



SMALL GROUP STUDY GUIDE

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**STORIES
FROM THE
WILDERNESS**



HOPE

IN THE WILDERNESS

1. WATCH

Omar's story - <http://www.csw.org.uk/wilderness>

2. GO DEEPER - HOPE

- Were there any parts of Omar's story that particularly stood out to you, or were challenging to hear? Discuss together.

Read 1 Peter 1 – focus on verses 3-7.

- The turning point of Omar's story is when he is given a card from a little girl – it provides hope at exactly the right time. Have you ever received an encouragement that gave you hope when you most needed it?
- What lessons can you learn from Omar's story about holding onto hope, even in difficult situations?

“GOD HAS FAITH IN YOU....”

- In the passage, Peter talks about 'new birth into a living hope' – what do you think this means?
- Which part of the passage gives you the most hope?
- Do you feel that you live a 'hope-filled' life? Why or why not?
- Practically speaking, how can we encourage and give each another hope in the middle of challenges that we face?

3. PRAY - HOPE

- In the passage, Peter talks about a 'living hope'. Take time to pray for anyone facing a challenging situation – pray 'living hope' over their situation and their life.
- Pray for a renewed sense of hope for Christians living in Cuba, especially those who are threatened and arrested – you may want to read the information box below aloud.

4. TAKE ACTION

Write to someone like Omar, who is suffering for their faith.

Get free resources from csw.org.uk/loveletters

RELIGIOUS FREEDOM IN CUBA

The government strictly regulates all religious activities and groups. Christians in denominations that aren't officially registered with the government (such as the Apostolic Movement Omar belongs to) are regularly threatened by government officials, and sometimes, like Omar, are arrested and imprisoned. The government sometimes seizes church buildings from their owners and closes or demolishes them, forcing the congregation to find somewhere else to meet.

**STORIES
FROM THE
WILDERNESS**



TRANSFORMATION

IN THE WILDERNESS

1. WATCH

Bob's story - <http://www.csw.org.uk/wilderness>

2. GO DEEPER - TRANSFORMATION

- Bob's story is a remarkable journey of bravery - which part of his story impacted you most? Discuss together.

Read Luke 19 - focus on verses 1 - 10.

- Bob's character and life was transformed when he encountered Jesus - just as Zacchaeus' life was transformed. How did your life change when you encountered Jesus?
- What does Bob's story teach you about how God can transform us to work for his Kingdom, as he did with Zacchaeus?

**“FOR THE SON OF MAN CAME TO SEEK AND TO
SAVE THE LOST...”** - Luke 19

- Do you think it's possible to grow and transform in faith without facing difficult situations? Discuss together.
- Do you feel that you are being transformed by Jesus as you live as a Christian? Why or why not? In which areas of your life do you want to see transformation?

3. PRAY - TRANSFORMATION

- Pause and think individually about situations where your faith or character is being transformed. Pray for one another.
- Pray for the transformation of your local society – that people will encounter Jesus like Bob did.
- Focus on praying for Christians living in China, especially for those who are prominent in society and at high risk of persecution. You may want to read the information box below aloud.

RELIGIOUS FREEDOM IN CHINA

Though China officially recognises both Protestantism and Catholicism, Christians are under immense pressure as they live out their everyday lives. To give just one example, local authorities in Zhejiang Province have forcibly removed crosses from churches, often demolishing the buildings in the process. Christians can be harassed, followed by police, beaten or disappeared. Those who try to defend them can expect the same treatment.

**STORIES
FROM THE
WILDERNESS**



1. WATCH

Ladan's story - <http://www.csw.org.uk/wilderness>

2. GO DEEPER - TRUTH

- What inspired or challenged you most about Ladan's story? Discuss together.

Read Matthew 4 – focus on verses 1-11.

- The Word of God sustained Ladan throughout her time of wilderness. Has God ever provided you with a scripture passage for a specific time or season?
- Jesus overcame temptation by quoting truths from scripture. Which Bible truths do you use when you are facing challenging situations?

“THE PRISON WALLS BECAME MY BIBLE...”

- In Hebrews 4: 12 the writer talks about how the word of God is ‘alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow....’ How does this verse challenge you about the truth and power of scripture?
- Do you find it easy or difficult to read scripture? Which habits or methods help you to engage with the Bible?

Spend time together sharing passages of scripture or truths in the Bible that give you encouragement. Then, ask each person to set a reminder to send their chosen passage to the rest of the group at some point in the week as a way of reminding each other of the power and truth in the Bible.

3. PRAY - TRUTH

- Pray truths of scripture over each other. Pray for God's protection, power, life and presence to fill each person.
- Pray for the power and truth of the Bible to be revealed in nations such as Iran where access to the Bible is restricted. You may like to read the information box below aloud

4. TAKE ACTION

Speak up for someone suffering because of their faith.

Go to <http://www.csw.org.uk/campaigns>

RELIGIOUS FREEDOM IN IRAN

Since Iran's revolution in 1979 it's become increasingly dangerous for religious and ethnic minorities, as the government is determined to enforce a strict interpretation of Shi'a Islam. Most Iranian Christians have to meet in secret, in private homes that may be raided at any time. Attendees of the few state-sanctioned churches are harassed by security services. Muslims who convert to Christianity suffer especially harsh treatment, as the legal punishment for the crime of 'apostasy' (abandoning a religion, in this case Islam) is death.

**STORIES
FROM THE
WILDERNESS**



1. WATCH

Helen's story - <http://www.csw.org.uk/wilderness>

2. GO DEEPER - WORSHIP

- What impacted you most about Helen's faith throughout her story?

Read Acts 16 - focus on verses 25 -34

- Even in the midst of trial, Helen continued to praise and thank God. How can we build an attitude of thanksgiving irrespective of the circumstances we face?
- Do you think that worship is something we have to feel? Is it possible to truly worship God in tough circumstances?
- How can having an attitude of thankfulness make a difference to our lives?

“THANK YOU FOR THE COLD NIGHTS. THANK YOU FOR THE HOT DAYS. THANK YOU FOR THE HUNGER, FOR THE SICKNESS. THANK YOU FOR THE BUGS THAT BITE MY BODY. THANK YOU LORD, THANK YOU...”

- The way we live and worship changes in different seasons of our lives - spend time discussing together what this looks like for you, at the present time.

3. PRAY - WORSHIP

- In Romans 12, Paul says ‘...offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship.’ Pray that God will fill each member of your group with a spirit of worship and thanksgiving, especially during difficult times in our lives.
- Focus on praying for Christians living in Eritrea, one of the most repressive countries in the world. You might like to read the information box below aloud to inform your prayers.

RELIGIOUS FREEDOM IN ERITREA

Eritrea is one of the most repressive countries in the world – including in its treatment of Christians and people of other faiths. Helen’s story is, sadly, far from unique: thousands of Christians are imprisoned in shipping containers (if they have shelter at all), beaten, tortured and intimidated in an effort to make them renounce their faith.

**STORIES
FROM THE
WILDERNESS**



FAITH

IN THE WILDERNESS

1. WATCH

Carlos's story - <http://www.csw.org.uk/wilderness>

2. GO DEEPER - FAITH

- What struck you most about Carlos's story and the way he responded in faith?

Read Hebrews 11 - focus on verses 1 - 3

- In prison, Carlos felt trapped and uncomfortable, yet he continued to trust God's faithfulness. Have you ever faced an uncomfortable situation where holding onto your faith was difficult?
- Carlos attributes his constant supply of water in prison to God's faithfulness. Do you find it easy or difficult to be aware of God's faithfulness in each moment? How can you build a daily awareness of this?
- Carlos demonstrates in his story that he is a man of faith - what characteristics do faithful Christians possess? Do you see yourself as one?

**"THE WHOLE POINT WAS TO DESTROY MY FAITH, BUT, THANK
GOD, HE INCREASED MY FAITH"**

- In the passage, Paul writes about faith being an 'assurance about what we do not see'. Discuss how this is possible and what impact it might have on your life.
- How can we become more resilient to challenges to our faith?

3. PRAY - FAITH

- Pray specifically for individuals who are facing challenges to their faith - pray for a strong awareness of God's presence and faithfulness to fill them.
- Pray for Christians in Cuba who are facing challenges to their faith by the government - read the paragraph below aloud, to inform your prayers.

4. TAKE ACTION

Speak up for someone suffering because of their faith.

Go to <http://www.csw.org.uk/campaigns>

RELIGIOUS FREEDOM IN CUBA

Carlos' story is not uncommon in Cuba. Many men and women are arrested and detained by the government for stretches of time as an intimidation tactic: this often escalates to charges and a prison sentence. It's not only incredibly difficult for the person in jail, but financially and emotionally draining for their families too. This also means the churches are left without leaders and, if their building has been seized, nowhere to meet.

**STORIES
FROM THE
WILDERNESS**



1. WATCH

Muyiwa's story - <https://www.csw.org.uk/wilderness>

2. GO DEEPER - PEACE

- Were there any parts of Muyiwa's story that particularly stood out to you, or were challenging to hear?

Read Psalm 27

- In the middle of our wilderness, God can often feel absent, yet Muyiwa felt God's peace. Have you ever experienced the peace of God in the middle of a difficult or unsettling circumstance?
- Muyiwa suffered because of his father's persecution - how do the trials of others affect your faith in God?

"THE LORD IS MY LIGHT AND MY SALVATION - WHOM SHALL I FEAR? THE LORD IS THE STRONGHOLD OF MY LIFE - OF WHOM SHALL I BE AFRAID?"

- Psalm 27 was significant for Muyiwa's faith and trust in God - which part of this psalm stands out to you most in revealing God's character?
- In the middle of our trials, God is constant. Practically, what actions can we take during challenges to ensure that we can focus on the peace that God provides?
- Often when we face trials we can, intentionally or unintentionally, shut out God. What challenges does this produce? How can we learn to stand in God's strength rather than our own?

3. PRAY - PEACE

- In Philippians 4, Paul writes 'Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.' Use these verses to encourage prayer together, and pray with confidence for God's peace.
- Pray for Christians living in Nigeria who are facing trials like Muiyiwa's father. Pray for their peace and protection - if it helps, read the paragraph below aloud.

RELIGIOUS FREEDOM IN NIGERIA

Nigeria is roughly divided into a predominantly Islamic north, a central area where major religions are evenly balanced, and a mainly Christian south, with a sizeable minority in each area following traditional beliefs. Muslims complain about the prominence of Christianity in public life; while non-Muslims in the north complain about chronic marginalisation, increasing Islamisation and outbreaks of religiously-related violence. The Islamist militia Boko Haram and its related offshoots have also been responsible for a recent rise in violence, as they mount sustained terror campaigns aimed at creating an entirely Islamic north.

**STORIES
FROM THE
WILDERNESS**

ABOUT CSW

CSW is a human rights organisation specialising in freedom of religion or belief, and as Christians we stand with all those facing injustice because of their religion or belief.

We believe we are called to speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves, for the rights of all who are destitute (Proverbs 31: 8).

Our team of specialist advocates work on over 20 countries across Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Middle East, to ensure that the right to freedom of religion or belief is upheld and protected.

We are proud of our Christian heritage, identity and values. This means that we believe in the power of prayer to transform situations, and we encourage our supporters to join us in praying for the cases and issues we work on.

KEEP IN TOUCH

- ☐ I'd like to receive news by email about CSW's work and how I can support it
- ☐ I'd like to receive CSW's quarterly magazine and prayer diary by post
- ☐ I'd like to receive a weekly prayer email with updates from around the world
- ☐ I'd like to receive Connect and Encourage so I can write to people suffering for their beliefs
- ☐ Please send me ____ booklets introducing CSW for me to share with my small group

My details:

Name _____

Email address _____

Address _____

Postcode _____

Please return to: CSW, PO Box 99, New Malden, Surrey, KT3 3YF

DONATE

If you or your church would like to make a gift to CSW, you can make a donation here, call us on 020 8329 0010, or send a cheque made payable to CSW to: CSW, PO Box 99, New Malden, Surrey, KT3 3YF

Thank you for standing with those suffering for what they believe.



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