

Praying for the Persecuted Church

Key Scripture

*“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

There is a growing pattern of persecution of believers around the world that demands our attention. Many people associate the martyrdom of Christians with the Roman Coliseum, when believers were thrown to be torn apart by lions, crucified, and beheaded. The number of believers who died in that era were relatively small compared to the numbers of believers dying for their faith today.

**Since the death of Jesus Christ 2000 years ago,
More Christians have died in this century than all of the centuries previously!
From 30AD to 1900, there were 14 million verified martyrs
100 million Christians have died for their faith in the 20th century
[more than have been killed in all this century’s wars].
Christians are the most-persecuted religion in the world at the present time.
More than 200 million Christians face persecution each day - 60% are children.
In the world today, 600 million believers are prevented from practicing their faith
through intimidation, forced conversions, bodily harm or even death.
At this time, 1 Christian is killed for their faith in Jesus Christ very five minutes.**

Christians in the United States have suffered subtle ostracism but historically there had been very little resistance to the point of shedding of blood. This is no longer the case. As I write this new introduction, we are listening to news reports of a gunman killing 26 believers as they worshipped in church in a small rural community in Texas. Charleston, NC, Columbine, CO, students killed in a high school as they met for prayer.... Did you even hear about the 10 dead and 7 wounded at Umpqua Community College in Oregon, Oct. 3, 2015. Victims were chosen one by one because they identified themselves as Christians.

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!

If **any** of you
Wants to **BE** MY follower,
You **M U S T** **put aside** your
Selfish Ambition,
SHOULDER YOUR Cross
And follow ME.

If you try to **keep** your life for yourself, YOU WILL LOSE IT.
But if you GIVE **UP** your life
For **MY Sake**
And for the sake of the
GOOD NEWS
You will find **True Life**.
Mark 8:34-35

What is Persecution?

Persecution means to harass in a manner to injure, grieve or afflict. To cause to suffer because of belief. 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.

Persecution can take many forms. In its most subtle forms, it can result in social ostracism, ridicule and slander. As persecution becomes more formalized, it begins with loss of loss of employment, possessions and property, destruction of Bibles and books or materials that relate to one's faith. When the government sanctions persecution, it can close down places of worship and forbid believers from meeting together. In the more extreme situations persecution takes the form of imprisonment, beatings, torture and death. Many parts of the world have experienced mass genocide of believers and expulsion from one's country.

Scriptural Truths Related to Persecution:

1. **Persecution for Christ's sake is certain in this world:** Jesus suffered incredible persecution in His life on this earth. All persecution is actually directed at Christ Himself. (Acts 9:4-5) We are to receive suffering as part of Christ's ministry. We must not be dismayed by the fiery trials that face us as Christians. Persecution is a mark of true discipleship. A Christian is never the victim of circumstances. Jesus made it clear that we are to expect such treatment if we truly follow Him. Matt. 10:22; John 16:33; John 15:18-21; 1 Pet. 4:1,2,12-19; Acts 9:4-5; 14:1-2, 5-6, 19-22; 2 Tim. 3:12; Heb. 11:2, 36-39; Phil. 1:29; Luke 21:12-19; Rom. 8:17-18

2. **From the beginning, the righteous have faced persecution by those who do not know the Lord. Those born after the flesh always persecute those born after the spirit.** Persecution has existed against true believers since sin entered the garden and Cain slew his brother Abel. Those who are after the flesh [offspring of Satan] have a natural enmity against those who are of the Spirit [children of God]. As long as we are silent in our beliefs we probably will not be persecuted, but when we begin to act on our faith with boldness, persecution will begin to be manifest. Those who love power will always be afraid of Jesus. Gen. 3:15; Rev. 12:17; 1 John 3:12; Galatians 4:29; 2 Cor. 2:16



"Jesus promised His disciples three things – that they would be completely fearless, absurdly happy, and in constant trouble."

G.K. Chesterton, British writer and apologist, 1874-1936



3. Historically, 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 believed that to suffer persecution is a privileged mark of true discipleship, refusing to renounce the name of their Savior in the face of torture, imprisonment, and even death. In much of the world this is still a way of life. 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. (John 17). 1 Cor. 4:11-16; 2 Cor. 11:23-28; Matt. 5:10-12; 1 Peter. 4:13-16; Luke 6:22-23

4. Persecution of Christians is actually directed at Jesus Himself. Even though Saul was persecuting His followers, Jesus asked him, "Why are you persecuting Me?" Jesus made it clear that those who harm the least of these, are actually harming Him. Acts 9:4; 22:7-8; Isa. 63:9; Matt. 25:33-46; Zech. 2:8; Eph. 5:30

5. Times and seasons of persecution are set and limited by God. Rev. 2:9-11

6. We are to be bound together with persecuted believers and commanded to pray for them. "And if one member suffers, all the members suffer..." Put yourself in the place of those who are persecuted and pray for them as if it were your mother, father, brother, sister or only child who is being persecuted. One aspect of Christian suffering in times of persecution is intense isolation and loneliness. Christians who are in prison or undergoing intense persecution often wonder if anyone knows or cares about their situation.

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

It is essential that we see ourselves as part of this larger Body of Christ. As we 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! Matt. 25:36; 1 Peter 1:22; 1 Cor. 12:26; 2 Cor. 6:11-13; 7:2-3; John 17:23; Heb. 10:34; 13:3; Phil. 3:10-11, 20; 4:14-19; Ps. 74:19; 2 Tim. 1:16-18; Neh. 1:3-4; Rom. 12:15; Gal. 6:1-2 1 Pet. 3:8

7. 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. In Acts 12:5, the believers prayed for Peter when he was imprisoned. The word for "prayer" used in this passage is 'ektenes,' which signifies earnest and stretched out prayer. It signifies fervent prayer arising from a heart stirred with passionate fire. Luke 23:24; 6:22-23; 1 Cor. 4:11-13; Matt. 5:43-48; Acts 12:5; 16:29-34

8. 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); Matt. 13:18-23

9. Though we are persecuted, we will be more than conquerors through Christ Jesus. God's promise is that He will be with us and keep us in all of our persecutions. He will not allow a hair on our head to be harmed. In all of the troubles, afflictions, and persecutions that befall us, we shall never be truly hurt by

them. Though they kill the outer man, the spirit is preserved in Jesus. Jesus promised, "I will build my Church and the gates of hell will not prevail against it." The blood shed by true believers calls out to God, who sees and hears their cries. He will bring forth justice in the right time. 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; Mark 8:35-38; Ex. 3:2; Dan. 3:25,27; 6:21-23; Acts 18:9,10; 20:23; Ps. 23:4; 2 Cor. 1:8,9,12; 1 Pet. 3:17; Luke 21:13; Phil.1:27-29

10. We are to rejoice and thank God in times of persecution and suffering God's love is better than life. Believers considered it to be a privilege to suffer for Christ's sake. Jesus taught that there is a special blessing that comes through persecution. **Those who suffer persecution will be rewarded greatly in heaven.** Our temporary light affliction is nothing compared to the eternal reward God has purposed for us in His Kingdom. Ps. 16:1; 63:3, Matt. 5:10-12; 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. 10:34-35; 11:24-25; 1 Pet. 4:13-16; James 1:2-3; Phil. 3:7-8

11. 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

God's Purposes in Times of Persecution

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.

In His Sovereignty, God has established plans for each person's life, to give them a future and a hope. He is not taken by surprise by suffering and persecution. 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. Some of the items below were taken from their book.

1. God works in the midst of persecution. Believers through the ages have understood there is a divine purpose in persecution. Through the ages, Christians have shown their purest faith and greatest courage in times of persecution for His sake. God works through tragic circumstances to accomplish His purposes. The Church grows in times of persecution. Christians are purified. Believers report that when persecution comes, their love for other believers grows, and trust between Christians increases as they learn to depend upon one another for their very survival. Jesus taught His followers to count persecution as a blessing. Matt 5:10-12; 1 Pet. 4: 14-16

2. Suffering refines His people and deepens their faith and holiness. Dr. Mark Noll, Christian historian in speaking of the Communist persecution that sought to eliminate Christianity, noted "the faith survived because traditional Christian words were refined, under deadly pressure, into a living reality of extraordinary purity." Heb. 4:15; 5:8; 12:9-11; 1 Pet. 1:7

3. Through suffering and persecution, the Church becomes cleansed of all remnants of self-reliance and entanglement with the world. 2 Cor. 1:8-9, 12:9-10; Rom. 5:3-4; 1 Pet. 1:21; 4:19

4. **Suffering is a primary means of building compassion in His servants**, by which they can comfort and minister to others. Job's friends came to comfort Job but their words only brought him more pain and confusion because they did not understand God's ways or purposes in Job's trial. Job 2:11; 21:34; Col. 1:4-5; 2 Cor. 1:3-7
5. **Through suffering God enlarges the capacity of the saints to love and recognize His glory** in this age and in the one to come. 1 Cor. 4:13; 2 Cor. 6:1-13
6. **Believers grow in boldness when they witness others being persecuted for their faith.** Phil. 1:12-14
7. **Our willingness to suffer for the sake of Christ reveals His immense worth to unbelievers.** Our willingness to suffer for the sake of Christ may result in the salvation of our persecutors as they see our faith. 2 Cor. 1:5-6
8. **Persecution and suffering raises up and repositions believers to go into new areas of mission.** There is a saying that the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church. Acts 8:1-4; 11:19-21
9. **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 21:12-14; Mark 13:9

How to Pray for the Persecuted Church:

Meditate on the verses and pray as the LORD leads. Do not lean on your own understanding, but ask Him to give you His heart for those who are suffering. Persecuted Christians often do not ask for their persecution to stop but rather that they will keep God's Word and not deny His name.

1. **Pray that God will show His glory in times of persecution and martyrdom.**
2. **That those persecuted will be a Witness to the world of the love and character of Jesus.**
 - ♥ Pray that the Gospel will be advanced. Pray that the efforts to silence the good news of the Gospel will not succeed, but instead that the Gospel will be proclaimed with even more power than ever. Acts 15:57-58
 - ♥ Pray that their persecutors will see the courage and love of those they persecute, so that they will themselves be saved. Acts 16:25; 1 Cor. 4:9-13 (KJV)
3. **Pray for the fruit of the Spirit to be displayed in the face of persecution.** Ask the Holy Spirit to fill the hearts and lives of those being persecuted so He can minister to them in comfort and encouragement. Pray for the following qualities of godly character to be formed in those who are persecuted:
 - ♥ **Love for their persecutors and those imprisoned with them.** Protect them from being offended or developing a root of bitterness. John 15:13; 1 Cor. 13:4, 6-7, 13; 2 Peter 1:5-8; Heb. 12:15

- ♥ **Joy in the midst of persecution:** Pray for a spirit of joy in the midst of affliction. 2 Cor. 7:4, Neh. 8:10; Phil. 3:1; James 1:2-4
- ♥ **Peace:** To keep from being overwhelmed by their circumstances (peace of mind and encouragement) Heb. 10:32-36; 2 Tim.2: 3,9-10 That they would not be dismayed. John 14:27; 16:33; Peter 4:7; 1 Pet. 5:10; Isa. 28:16
- ♥ **Patience:** Pray for **steadfast endurance** in the face of suffering. Heb. 10:32-36; 2 Tim. 2:3:9—10; Isa. 49:23
- ♥ **Goodness:** That the godly character of goodness would be manifest in all their actions. That God would grant a bountiful propensity to will and do what is good and an intrinsic kindness that produces generosity and deep-seated love for those who hate us. Rom. 15:14
- ♥ **Faith:** 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; 12:4-5; Rom. 14:4; 2 Cor 4:8-18; James 5:10-11
- ♥ **Gentleness:** That believers will reveal the character of Christ, who remained gentle when He was persecuted. 1 Pet. 2:23; Eccles. 10:4
- ♥ **Self-control:** Clear minded and self-controlled so they will be able to pray in time of opposition. Pray that believers will be content to let their vindication come from God in His way and His time. Isa. 54:17; 1 Peter 4:7; 1 Pet. 5:10
- ♥ **Boldness:** Pray for God to give the believer the words to speak and the courage to speak them boldly. Pray that adversity would strengthen their faith and give boldness to speak: Acts 4:24-30; Eph. 6:18-21; Phil.1:12-14 Col. 4:3-4; 2 Chr. 18:13; Acts 4:13.
- ♥ **Not be ashamed of the gospel.** 2 Tim. 1:8; Rom. 1:16
- ♥ **Overcome all fear of man.** Prov 28:1; Ps 3:6; Ps. 27:3; Jer 1:17
- ♥ **Put on whole armor of God:** Eph. 6:10-20
- ♥ **Trust:** To be able to put all their trust and reliance on the Lord **2 Tim.** 1:12; Ps. 16:8; Isa. 30:15 [The Hebrew word for “trust” is “betach” (Strong’s # 983/985) This word contains the sense of confidence, safety and security that comes from having a perfect place of refuge. With betach trust, one has an assurance to act with boldness and without care for safety. It comes from the prim. Root which means to hie for refuge, fig. to trust, be confident, be bold, secure, make to hope, make to trust, to attach oneself, to confide in, to feel safe, rely on. The idea is firmness, solidity, sense of well-being, knowing the rug won’t be pulled out from under you. Strong contrast with relying on other type of security, confident anticipation, not a constant anxiety. We can truly relax when know who is in control Ps., 4:8; Lev. 25:18,19.

♥ **Hope:** Romans 5:5; Job 5:15-16; Job 42:2, Jer.29:11; Heb. 6:19-20; Rom. 15:13

4. That those who are persecuted will be victorious. 1 Cor. 15:57-58

♥ **That they may complete the work for which they have been sent:** 2 Tim. 4:5-7

♥ **That they would not fall away in time of adversity.** Courage not to deny His name and not to compromise on basic truths. 1 Cor. 16: 13; 2 Cor 4:8-18; James 5:10-11; Rom. 8: 35-39

5. Pray for freedom of all fear of man.

♥ That believers will choose to obey God rather than men.

♥ We must not be swayed by the opinions or reactions of the world. We must preach the Good News with sensitivity and love, but not silenced by those who are offended by the Cross. Gal. 5:10-11; 1 Peter 2:7-8; Acts 17:6-7

♥ Stand against compromise that inevitably leads to more compromise until no principles are sacred. Life is more fulfilling and faith more meaningful when lived solely by principles of God's Word. No compromise is possible regarding God's truth regarding the Lordship of Jesus OR the commission to be His Witnesses. It is far healthier to trust His promises, channeling intellect and energies to maintaining one's fidelity to Christ, even when persecuted, living for God's glory is always better than living for one's convenience.

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

♥ For missionaries to go forth as witnesses, who would not love their own lives, even unto death Rev. 12:11

7. Pray for government and religious leaders of nations which engage in persecution. 1 Timothy 2:14 Use the conversion of Paul as a strategy to pray for leaders: 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.

8. Ask the Lord to minister to the Church in their time of need: Eph. 3:14-21; 2 Cor. 1:3-11

9. Favor: Pray for favor with those in power, as seen in the lives of Daniel, Joseph. Acts 24:23; 27:3

10. Encouragement: Psa. 73:28 (draw nigh unto God)

♥ Protection from isolation & depression (vulnerability to mental attacks - e.g. John the Baptist) or feelings of abandonment.

♥ That God will send those to minister to them: Send believers to be a strength and support: i.e. Timothy's support of Paul 1 Cor. 4:17; Col. 4:8; 1 Thes. 3:2; 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.

- ♥ Pray for imprisoned Christians to be comforted by the Holy Spirit and to know that they have not been forgotten. Matthew 6:9-13; Heb. 13:3

11. Fellowship:

- ♥ Protection of fellowship/companionship, that believers would not forsake gathering together Heb.10:25
- ♥ Pray that Persecuted Christians in restricted areas will support each other and band together. 1 Peter 4:7-11

12. Access to the Word and sound teaching to sustain them.

- ♥ Where there is persecution, the enemy tries to cut them off from the word. Pray that they would have the Word to sustain them: 2 Tim. 4:13; Isa. 66:2; John 15:7
- ♥ Pray for the provision of Bibles: Psalm 119:11,105-112; Hosea 4:6

13. Wall of protection:

- ♥ The Lord will strengthen and protect them from the evil one. 2 Thess. 3:3; Zech. 2:5
- ♥ 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

14. Physical Needs:

- ♥ Pray for Christians who have lost homes, farms, food, water and income, that God will meet their every need and ease their anxiety. Matthew 6:32-34; 1 Cor. 6:10; Matt. 6:8,32
- ♥ *Healing:* Pray for Christians who are beaten and tortured, that they may be healed and forgive their tormentors. Acts 7:60

“O loving Christ, draw me, a weakling, after Yourself; for if You do not draw me, I cannot follow You. Give me a brave spirit that I may be ready and alert. If the flesh is weak, may Your grace go before me, come alongside me, and follow me; for without You I cannot do anything, and especially for Your sake I cannot go to a cruel death. Grant me a ready spirit, a fearless heart, a right faith, a firm hope, and a perfect love, that for Your sake I may lay down my life with patience and joy.”

John Huss as he lay in chains in prison before being burned at the stake, Bohemia 1415