point is that many of the hundreds of North Korean escapees who work in South Korean ministries have been trained in safe houses like this.”

Min-soo is one of them – he now lives in South Korea and works as a pastor. “As I look around, I can see that these people are being prepared to become the leaders of the North Korean church post-reunification.

“I did not know this at the time, but these safe houses perform a critical work.”



Knowing that the North Korean church is being supported by brothers and sisters from around the world is a huge source of encouragement to Min-soo.

He says, “When I first started my faith journey, I felt lonely and felt as if I was living by myself. I felt resentment for the way I had to walk this earth alone.

“Later, when I looked back, I realized that neither I nor the underground Christians

in North Korea were fighting the fight alone. I realized that Open Doors and people all over the world exist who pray for the persecuted and isolated believers. It was an immense boost to know that there existed people who prayed for us and provided both spiritual and physical aid so that we could be victorious.”

## Going deeper



**For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.**

– EPHESIANS 2:10

So many people were involved in Min-soo's journey of faith – those involved in the radio broadcast, those in the church in Beijing, those who ran the Open Doors safe house, and everyone who has supported these ministries or prayed for North Koreans.

Think of those who have been important in your own journey of faith. Spend some time thanking God for them. Perhaps you might like to take a moment to send a message to one of them, thanking them for the part they have played in your life.

Is there someone God is asking you to help or encourage in some way? Ask God to show you the 'good works' he has prepared for you to do today.

# North Korea & Open Doors

Brother Simon, the current coordinator for Open Doors' ministry to North Korean Christians, was studying theology in the US in the late 1980s, when one day as he prayed, he felt God speaking to him about going to China.

When he got there, God led him deep into the countryside, where he discovered a group of believers. He was able to preach to them, and when he had finished, he was asked by an old lady from the group to come again and bring 20 small Bibles. He thought it was a strange request, but his spirit was deeply moved.

A few months later, he returned to the same place with the small Bibles. The same old lady made another request. "Please bring more Bibles. We need your help. Also, would it be possible to make a collection of praise songs?" A few months later, he returned once more, delivering the Bibles and praise song books. This continued for months and then years, and God miraculously provided

all the resources needed to meet the requests of these believers. Brother Simon eventually realised that these items were being given to North Korean believers.

In the 90s, when a terrible famine hit North Korea, known as 'the Arduous March', food and medications were also provided. This was the start of the work of Open Doors with North Korean believers.

This work continues today, thanks to the prayers and support of believers around the world. Open Doors is still able to supply North Korean believers with emergency relief aid, such as food, medicines, and clothes, through our networks in China. We also broadcast Christian radio programs into North Korea, and provide shelter and training to North Korean believers in safe houses in China. The believers who stay in these safe houses often travel back to North Korea.



*“Strengthen what remains and is about to die.”*

(Revelation 3:2)

The goal of Open Doors has always been to 'strengthen what remains and is about to die' (Revelation 3:2). This verse is particularly relevant when it comes to North Korea. Your support is not only helping our brothers and sisters to survive in a country where ordinary people struggle to find enough to eat and meet their basic needs. You are also keeping the church in North Korea alive, shining as a light in the darkness.

Our North Korean brothers and sisters believe that God has a plan for their nation. One believer has shared, "One

day the borders will open and we will unite with the South Korean and the Chinese church to bring the gospel to some of the darkest places on this earth." Until that day of freedom comes, Open Doors is committed to supporting our church family in North Korea in prayer and action.



**OpenDoors**



# Give them a voice

Despite North Korea being known for having one of the worst human rights records in the world, the deep suffering of North Koreans is often overshadowed by nuclear and security concerns. It's time to give the people of North Korea a voice and make sure it's being heard:

## **Give them a voice in your church:**

Organize a prayer meeting in your church and share stories of courageous North Korean believers. Intercede for the church in North Korea that is under extreme pressure. Pray for North Korea's leaders, that God may change their hearts and use them to change the situation in the country.

## **Give them a voice on social media:**

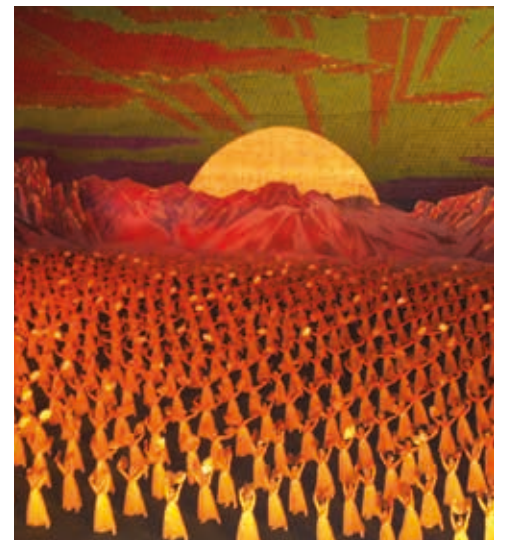
Share one of the stories from this magazine on social media and tag someone with influence to bring the issue to their attention – it could be a prominent Christian, someone in the media, or someone else that people listen to.

## **Give them a voice with your government:**

Write a letter to the ministry of foreign affairs (or equivalent) of your government to express concern over the abysmal human rights violations experienced by Christians in North Korea. Ask them to keep this issue on the United Nations agenda and to prioritize these violations over any other issue if engaging with North Korean officials.











**OpenDoors**

I tjänst för världens förföljda **kristna**

**Open Doors Sverige**

**Drottninggatan 60**

**702 22 Örebro**

Telefon: **019 - 31 05 00**

E-post: **sweden@od.org**

Org.nr: **802439 - 9845**

**www.open-doors.se**