

SOME PLACES ONLY COURAGE CAN TAKE YOU.

BEYOND UTOPIA



FAITH STUDY GUIDE

OVERVIEW

The documentary *Beyond Utopia* takes us on an unforgettable journey with a courageous pastor, Pastor Kim, as he helps families flee one of the most oppressive places on Earth - North Korea. It helps show the truth about both the oppressive regimes who keep their people in bondage and the faith-driven heroes who are taking a stand for freedom.



Support refugee efforts

This documentary offers us an opportunity to engage in important conversations about our world and our role in it as Christ followers. We see Pastor Kim, an ordinary man living out extraordinary faithfulness, put his faith into action by helping North Korean defectors to freedom.

BEYOND UTOPIA

Opens in theaters
for a two night event:
OCTOBER 23 & 24

For more information visit:
fathomevents.com



HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

This discussion guide, specifically crafted for pastors, small group leaders, and ministry leaders in all walks of life, has been created with the intention of equipping leaders with tools and resources for conversation about Beyond Utopia.

When combined with the film, these accompanying discussion questions present an opportunity for engaging in meaningful conversations about God's world and our role in it, whether this discussion occurs in the theater after a screening, within your church building, or in a small group environment. Encourage your church, your small group, and friends to watch the movie and subsequently engage in conversation using these questions, which offer a flexible framework to encourage discussion around the film's central themes.

Individuals may be in an emotionally-elevated state after viewing the documentary. We recommend using this guide and its open-ended questions to invite dialogue and to provide everyone with an opportunity to process their reactions.

Here are a few suggestions for you to contemplate as you adapt this tool to use in your ministry setting:

1. Encourage your small group to view the film together and use this resource as your curriculum in your subsequent meeting.
2. View the documentary as a congregation and hold a time of prayer afterward.
3. Engage your congregation in a fundraiser to support the film's impact by supporting Caleb Mission and LiNK.



FILM DISCUSSION QUESTIONS & INITIAL REACTIONS

Q: What were some emotions you felt as you watched *Beyond Utopia*? How did you feel after watching this documentary compared to before you started?

Q: What is one moment in the documentary that stood out to you the most? Why?

Q: Do you have any personal connections to the stories or experiences shown in the documentary?

So-yeon Lee and Pastor Kim both share stories of loss, grief and even guilt. The film ends with uncertainty around the future of So-yeon's son. We feel the pain, grief, and fear she holds as a mother.

Q: How did So-yeon's story and situation make you feel? How are you processing this lack of resolution for So-yeon and her family?

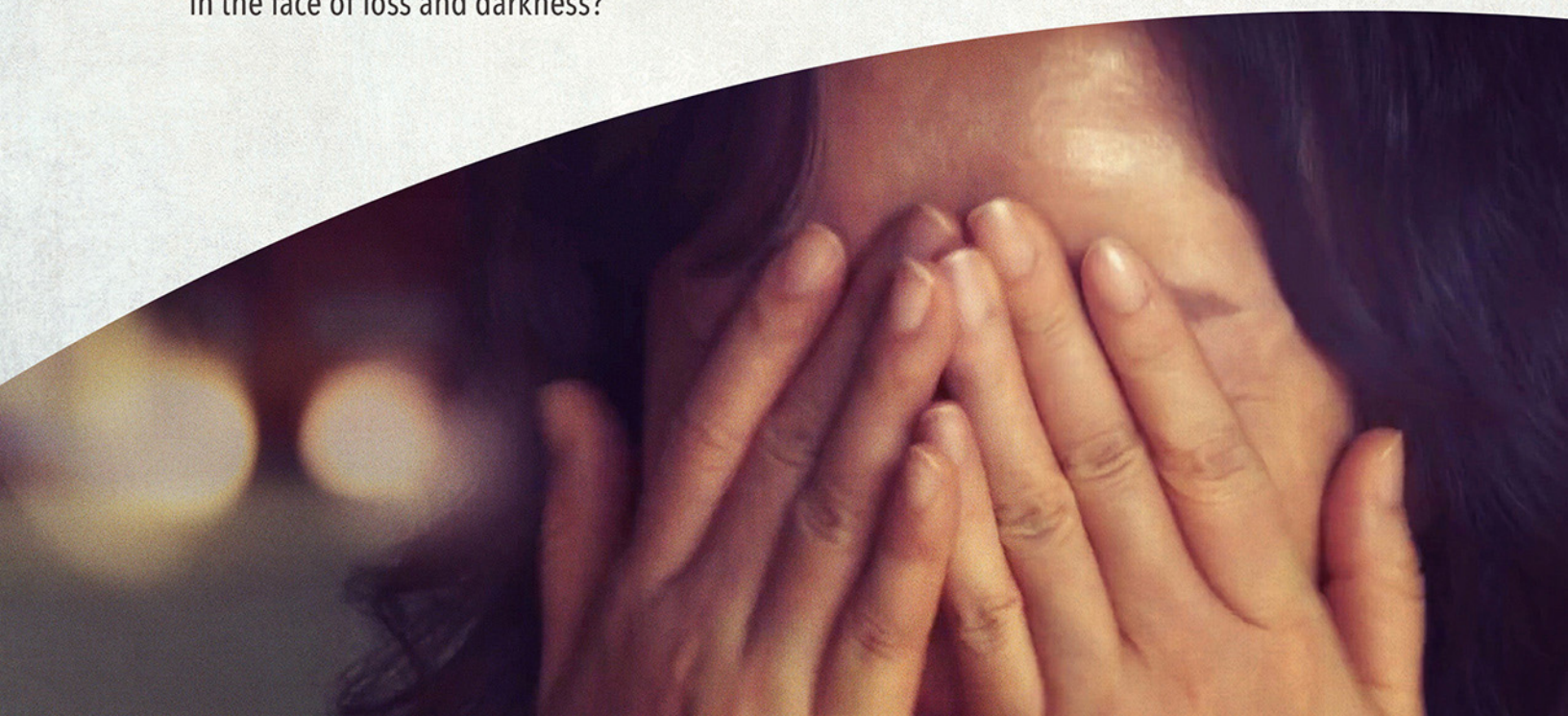
Q: Why do you think the film includes her story?

Pastor Kim shares about his son tragically dying while he was on a mission saving a North Korean defector. As his son was being cremated he vowed, *"We've lost you, so now we'll devote ourselves to saving many more defectors... I've rescued around 1,000 people since his death over 10 years ago. In Christian terms, my son was the grain of wheat."*

At this moment, Pastor Kim is referencing John 12:24 which says, *"Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit."*

Q: Sit with this verse for a moment. What does Jesus mean here? How is Pastor Kim applying this verse as it relates to his son and to his mission?

Q: How is Pastor Kim's response an example of hope in the face of loss and darkness?



PROCESSING THE FILM

In the film, we learn how the North Korean regime co-opts the Christian faith to uphold its power. At one point in the film we hear, *"We prayed to 'our Father and Leader Kim Il-Sung' before breakfast every morning. We had never heard of a book called The Bible and if anyone were caught with one they'd receive the worst punishments imaginable. In North Korea, I studied the 'Ten Principles for the Establishment of a Monolithic Ideological System.' After I got to South Korea, I came across the Ten Commandments and they were basically identical."*

Q: How did you respond to hearing this? Are there examples outside of the North Korean regime in which you've seen the Christian faith be exploited for personal or political gain?

At one point in the film, So-yeon laments on the phone, *"we were born in the wrong country!"* The Bible gives us many examples of people who lived in difficult places, situations, and political climates. Just as God placed Daniel amidst the trials of Babylon, Joseph within the dungeons of Egypt, and Esther in the Persian court, time and time again God has allowed His people to be placed in difficult places. Throughout it all, God assures his people *"Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand."* (Isaiah 41:10).

Q: How does this sit with you? Why might God allow people to be placed in difficult places and circumstances?



Interestingly, Pastor Kim's wife's name is Esther. In Scripture, Esther is one of the most powerful women who responded to her own cultural moment and context. She was challenged to consider if she had come to a place of influence "for such a time as this" (Esther 4:14). In response, she uttered one of the most courageous lines in Scripture, "*If I perish, I perish*" (Esther 4:16). She prevented the first Holocaust despite knowing it could cost her her life.

Q: What weight do these words carry for Christians today? As we put faith into action, what role does sacrifice play?

Q: What do you think compels biblical characters like Esther, and people in our world like Pastor Kim, to be willing to sacrifice their time and well-being for others?

Q: Is there a need in our world for which you have felt stirred to sacrifice your time, convenience or even security?

At one point in the film, we see the Roh family crossing the river in the long narrow boat where they are given strict instructions to remain still until instructed to move. This moment required counterintuitive waiting, stillness, and trust in the face of a perilous journey to freedom. It's an interesting juxtaposition to the physical strain, endurance, and fortitude required for other parts of the escape.

Christians are called to wait patiently on God's timing. Psalm 27:14 states, "*Wait for the Lord; be strong, and let your heart take courage; wait for the Lord!*"

Q: How is this a metaphor for the Christian life?

Q: Is there something we can learn from their bold action and patient waiting? How does Pastor Kim demonstrate this balance?



FORMING A RESPONSE

Many people don't know that Pyongyang, the capital of North Korea, was once called the "Jerusalem of the East" and was one of the main places for Christian seminaries and teachers in Asia. Today, the reality of Pyongyang is quite different. It is now controlled by a regime that sees religion, especially Christianity, as a threat to the worship of its leaders. Ironically, Kim Il-sung, the founder and leader of North Korea and the communist party there, grew up in a Christian family. His father worked as a missionary part-time and his mother was a deaconess. While adamantly opposed to Christianity, the Kim regime co-opted many aspects of the Christian faith. There are token churches and temples in North Korea, but they are kept only to give the appearance of religious tolerance to foreign visitors.

Q: Why has North Korea gone so far as to build these fake churches? What image do you think they want to maintain or give off?

Q: When you learn about injustices throughout the world such as the situation in North Korea, does it ever evoke feelings of hopelessness or paralysis? Please elaborate.

Martin Niemoller (1892-1984) was a German Lutheran pastor who wrote about the silence of German intellectuals and clergy, including by his own admission, his own silence, following the rise of Nazi power. Issuing a cautionary message and a solemn confession, Niemoller underscores the importance of Christians taking a stand for neighbors different from him. *If we don't stand up for others, who will stand up for us?* In his 1946 address he memorably said, *"Then they came for me, and by that time there was no one left to speak up."*

There is a cost to remaining silent in the face of human suffering. It is easy to feel numb or apathetic toward those whom we don't instinctively care about because we don't relate or identify. However, the gospel speaks in direct opposition to this instinct. Galatians 5:14 sums this up with these words, *"For the entire law is fulfilled in keeping this one command: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'" In John 15 Jesus says to his disciples, "This is my commandment: Love each other in the same way I have loved you. There is no greater love than to lay down one's life for one's friends."*

Q: Has this film changed your perspective, awareness, or compassion for those living under the regime of North Korea?

There have been many heroes throughout the generations who have demonstrated sacrificial and radical love for others. Among them, Dietrich Bonhoeffer was a pastor who ultimately felt led to radical action in the face of the Nazi regime. He increasingly became convinced that responsibility to the other was the hallmark of Christian discipleship, and in his *"Letters and Papers from Prison"* he lamented, *"We have learnt, rather too late, that action comes not from thought, but from a readiness for responsibility."* Additionally, he wrote that, *"Silence in the face of evil is itself evil: God will not hold us guiltless. Not to speak is to speak. Not to act is to act."*

Q: As followers of Christ, what does responsibility for our brothers and sisters in North Korea mean? Imagine what compassion and action might look like for you and might require of you.

Bonhoeffer's legacy and theology speaks not just to action on behalf of individuals, but action that challenges and reforms the very systems and structures that impact individuals as well. He wonders about the obligation the church has not just to "*bandage the victims under the wheel, but to put a spoke in the wheel itself.*" Meaning, we bear a responsibility to human individuals, but also to systemic reform.

Q: What role might the Church have in responding to systemic injustice and suffering?

For some, the film raises the question of ethics. We learn about some of the resources and tactics used to help North Korean defectors escape, which from time to time means hiring brokers who may be human traffickers or engaging authorities in bribes.

For Bonhoeffer, Christian ethics are not formed by a set of values for hypothetical situations or an abstract question of good and evil. Instead, Christian action requires one to ask, "*What is Jesus Christ doing in the world today and how can I participate in that?*" In other words, the ethic here is love, prompting us to ask each day anew: *what are the concrete situations today that require the love and action of Christ?*

Q: What might love and action from the broader Church look like for those suffering at the hand of the North Korean regime?

This year is the 60th Anniversary of the Civil Rights Movement where Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and other pastors played a critical role. While acknowledging the importance of diplomacy, Dr. King also used his famous "I Have A Dream" speech to call Americans to recognize "*the fierce urgency of now.*" In his "Letter from Birmingham Jail" he challenged his fellow Christians, "*For years now I have heard the word 'Wait!' This 'Wait' has almost always meant 'Never.'*"

Q: What do you think we should learn from Dr. King's call for urgent action?

Dr. King also famously wrote in his 1963 book *Strength to Love*, "*In the end, we will remember not the words of our enemies, but the silence of our friends.*" This echoes Edmund Burke's belief that "*the only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing.*"

Q: How do we encourage our friends not to be silent? How do we motivate good people to do something in the face of human suffering? Please elaborate.

Q: What would you like to take away from this experience, and how might it influence your future actions or choices?



JOINING IN PRAYER TOGETHER

We must respond and rise up to support our brothers and sisters in North Korea. Please join us praying for:

Pray for Protection:

Psalm 91:1-2 (NIV) - "Whoever dwells in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the LORD, 'He is my refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust.'"

The 26 million people in North Korea who are created in the image of God, and yet not often treated as such. Pray for their physical, emotional, and spiritual well-being. Prayer also for the North Korean Christians who are facing persecution for their faith. Pray for these believers to be filled with courage and unwavering faith in the face of adversity.

Pray for Freedom:

Isaiah 61:1 (NIV) - "The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me, because the LORD has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners."

Pray for those who have been separated from their families. Pray for those who are still suffering undering an oppressive regime in North Korea. Pray for other organizations that are supporting the work of helping North Korean refugees.

Pray for the Underground Church in North Korea:

Ecclesiastes 4:9-10 (NIV) - "Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their labor: If either of them falls down, one can help the other up. But pity anyone who falls and has no one to help them up."



North Korea has resumed its ranking on the World Watch List as the most dangerous country in the world in which to be a Christian (Open Doors USA). The organization Open Doors USA estimated that authorities held 50,000 to 70,000 North Korean citizens in prison for being Christian. They stated that Christians experienced persecution that was *"violent and intense"* and that *"life for Christians ... is a constant cauldron of pressure; capture or death is only a mistake away."*

Pray for the underground churches in North Korea. For their growth and unity despite the risks.

Pray for International Advocacy:

Proverbs 31:8-9 (NIV) - *"Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves, for the rights of all who are destitute. Speak up and judge fairly; defend the rights of the poor and needy."*

Pray for international organizations and governments to advocate for human rights in North Korea.

Pray for Pastor Kim, So-yeon, and the Roh Family:

Psalms 34:17 (NIV) - *"The righteous cry out, and the LORD hears them; he delivers them from all their troubles."*

Pray for So-yeon and her family. For her family's safety and well-being and ultimately, prayer to be able to reunite with her son.

Pray for the Roh family as they are adjusting to a new life in South Korea.

Pray for Pastor Kim's ministry Caleb Mission. For funding and for support as they continue the ministry of safely rescuing North Korean refugees.



Support refugee efforts