

Praying for the Persecuted Church

"Don't forget about those in prison. Suffer with them as through you were there yourself. Share the sorrow of those being mistreated, as though you feel their pain in your own bodies."

--Hebrews 13:3 NLT



Portion for the Journey

When this call to pray was initially written in 2003, reports of persecution came from across the ocean. Christians in the United States suffered subtle ostracism but there had been very little resistance to the point of shedding of blood. This is no longer the case. In 1999, Columbine, CO students were killed in a high school as they met for prayer.... Victims were chosen one by one because they identified themselves as Christians. From 1966 to 2000, only 1% of mass shootings were motivated by religious hate. The number escalated from 2000 to 2014 with 9% of mass shootings involving religious hate. That number jumped to 17% between 2018 and February 2020.

The pattern of persecution shows an exponential increase in persecution of believers and for the second year in a row, Christians are the most persecuted religion in the world.

- Since the death of Jesus Christ 2000 years ago, by 2017, 43 million Christians had become martyrs, but in 2024 the number has reached 75 million. Over 75% of these were in the last century alone.
- More than 200 million Christians face persecution each day with children comprising 60% of this number.
- One in seven Christians worldwide faces high levels of persecution and discrimination for their faith. Five years ago, that number was 1 in 9. In the past year alone, as of 2024, the number has risen by about five million. That is 365 million of our brothers and sisters.
- On average, more than 13 Christians are killed each day for their faith. That means almost every two hours, a believer is killed.
- 4,125 Christians were detained without trial, arrested, sentenced or imprisoned
- 3,906 believers were abducted
- More than 3,200 Christians were raped, sexually harassed or forced to marry non-Christians
- 42,849 followers of Jesus were physically or mentally abused

- And nearly 300,000 Christians were forced to leave their homes, go into hiding or flee their country of origin.

We must not be dismayed by the fiery trials that may face us as Christians. Open Door ministries notes just the statistics on increasing persecution doesn't tell the whole story. "One of the reasons that it's getting worse is because the church is growing. In the most hostile of environments, it continues to thrive. More than anything, it is a testament to the power of the gospel and the eternal truth that 'God's Word is not chained.' **2 Tim. 2:9** But it's also because the global Church is standing with its most vulnerable members. It's what family does."

Persecution against God's children has existed since sin entered the garden and Cain slew his brother Abel, who was more righteous in God's sight. **Hebrews 11**, the Great Chapter of faith, describes the martyrdom of believers. A study of the Early Church writings and the history of the martyrs of the church through the ages shows that persecution and even martyrdom were considered to be a part of the normal Christian life. Christians through the ages have shown their purest faith and greatest courage in times of persecution when they chose to stand for Christ. They refused to renounce the name of their Savior in the face of torture, imprisonment and even death. **1 Cor. 4:11-16; 2 Cor. 11:23-28; Heb. 11:35-40**

In much of the world, this is still a way of life today. Jesus called those who would follow Him to consider the cost of following Him before they started on the journey. His last prayer before His crucifixion was concerned with those who would be left in the world which is under the power of the Evil One. It is essential that we see ourselves as part of this larger Body of Christ. **John 17**

A Christian prisoner in Cuba was asked to sign a statement containing charges against fellow Christians that would lead to their arrest. He said: "the chain keeps me from signing this." The Communist officer protested, "but you are not in chains!" "I am," said the Christian. "I am bound by the chain of witnesses who throughout the centuries gave their lives for Jesus Christ. I am a link in this chain. I will not break it." – Jesus Freaks, pg. 49, Albury Publishing, Oklahoma City, OK, 1999

*If only we could see ourselves as part of this chain,
what fervent prayers would we be lifting up continuously
for our brothers and sisters who are being persecuted for Christ!*

Jesus said, "I will build My Church and the gates of hell will not prevail against it." In the midst of much suffering throughout the world, the gospel continues to make great advances. According to the US Center for World Missions, in 1990 one out of every seventh person in the world was a believer. This was up from a ratio of one in twenty-seven in 1900. Our prayers are making a difference in the battle so be encouraged! **Matt. 16:18**

SCRIPTURAL TRUTHS REGARDING PERSECUTION:

The word "Persecution" translated from "diako" in the Greek, is found 30 times in the New Testament. It means to be pursued or hunted, and is used primarily regarding pursuit by hostile soldiers. It is literally the systematic attempt to suppress or exterminate Christianity to the point of

violence. Persecution results from the world's hatred of God and seeks to hinder or destroy His Witness or revelation of Christ to the world.

1. **Persecution for Christ's sake is certain in this world:** We are to receive suffering as part of Christ's ministry. We should not be surprised when we face persecution. From the beginning, the righteous have faced persecution by those who do not know the Lord. Jesus made it clear that we are to expect such treatment if we truly follow Him. He warned that if the world hated Him, they would also hate us. **Acts 9:4-5; 14:1-2, 5-6, 19-22; 2 Tim. 3:12; John 16:33; John 15:18-21; Phil 1:12-14; 27-30; 1 Pet. 4:12-19; Luke 21:12-19; Rom. 8:14-18**
2. **Times and seasons of persecution are set and limited by God.** (**Rev. 2:9-11**) Believers through the ages have understood that there is a divine purpose in persecution. They believed that to suffer persecution is a privileged mark of true discipleship. It is in times of persecution that we find what we are really made of. Justin Martyr described it as the fan which now cleanses the Lord's threshing floor, separating the grains of the martyrs from the deniers. Jesus taught that there is a special blessing that comes through persecution. **Matt 5:10-12; Luke 6:20-23**
3. **We are to be bound together with persecuted believers.** "And if one member suffers, all the members suffer..." as we do this, we will let the world know that He sent us. We need to ask Him to make room in our hearts for our suffering brothers and sisters. The world will know us by our love. **1 Cor. 12:26; 2 Cor. 6:11-13, 7:2-3; John 17:23; Heb. 13:3; Phil. 3:7-11**
4. **We are called to pray for those who persecute us:** "But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you." We are to return good for evil. **1 Cor. 4:11-13; Matt. 5:43-48; Acts 16:29-34**
5. **Those whose foundations in Christ are not strong fall away in times of persecution:** **Matt. 7:24-27; 10:22; 13:6, 18-23; 24:9-10; 26:69-75; Mark 4:17; Prov. 12:3 (NASB); 2 Thes. 2:3-12; 2 Thes. 2:3-12**
6. **Through Jesus we will be more than conquerors:** Persecuted Christians often do not ask for persecution to stop. Rather, they ask for prayer and the faith that they will keep the Word of God and not deny His name. Jesus promised. "I will build my Church and the gates of hell will not prevail against her." **Matt. 16:18; Rom. 8:35-39; Rev. 2:7,11,17,26; 3:5,12,21; Col. 2:15; Acts 5:39-42**
7. **We are to rejoice in times of persecution and suffering for our reward will be great.** God's love is better than life. **Ps. 16:1; 63:3, Matt. 5:11-12; Luke 6:22-23; Acts 5:41; Rom. 2:5-8; 5:2-4; 8:18; 2 Cor. 4:15-18; 12:9-10; Heb. 10:31-39; 11:24-25; 12:1-3; 1 Pet. 4:12-19; James 1:2-4; Phil. 3:7-11**
8. **We give God the greatest glory when we rejoice and offer thanksgiving** in times of persecution and suffering. A heart that gives God praise and thanks in times of suffering is infinitely more precious in God's sight than one who thanks Him in time of prosperity. **1 Pet. 4:13; Rev. 3:18-19; 1 Thes. 5:16-18; Eph. 5:20**

In times of persecution, we should pray that His purposes will be accomplished. The Word particularly reveals His purposes in the persecution and suffering of His children. The book, “Suffering and the Sovereignty of God” by John Piper and Justin Taylor lists a number of reasons why God has ordained the suffering and persecution of His children.

1. **Suffering Refines His people and deepens Faith and Holiness.** Heb. 4:15; 5:8; 12:10; 1 Pet. 1:7
2. **Through suffering and persecution, the Church becomes purified of all remnants of self-reliance and entanglement with the world.** 2 Cor. 1:8-9, Rom. 5:3-4; 2 Cor. 12:9-10; 2 Cor. 1:9; 1 Pet. 1:21; 4:19
3. **Suffering is a primary means of building compassion in His servants, by which they can comfort and minister to others.** Col. 1:4-5
4. **Through suffering God enlarges the capacity of the saints to enjoy His glory in this age and in the one to come.** 1 Cor. 4:13
5. **When believers witness the suffering of a brother or sister it makes others increase in their boldness to witness their faith.** Phil. 1:12-14
6. **Our willingness to suffer for the sake of Christ reveals His immense worth to unbelievers.** Our willingness to suffer for the cause of Christ may result in the salvation of our persecutors as they see our faith. 2 Cor. 1:5-6
7. **Persecution and suffering reposition believers to go into new areas of mission.** Acts 8:1; Acts 11:19
8. **God turns setbacks into triumph.** In times of comfort and ease, Christians fall into weakness, apathy, lethargy, self-centeredness and preoccupation with security. In times of persecution, Christians lose their complacency and become courageous in their witness. Luke 21:12-13; Mark 13:9; 1 Cor. 15:55-58

PRAYER POINTS TO PRAY FOR THE PERSECUTED CHURCH

Pray that God will receive glory in through the lives of those suffering and enduring times of persecution and martyrdom and that the Gospel will be furthered. Pray they will complete the work for which they have been sent. **Phil. 1:14; 2 Tim. 4:5-7; Acts 16:25**

Pray that those being persecuted will not be surprised by this fiery ordeal. See persecution as part of Christ's ministry. **Acts 14:1-2, 5-6, 19-22; 1 Pet. 4:7, 12-19; 5:10; John 14:27; 15: 18-21; 16:33; Isa. 28:16**

Pray that those being persecuted will forgive and love their persecutors and those imprisoned with them: Accept persecution and return good for evil. **John 15:13, 1 Cor. 13:13; 2 Peter 1:5-8 1 Cor. 4:11-13; Mt. 5:43-48** That there would be no root of bitterness. **Heb. 12:15**

Pray for salvation of the persecutors. Pray those persecuting believers will see their love for their Savior and want to know Him. **Acts 16:29-34**

Joy in the midst of persecution: To keep from being overwhelmed by their circumstances (peace of mind and encouragement) To pray for a spirit of joy and contentment in the midst of affliction. **2 Cor. 7:4, Neh. 8:10; Phil. 3:1; James 1:2-4; Heb. 10:32-36; 2 Tim.2: 3,9-10**

Patient Endurance and Steadfastness: Pray for grace to endure trials and patient endurance of suffering. **Heb. 10:32-36; 2 Tim. 2:3, 9-10; Isa. 49:23**

Pray that believers will be content to let their vindication come from God in His way and His time. **Isa. 54:17; Heb. 10:32-36; 2 Tim.2: 3,9-10**

Faith: Pray their faith will not fail in time of testing. That those who are persecuted will have faith in the time of testing. Use trials to make faith stronger and purer. **Luke 22:32; 1 Thes 3:7,8; Heb 11:32-40 (KJV); 12:4-5**

Boldness: Adversity would strengthen their faith and give boldness to speak. Pray they will be free from the fear of man. **Eph. 6:19,20; Phil.1:12-14 Col. 4:3-4; 2 Chron 18:13; Acts 4:13.**

Not be ashamed of the gospel. **2 Tim. 1:8; Rom. 1:16**

Put on whole armor of God: **Eph. 6:10-20**

Trust: Rely on the Lord, to be able to put all their trust in Him. **2 Tim. 1:12; Ps. 4:8; 16:8; Isa. 30:15; Lev. 25:18,19**

Pray they will put their hope in Jesus' promises and victory in the midst of trials. **Romans 5:5; Job 5:15-16; Job 42:2, Jer.29:11**

That those who are persecuted will be victorious. That they would not fall away in time of adversity. Courage not to deny His name and not to compromise on basic truths. **2 Cor 4:8-18; James 5:10-11; Rom. 8: 35-39; Rev. 3:8**

Obey God rather than men. Pray they will overcome all fear of man and resist temptation to compromise the truth that comes from fear of persecution. Wisdom to recognize compromise that inevitably leads to more compromise until no principles are sacred. No compromise is possible regarding God's truth regarding the Lordship of Jesus OR the commission to be His Witnesses. **Dan. 3:8-18; Prov 28:1; Ps 3:6; 27:3; Jer 1:17; Matt. 10:28; Prov. 29:25-26; 1 Pet. 3:13-15; Isa. 51:7; Ezek. 2:6; 1 Sam. 15:24**

Pray for pastors and church leaders to be raised up with a boldness to lead. Pray for their protection because they are often targeted first for persecution. **2 Cor. 4:17-18; 1 Thes. 3:7, 1:6**

Laborers into the Harvest field: Leaders raised up with a boldness to lead: **1 Cor 4; 2 Cor. 4:17-18; 1 Thes. 3:7, 1:6** Pray that God would raise up leaders in the Persecuted Church, that they may be courageous, wise and faithful to their God-given responsibilities. **1 Peter 5:1-4, 1 Timothy 3:1-10**

Pray for government and religious leaders of nations which engage in persecution. Use the conversion of Paul as a strategy to pray for leaders. **1 Timothy 2:1-4; Gal. 1:13, 1 Cor. 15:9; 1 Tim. 1:13; Acts 8:1,3 and Acts 9:1-21; Acts 22:4-21; Acts 26:9-11.** Pray for favor with those who are in power. **Acts 24:23; Acts 27:3, also Daniel, Joseph)**

Ask the Lord to minister to those suffering persecution in their time of need. Ask Him to send believers to encourage them. **Eph. 3:14-21, Acts 24:23; 27:3; Phil. 4:14-19; 2 Timothy 1:16-18**

Encouragement: That believers will encourage one another more and more as they see the day drawing near. That God will send those to minister to them: **Rom. 15:30-32; Acts 24:23; 27:3; Phil. 4:14-19; 2 Tim 1:15-18; Heb. 12:1,12; 1 Thes. 5:11; Heb. 10:23-25; Psa. 73:28** (draw nigh unto God)

Protection from isolation & depression. Protection from vulnerability to mental attacks of feeling forgotten or abandoned by God (e.g. **Elijah under Jezebel's threat to kill him 1 Ki. 19:4-8; James 5:7 and John the Baptist imprisoned for the sake of righteousness Luke 7:19, 21-23**) Pray they will be encouraged and hold fast to the promises of God never to leave them, fail them or forsake them! **Deut. 31:6; 2 Cor. 4:9; Ps. 22:24; 27:10; 34:18; 37:28; 68:5-6; Isa. 41:10; 43:2; 49:15-16; 54:10; Rom. 8:35-39; Matt. 28:20; 2 Tim. 4:16-17;**

Comfort: The Holy Spirit is our divine 'paraklete' meaning 'one who is called to ones' side' to comfort and help us and lead us into all truth. Pray imprisoned Christians to be comforted by the Holy Spirit. **Matt. 6:9-13; John 14:16, 26;**

Fellowship: Protection in fellowship/companionship: That believers would not forsake gathering together. Pray that persecuted Christians in restricted areas will support each other and band together. Send believers to be a strength and support: **1 Pet. 4:7-11; Heb.10:25; 1 Cor. 4:17; Col. 4:8; 1 Thes. 3:2**

Access to the Word and sound teaching. Where there is persecution, the enemy tries to cut them off from the Word or to cause compromise in basic truths. Pray that they would have the Word to sustain them. Pray for the provision of Bibles. **2 Tim. 4:13; Isa. 66:2; John 15:7 Psalm 119:11,105-112; Hosea 4:6**

Wall of protection: The Lord will strengthen and protect them from the evil one. **2 Thes. 3:3; Zech. 2:5; 1 Cor 4:9-13 (KJV); Eph. 6:**

Pray that when it glorifies God the most, His people will be delivered from their persecutors: **Ps. 86: 14-17; Ps. 124; Ps. 32:7; 2 Ki. 17:39; Ps. 27:12; Ps. 31:15; Psa. 3; 41:2; 59:1; 143:9; 69:18**

Physical Needs

Destitution: Pray for Christians who have lost homes, farms, food, water and income, that God will meet their every need and ease their anxiety. **Matt. 6:8, 32-34; 1 Cor. 6:10**

Healing: Pray for Christians who are beaten and tortured, that they may be healed from their injuries and wounds, restored to health, nourished in their bodies as well as their spirits. **Acts 7:60**

MINISTRIES THAT SUPPORT PERSECUTED BELIEVERS AROUND THE WORLD:

- **Open Doors** <https://www.opendoorsus.org/en-US/> Open Doors originated in 1955, when a young Dutchman started smuggling Bibles to the persecuted Christians in Communist Europe. He became known as Brother Andrew, and his work led to more than six decades of support for the persecuted church. Their ministry provides resources to know how to support persecuted believers and keeps a World Watchlist of current information taking place at the front lines. Open Door World Watch List is an excellent resource!
- **Voice of the Martyr** www.persecution.com Founded by Richard and Sabina Wurmbrand in 1967, this ministry serves persecuted Christians in practical and spiritual ways. They publish a magazine to inform the Body of Christ how to support the persecuted church.
- **Christians in Crisis** www.christiansincrisis.net Christians In Crisis is a prayer advocacy ministry that prays for the persecuted church worldwide, the people who persecute them and all those needing to come to salvation through faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. It is the focus of CIC relating to the Islamic world, that Jesus died for Muslims too.
- **Persecution Project** <http://www.persecutionproject.org/> Ministry that provides up to date information on Christians undergoing persecution around the world. Offers a means of sending support to these believers.