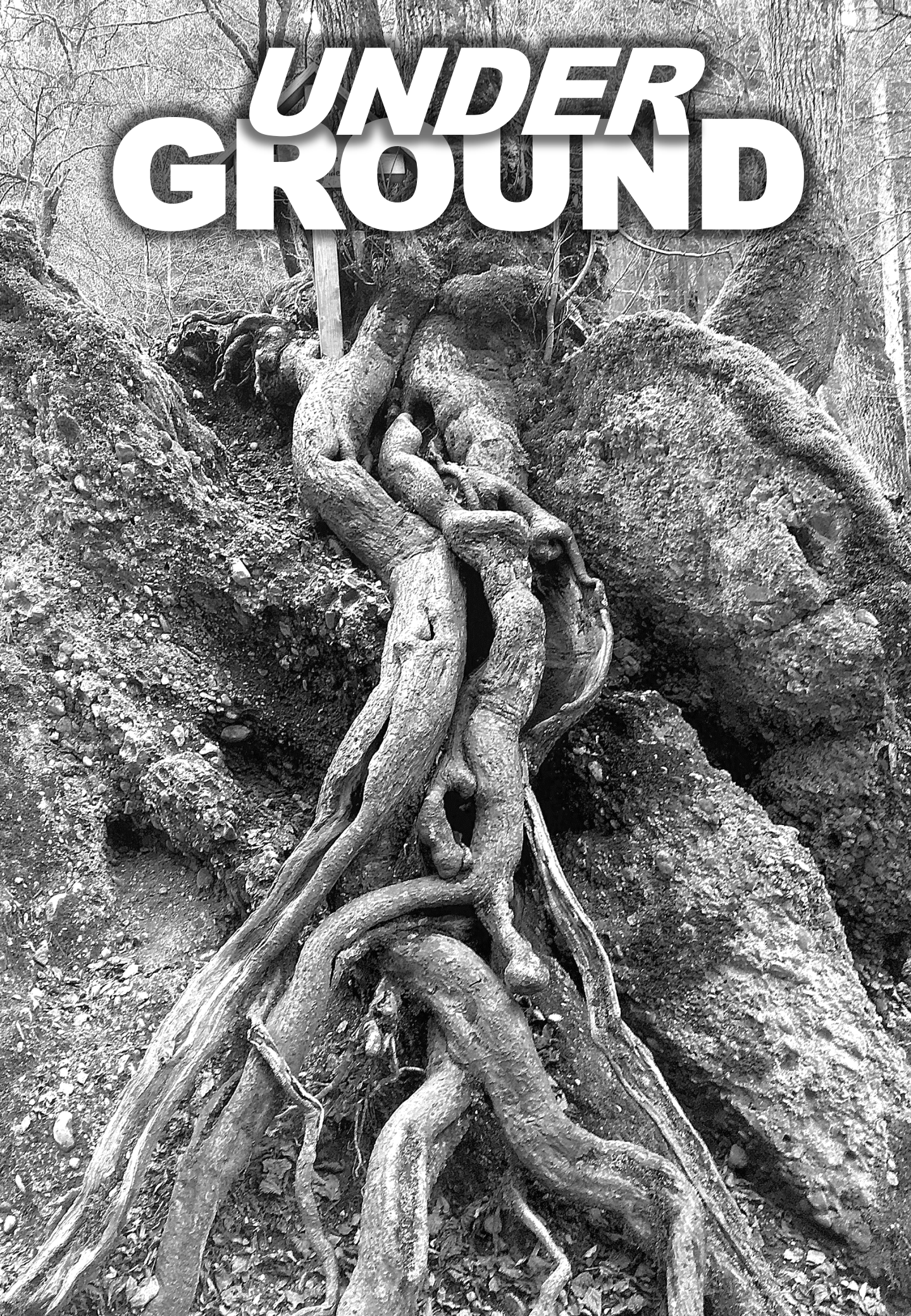


UNDER **GROUND**



**The purpose of this book is to call our consciousness
to the reality of persecution and martyrdom in the 21st century.**

REVELATION 12:11

And they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb
and by the word of their testimony,
for they loved not their lives even unto death.



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UNDERGROUND FORESTS

Buried in the soil beneath the earth are underground forests of another kingdom of life, one that's inextricably connected with what grows above the ground.

In the same way there exists an underground church in regions where Christians are persecuted, inextricably connected to the body of Christ and of immeasurable value to the church in freedom

From 'One Earth'¹:

Forests are living examples of how everything on earth is connected. From the tiniest insect to the largest forest, and everything in between, each living being and natural system contributes to the health of another. When an ecosystem is in balance, all the animals and plants and communities that depend on each other can thrive.

However, earth's power doesn't just exist above ground. Just beneath the surface of what may appear to be a barren landscape is an immense underground forest with all the potential to regenerate and sustain a booming ecosystem.

In most drought-prone areas of the tropical world exist whole **"UNDERGROUND FORESTS"** of tree roots that have taken hold in the continuous, generations-long farming cycle: trees and plants cut, burned, or covered with soil in order to plant new crops. Despite the repeated above-ground destruction, these almost invisible underground forests have stayed alive.

All they need is a chance to grow.

Farmers who regenerate soils rather than merely planting new crops on top of old ones have a more fertile foundation from which to grow new plants and sustain farmed animals.

They're able to increase the amount and nutritional value of food available to their families and increase their biomass production and drought-resistance. At the same time, they will be sequestering more carbon in the healthier soil as well as in the newly flourishing trees.

But the benefits extend far beyond individual farms. As habitats begin to regenerate, bigger and healthier crops and better nourished animals and their products can be sold for more income, as can byproducts such as hay, feed, firewood, and timber.

Applied to 'One Church':

Churches are living examples of how Christians on earth are connected. From the smallest fellowship in Bhutan to the largest megachurch in America, and everything in between, each believer and community contributes to the health of another. When a Church is in balance, all the believers and activities and communities that depend on each other can thrive.

However, the Churches' power doesn't just exist where it is visible. Just beneath the surface of what may appear to be an unreached landscape is a strong underground church with all the potential to regenerate and sustain a booming revival.

In most closed countries in the world exist whole **"UNDERGROUND CHURCHES"** of faithful believers that have taken hold in the continuous, generations-long faith cycle: persecution, martyrdom, churches closed or destroyed in order to eradicate the witness of Christ. Despite the repeated above-ground destruction, these almost invisible underground Churches have stayed alive.

All they need is a chance to grow.

Christian leaders who regenerate the legacy of the early church rather than merely planting new churches where others already exist have a more solid foundation from which to grow new disciples and sustain church growth. They're able to increase the amount and nutritional value of spiritual food available to their members and increase their influence and remain faithful in times of hardship. At the same time, they will be sequestering more life in the church and produce deep-rooted disciples

But the benefits extend far beyond individual churches. As places of worship begin to regenerate, transformed and healthier theologies and better disciplined believers and their activities will be received by more, as will be the consequences of being light and salt in communities.

¹ <https://www.oneearth.org/tapping-into-underground-forests/>

WHO WERE THEY?

I recently met with a young pastor after preaching at his church and I was eager to get to know him a little bit better. Let's simply call him Alan.

Alan was a pleasant young man, well versed in scripture with a solid Biblical foundation. He was wise beyond his years and had a healthy and balanced understanding of theology. Alan was a compassionate leader with a great future ahead of him. But something was lacking, and I couldn't put my finger on it.

Alan interrupted my thoughts. *"Mike, who influenced you the most as a young believer?"* he asked.

I didn't have to think too long. For the past five decades everything I hold dear, and every fibre of my faith, have been shaped by those within the body of Christ who suffer the consequences of what we confess - those who share the cross of Christ through persecution and martyrdom.

"Well" I answered "some of the first people that transformed my way of thinking about faith were people like Richard Wurmbrand, Corrie ten Boom and Brother Andrew"

Alan's response surprised me. *"Who were they?"*

I gasped: *"You've never heard of them?"* I could hardly believe my ears.

"Tortured for Christ, The hiding place, God's smuggler? You've really never heard of them?" I paused; *"What about Irlna Ratushinskaya, Mikhael Korev and Alexander Ogorodnikov from the old USSR, or Shabaz Bhatti and Asia Bibi from Pakistan? Have you at least followed the recent martyrdom of Bishop Haik, Rev Tateos and Rev Dibaj in Iran?"* I waited hopefully.

"Who are they?" he repeated his question

And then it struck me. This was what I missed. We have a young generation of sincere and passionate Christ followers, well equipped with biblical insight, but with little knowledge of our heroes of faith, no recognition of our modern-day martyrs and no understanding of the spiritual significance of persecution and martyrdom

The quote by Tertullian, "The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church," encapsulates the profound significance and transformative power of martyrdom within the context of Christianity. It suggests that the sacrifice and sufferings endured by martyrs serve as a catalyst for the growth and expansion of the church. The reality of modern-day Christianity is that we have imparted knowledge to a new generation of leaders without empowering them with the "seed of martyrdom". We have neglected to bring the lessons from **THE UNDERGROUND** to the surface and teach it to our youth. The fact that the Church in freedom has lost the opportunity to sow seeds of martyrdom might become one of the greatest challenges in modern-day Christianity. All other challenges; false teachings, secularism, prosperity, heresy – all bear the marks of a faith not being protected by the threat of death through martyrdom. Our survival depends on **THE UNDERGROUND** – and so does our revival.



Eight Christians killed for their faith in Iran¹

¹<https://articleeighteen.com/news/4902/#~:text=Eight%20Christians%20killed%20for%20their%20faith%20in%20Iran,Bishop%20Haik%20Hovsepian-Mehr%2C%20Rev%20Tateos%20Michaelian%20and%20Rev%E2%80%A6>



MARTYR

The word **MARTYR** refers to a person who sacrifices and surrenders his or her life to the point of death for the sake of a deep-rooted personal faith in God and a sacrificial love in that relationship.

The words 'witness' and 'martyr' in the Bible are the same words and are related to the idea of **testifying to the truth of the gospel, sometimes with personal suffering or death**. The Greek word for witness is "martyrs", which later became the ecclesiastical term for martyr. Jesus commissioned his church to be his witnesses, or martyrs, to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8)

By definition, martyrdom does not only require the *DEATH* of a committed believer but *A LIFE* of a devoted follower. It is an intentional act of dethroning one self and enthroning Jesus Christ.

The principle of martyrdom is that only by finding something worth dying for, will we find something worth living for. It's not until we die to self that we truly come alive. The more we give to God, the more we have and the more we become. It's only in losing our lives that we will really find them.

These are the marks of a consecrated martyr

PHILIPPIANS 1:21

For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.



St. Ignatius of Antioch, a first-century bishop, in his anticipation to be fed to wild beasts by the Emperor Commodus, wrote the following:

"To make bread the wheat must be ground, and to make wine the grapes must be crushed, so I want my members to be broken and ground by the beasts' teeth to become a sacrifice to God."

Martyrdom is an eucharistic act, Ignatius tells us.¹ But this was not a theology taught in a seminary, it was a principle caught by those who followed him as he was chained and on his way to martyrdom. Many Christians came out and greeted him on the way. As Christian encouragements arrived during his death march, Ignatius told well-wishers not to pray for him because he embraced dying for the Lord:

"Nearness to the sword is nearness to God; to be among the wild beasts is to be in the arms of God; only let it be in the name of Jesus Christ. I endure all things that I may suffer with Him since He who became perfect man strengthens me."

1 <https://www.americamagazine.org/issue/modern-martyrs>



34 AD — 313 AD

STONING

When Stephen was stoned, his hands was most probably tied behind his back and he was wrapped with 3 pieces of shroud from head to toe.

A hole was dug, then Stephen was placed in the hole and buried up to his waist. This incapacitated Stephen from protecting himself from stones being thrown at him.

The sentencing judge then threw the first stone (about the size of a tangerine) - not too big to kill with one blow but also no too small to not cause severe pain and bodily damage.

Afterwards, everyone participated and started throwing stones at Stephen until he was declared dead by a young man called Saul.

Acts 7:60-

In 34 AD Stephen became the first martyr of the Christian faith. His defence of his faith before the rabbinic court enraged his Jewish audience, and he was taken out of the city and stoned to death. His final words, a prayer of forgiveness for his attackers (Acts 7:60), echoed those of Jesus on the cross (Luke 23:34).

For those witnessing this purest expression of obedience, sacrifice and commitment, a foundation was laid that would shape Christianity for millenniums to come. It would reach beyond a theology of a crucified Christ and become the substance of a crucified church.

The threat of death by martyrdom, as displayed by Stephen, became the protection of the early church from insincere professions.

This reality of persecution did however not stop the early church from exponential growth, but it did deter those with selfish intentions to enrol. Martyrdom significantly purified motives and cemented convictions.

But everything changed in 313 CE

As persecution of Christians by the Roman Empire Constantine came formally to an end in the year 313, faith embarked on a new unexplored road of relative freedom and status. The Church now had something to lose and something to prove. In 313 AD, Constantine (c. 272-337) legalized Christianity and it became the official religion of the Roman Empire in 380 AD. This new platform allowed for believers to integrate into a new social order where Christianity was not only accepted but now had to be defended. The Church now increasingly started serving from the top down and slowly lost its free and alternative vantage point. It now enjoyed the protection of the emperor but lost its safeguard of spiritual sincerity. As the position of the Church changed, so the values changed as well. The theology of Christ was still in place, but the expression of faith took a change for the worse.

Martyrdom was now replaced with status; sacrifice by blessing and self-denial by self-enrichment

The Church now had an outward appearance of freedom but in their endeavours to preserve what they have gained; they unknowingly sacrificed the essence of what they preached.

Power and freedom inevitably started to corrupt that which identified those who laid the foundations of the church.

Richard Rohr describes it as follows:

Before 313, the church was on the bottom of society, which is the privileged vantage point for understanding the liberating power of Gospel for both the individual and for society. Within the space of a few decades, the church moved from the bottom to the top, literally from the catacombs to the basilicas. The Roman basilicas were large buildings for court and other public assembly, and they became Christian worship spaces.



313 AD — 2024 AD

Christianity, being primarily a way of life for the early church, and ultimately a road to death as well, has now progressively transformed into a doctrinal system, a cryptic belief, and simply a promise of eternal salvation. The power of persecution and the mystery of martyrdom was replaced by the new established religion of the empire. Believers now started reading the Gospel from the position of maintaining control and social order instead of experiencing the profound power of powerlessness that Jesus revealed.

In a sense, Christianity almost became a different religion. Slowly and systematically the church lost the essence of what it meant to display the cross of Christ through martyrdom. By embracing a cross-less faith, the message of a crucified Christ became an intriguing yet less experiential faith.

This newfound expression of faith not only transformed the theology of martyrdom but also transformed the response of the church in freedom to persecution as well. Sadly, this neglect of solidarity with those who are persecuted for our faith could propel the church living in freedom into a disastrous future. Only those who suffer the threat of martyrdom can offer a solution.

For the early church persecution belonged to all. If one member suffered, everybody suffered¹. No one was exempt and no one was excluded. Every believer shared the mutual responsibility of suffering together. Today we have created theological alternatives for martyrdom that can be placed on our theological bookshelves and only be displayed and explored when we feel like it.

“The persecuted Church” might be a good descriptive term for those who are persecuted for our faith, but it is not a biblical concept. This creates a sense of dualism - “they” and “us”. The bible teaches differently. There is only ONE church, and when one member of that church suffers, we all suffer together (1 Corinthians 12:26.) We are **ALL** the persecuted Church even though only some members experience the pain of persecution. The correct reference should be: *“That part of the body that is in pain”*. This allows ALL to feel the pain and share the suffering and the joy together.

Theologian Soong-Chan Rah argues in his book, ***PROPHETIC LAMENT: A CALL FOR JUSTICE IN TROUBLED TIMES***, that the American (Western) Christian worship tradition demonstrates a heavy emphasis on celebration because many Western Christians and churches are well-off. Put another way, Christians who are supported by the majority culture (as opposed to being persecuted as a minority) tend to interpret Christianity through a lens of prosperity and praise. He writes, *“Christian communities arising from celebration do not want their lives changed, because their lives are in a good place. These celebrants want life to stay the way it is because they are comfortable.”*

The ultimate reality is that it will not be opposition, persecution or martyrdom that will stop the advance of the gospel but a triumphal theology, celebrating privilege (rooted in a praise-only narrative), perpetuated by the absence of sacrifice. The overemphasising of freedoms, rights and liberties could be the final nail in the coffin for a faith built on the foundation of mutual cross-bearing. Failing to recognise our modern-day heroes of faith could have catastrophic spiritual consequences.

1 Corinthians 12:26

If one part (of the body) suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it.

Hebrews 13:3

Continue to remember those in prison as if you were together with them in prison, and those who are mistreated as if you yourselves were suffering.



Sadly, and it pains me to say this, the lack of solidarity with those bearing the pain of persecution and the neglect of not 'suffering together' is more evident in Evangelical and Charismatic circles than in the Orthodox faith. Orthodox Christianity, like the Coptic Church in Egypt, the Assyrian Church in Syria, the Orthodox Church in Russia and the Catholic church in Rome still revere their saints that lived lives of complete self-sacrifice, up to the point of embracing death as a final witness.

In the Orthodox Church the worship (latreia) given to God is completely different from the honour (tim) of love (agape) and respect, or even veneration (proskynesis), "paid to all those endowed with some dignity" The Orthodox honour the saints to express their love and gratitude to God, who has "perfected" the saints.¹

This has a strong biblical foundation. So great was the esteem in which the Apostles, prophets, and martyrs were held in the early Church, that many writings appeared describing their spiritual achievements, love and devotion to God.

Throughout early Christianity, Christians customarily met in the places where the martyrs had died, to build churches in their honour, venerate their relics and memory, and present their example for imitation by others. Interesting information on this subject derives from the Martyrdom of St. Polycarp (ch. 17-18), according to which the early Christians reverently collected the remains of the saints and honoured them "more than precious stones." They also met on the day of their death to commemorate "their new birthday, the day they entered into their new life, in Heaven." To this day the Orthodox have maintained the liturgical custom of meeting on the day of the saint's death, of building churches honouring their names, and of paying special respect to their relics and icons.

A MODERN-DAY EXAMPLE of this practice is found in Egypt where the Coptic Church built a church in remembrance of the 21 Christian martyrs that were beheaded in Libya on 15 February 2015.²

Exactly three years after the beheading of 21 Christians on a Libyan beach, a new church in the Egyptian village of Al-Aour has been dedicated in their memory.

As Bishop Bevnoutious anointed the altar, inscribed with the names of all 21 of the young Christian martyrs on its sides, he said: *"Today we remember our martyrs who were killed in Libya three years ago. Knives were held to their throats to deny their faith after 40 days of being kidnapped, insulted, and threatened. But like the martyrs of every era in the history of our church, they held on to Christ. They are an example for us to hold on to our faith and to Christ regardless of circumstances."*



¹ <https://www.goarch.org/-/the-saints-of-the-orthodox-church>

² <https://www.thetablet.co.uk/blogs/1/1139/new-church-dedicated-in-egypt-to-the-21-christian-martyrs>



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A devotion related to the topic



Discussion groups



Jesus looked at His followers and said (Matthew 5:10-12) *"Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me... (13) You are the salt of the earth..."*.

Think about this. The blessing of being persecuted because of righteousness sake, is directly related to the calling to BE the salt of the earth. This is quite liberating to say the least.

Persecution for Christians is a promise - it's not a maybe, it's a surely. But it comes with the blessing that it will produce flavour. It is not a curse that will consume us. When the disciples heard the call to be salt, they understood that seasoning and flavour is only produced when salt is poured out selflessly and scattered mercilessly. Jesus just finished His dialogue about suffering, slander and sacrifice and He then looked at them, just like He looks at us today, and basically said *"This is YOU. Like me you will be insulted, persecuted, slandered, falsely accused and mocked – Now go! Like salt poured out for flavour, scattered all over, go and transform your communities for the sake of the Kingdom. Live a life to be forgotten so that Christ can be remembered"*.

Christians can only produce flavour once it is scattered. Remember this: people don't enjoy salt. They enjoy what is salted. We are the salt of the earth. We do not exist for ourselves. Salt is a useless commodity if it remains in a container. It still has flavour in itself but it does not produce any flavour outside the container. By being scattered we find the reason and the purpose of the crosses we carry and the Christ we display

CHAPTER 1

OVERVIEW

Exploring the evidence of Christian persecution today



OVERVIEW

PERSECUTION TODAY



1 North Korea	11 India	21 Laos	31 Oman	41 DRC
2 Somalia	12 Syria	22 Cuba	32 Ethiopia	42 Indonesia
3 Libya	13 Saudi Arabia	23 Mauritania	33 Tunisia	43 Cameroon
4 Eritrea	14 Mali	24 Morocco	34 Colombia	44 Brunei
5 Yemen	15 Algeria	25 Uzbekistan	35 Vietnam	45 Comoros
6 Nigeria	16 Iraq	26 Bangladesh	36 Bhutan	46 Tajikistan
7 Pakistan	17 Myanmar	27 Niger	37 Mexico	47 Kazakhstan
8 Sudan	18 Maldives	28 CAR	38 Egypt	48 Jordan
9 Iran	19 China	29 Turkmenistan	39 Mozambique	49 Malaysia
10 Afghanistan	20 Burkina Faso	30 Nicaragua	40 Qatar	50 Turkey

- Christians remain the most persecuted religious group in the world.
- Christians experience persecution, opposition and harassment in **79 out of 198** countries in the world.
- Christians experience concentrated harassment in the Middle East-North Africa in **19 out of the 20** countries in the region.
- In sub-Saharan Africa, Christians face harassment in two-thirds of countries (**67 percent**).
- Around the world, more than **360 million** Christians live in the top 25 most restricted countries for the Gospel where they experience high levels of persecution.
- **49.9%** of all people live in the 25 countries most closed to the Gospel.
- This means that **half of the world** do not have free access to the Gospel
- **14.8%** of all Christians in the world live in these 25 countries. That's **1 in 7** believers, worldwide, who faces persecution as part of their normal Christian faith.

"The more like Christ you are the more the world will treat you like they treated Christ. Maybe you don't get much persecution because there's not much similarity"
John MacArthur



OVERVIEW

GLOBAL STATISTICS

1 Corinthians 12:26

*If one part suffers, every part **suffers with it**; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it.*



Today, every day, on average...

(these are actual reported cases, in reality the numbers will be much higher)

- **13** Christians are killed **because of their faith**.
- **40** churches or Christian buildings are attacked: a seven-fold increase from last year's list.
- **117** Christians are reported to be attacked, unjustly arrested or imprisoned.
- More than **360 million** Christians (one in seven) face high levels of persecution
- There was a **60%** increase in the number of Christians killed.
- More than **9 out of 10 martyrs** were from Africa.
- **82%** martyrs are from Nigeria.

COMPASSION

The Latin root for the word *compassion* is **pati**, which means to *suffer*, and the prefix **com-** means *with*. Compassion, originating from **compati**, literally means to **suffer together with**.

This also explains the difference between **sympathy** and **compassion** and how we can be confronted with the numbers of people suffering without feeling the anguish of those who suffer.

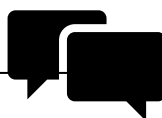
Sympathy and pity are feelings **for** someone. Compassion is feeling **with** someone. Pity results in feelings. Compassion results in action. And this is why the statistics will remain ineffective unless we **suffer with** them.

God has the ability to have compassion **with** the multitudes. When God saw the lostness of His creation and the brokenness of those in it, He didn't just feel a sense of pity or sympathy - He had compassion. God is able to identify with statistics and numbers to the extent that He feels the sorrow, hardship and pain of every individual. And from His character of compassion, heaven was moved into action. When we fully understand the heart of God, we too need to be moved with compassion

DISCUSSION GROUPS

Before you move on, and without looking at the previous page, can you name the top ten nations where Christians are persecuted.

Now remember them and pray for them





OVERVIEW

GLOBAL STATISTICS

*1Corinthians 12:26 If one part suffers, every part **suffers with it**; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it.*

Where Christians Face the Most **PERSECUTION**

- 1 North Korea
- 2 Somalia
- 3 Libya
- 4 Eritrea
- 5 Yemen
- 6 Nigeria
- 7 Pakistan
- 8 Sudan
- 9 Iran
- 10 Afghanistan

Where Christians Face the Most **KILLINGS:**

1. Nigeria
2. DRC
3. India
4. Uganda
5. Myanmar
6. Burkina Faso
7. Cameroon
8. CAR
9. Colombia
10. Ethiopia

Where Churches were **ATTACKED** Most:

1. China:
2. India
3. Nigeria
4. Nicaragua
5. Ethiopia
6. Rwanda
7. Sudan
8. Burkina Faso
9. Niger
10. Angola

Of the top 50 nations:

19 are in Africa

(6 in North Africa),
14 are in Asia,
10 are in the Middle East,
5 are in Central Asia, and
2 are in Latin America.

Of the top 50 nations:

34 have Islam as a main religion,

10 have Christianity.

4 have Buddhism,
2 have Hinduism,
1 has atheism,
1 has agnosticism

Here are some of the top persecutors of Christians worldwide.

1. ISIS

2. Al-Qaeda
3. Kim Jong-un
5. Al-Shabaab
6. Boko Haram
7. Militant Fulani Herdsmen
8. Radical Islam
9. Drug Cartels
10. The Chinese Communist Party



DISCUSSION GROUPS

Does your country or a neighbouring country appear in the top 50 list? Can you identify and name some of the restrictions or opposition you face when sharing the Gospel?



OVERVIEW

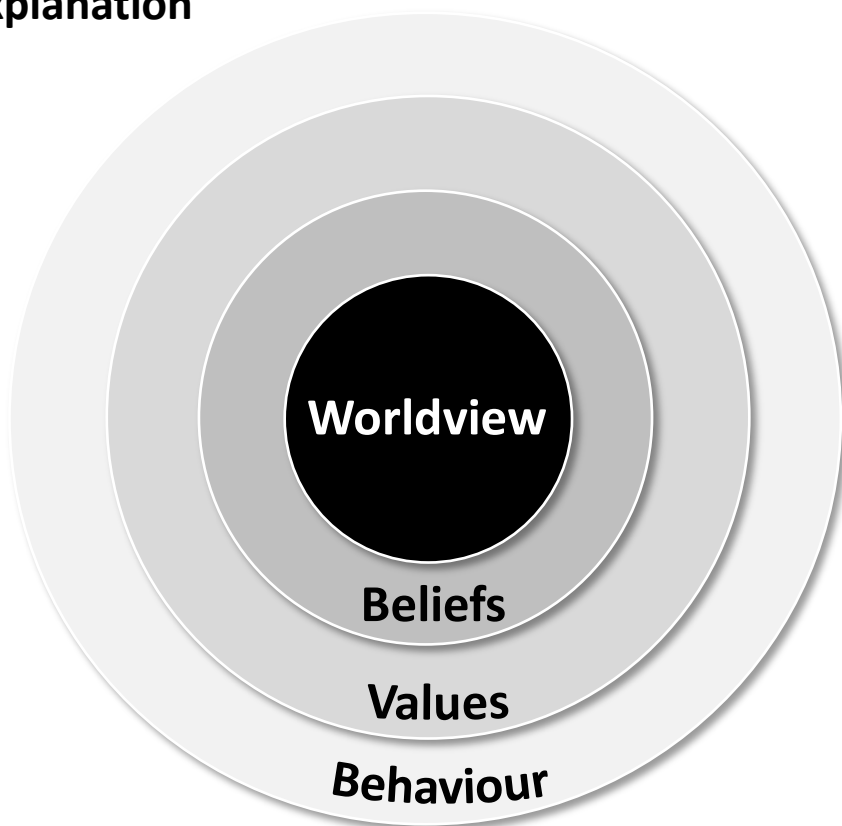
THREE WORLDVIEWS

Before we understand the different definitions of persecution and the Biblical response to persecution, we first need to understand the different glasses that we wear when we encounter persecution. This is called our “Cultural Worldviews” and form the platform for our beliefs, values and ultimately our behaviour. This is a critical component in understanding persecution from a cultural perspective.

Barney’s Four-Layer Explanation

G Linwood Barney (1937) introduced the concept of four layers of understanding as we move into the heart of analysing another culture.

When we first consider a culture we are initially impacted with people’s behaviour. Once we work through this, we are faced with their values and next the underlying beliefs that underlie these values. At the very heart of Barney’s four layer model is worldview, as illustrated in the diagram right. However, it is at this level, the very heart of worldview, that sociologists have struggled to explain what worldview is. As a result a number of different scholars have presented various suggestions.



Roland Muller, in his book *Honour and Shame: Unlocking the Door*, gives an eye-opening explanation of how worldviews determine cultural behaviour and ultimately translate into our understanding of the gospel and our understanding of persecution

Muller explains that all cultures are rooted in worldviews, and he suggests that there are “three basic planes on which worldviews function”, creating extremes and tensions. These three core worldviews are: defined as:

guilt and innocence

shame and honour

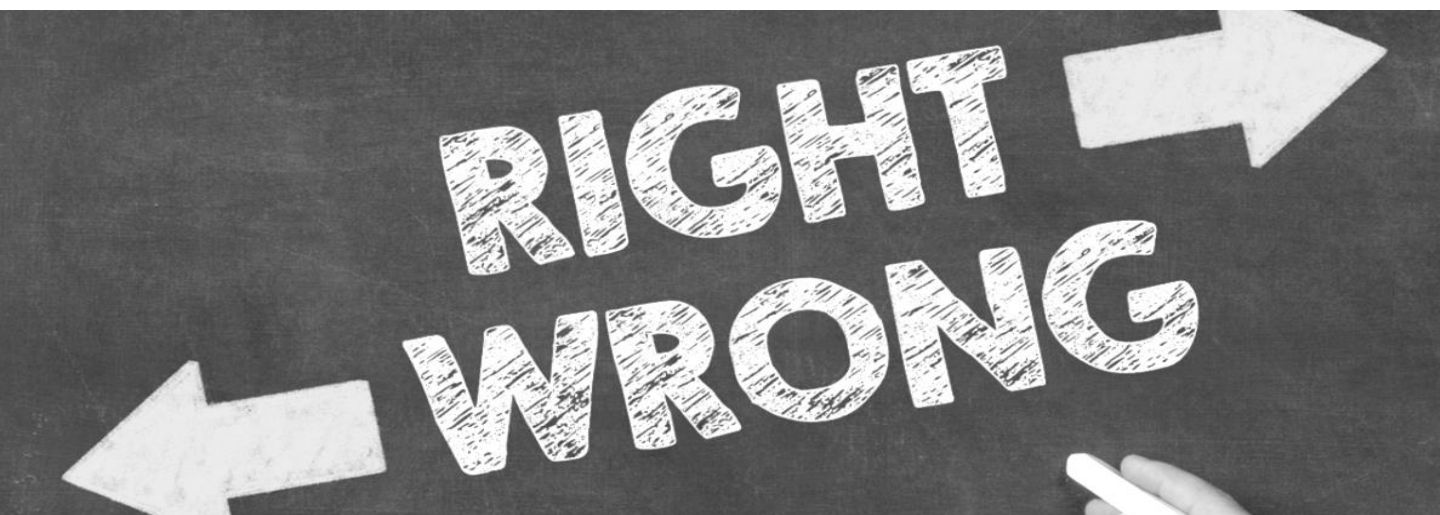
fear and power.

Muller explains that the influence of sin in all humankind brings about one of three predominant emotional responses – guilt, shame or fear – and it is these emotional reactions that determine our cultural behaviour. All cultures experience all three world views at the same time but there is always a dominant worldview that shapes our understanding and therefore our responses to challenges.



OVERVIEW

THREE WORLDVIEWS



WORLDVIEW 1

Guilt and innocence

In the Bible we find three specific ways that sin affected Adam and Eve in the garden. These three are found in Genesis chapter three. In verse seven, the scriptures tells us that Adam and Eve “knew” that they had sinned. This knowledge of sin is nothing other than our conscience speaking or the feeling of guilt.

When Adam and Eve sinned, they felt the sting of a guilty conscience. For the first time they experienced knowing right from wrong through their conscience. This knowledge of good and evil (right and wrong) is common to us today and especially for most western evangelical Christians. Every western book on Christian theology examines man’s guilt, which originated in the Garden of Eden. Guilt is then traced through the Bible, as God addresses guilt in the Old and New Testaments. Theologians are quick to explain things like the meaning of the scapegoat in Leviticus, the guilt offerings, and the justification of our sins on the cross by Jesus.

Adam and Eve, when confronted with the knowledge of their sin, knew the pull of guilt on their consciences. This typifies much of today’s Western culture, which is driven by the concepts of guilt and innocence, or more simply put: **right and wrong**.

In Romans, Paul famously presents the Gospel in the courtroom terms of guilt and forgiveness. This has defined the Gospel in Western minds ever since. Our Western society is dominated by a worldview of ‘right and wrong’, and everything in life is dominated by this worldview, even persecution and the blessing it produces.

The dominant factor when contemplating persecution from a western perspective is therefore that “it is wrong” and it needs to stop. This worldview presents two challenges to the church:

1. Firstly, western believers find it difficult to see a blessing in persecution because it is perceived as wrong and unjust. God’s purposes through hardships therefore becomes an obstacle to spiritual maturity and instead of embracing this blessing, Christians will question Gods goodness.
2. Secondly. Even though persecution is still God’s design to display the cross to the ends of the earth, Western Christians still see it as wrong and would therefore try to fight it, avoid it or escape it. This world view will therefore misinterpret Gods sovereign plan for the Gospel to be proclaimed to the ends of the earth because of an unbiblical worldview that persecution is wrong.



OVERVIEW

THREE WORLDVIEWS



WORLDVIEW 2

Honour and shame

Guilt was not the only influence of sin in the Garden of Eden. When Adam and Eve realized they had sinned, they immediately hid themselves (v.8). Adam and Eve were ashamed. Shame had come upon Adam and Eve, but their shame was not for them alone. Shame, like guilt, passed upon mankind from that point on. As a result, man is not only guilty from this point on, but man is also in a position of shame before God.

Anthropologists and sociologists have pointed out to us that many cultures around the world place shame and honour at the centre of their value system rather than right and wrong. Shame and honour are paramount to understanding their worldviews. The shame-based cultures of the world span an area from Morocco to Korea and cover much of what is known today in mission circles as the 10-40 window. They also include some of the aboriginal natives of Australia and North America.

Today, the Middle East and Arab world operate largely according to a worldview of honour and shame. While individualism is accepted and admired in the West, conformity to the group is celebrated and pursued in Middle Eastern and Arab countries. Islam, by its definition, calls its followers to conform to the point of submission, and public prayers and universal fasting encourage this conformity. Every Arab desires to be honourable, and conforming to the group identity is a means of retaining one's honour. This desire to avoid shame and maintain honour would dictate one's values and behaviours in the Middle East and Arab world.

The dominant factor when contemplating persecution from a Middle Eastern perspective is therefore that "it is shameful" and it needs to be avoided. This worldview presents two challenges to the church:

1. Firstly, Muslim converts believers find it difficult to believe that it is an honour to be persecuted because of the shame connected to it. Islam calls its followers to success, even in the Shaada – the Muslim prayer. Persecution is generally perceived as shame and therefore a curse.
2. Secondly, Muslims who convert to Christianity also become the object of shame – the shame you bring on your community, your family and on your culture, which is engraved in Islam. It is therefore important to understand that imprisonment and torture might represent physical persecution, but it is less painful than the societal persecution of shame. This world view will therefore misinterpret Gods sovereign plan for the Gospel to be proclaimed to the ends of the earth because of an unbiblical worldview that persecution is a shame



OVERVIEW

THREE WORLDVIEWS



WORLDVIEW 3

Fear and power

There was a third result of man's sin. When God came to speak to Adam and Eve in the garden, Adam told God that they had hidden themselves because they were afraid (v. 10). The third result of sin was fear; and fear came upon Adam and Eve as well as upon the whole human race. Before this, man enjoyed the presence of God. Now he cowered in fear, and fear passed upon all mankind.

Many works of Christian theology omit this facet of sin even though missionaries have long talked about "fear-based cultures" that exist among animistic people. Anthropologists and sociologists tell us that many cultures in our world can be grouped together into what are known as fear-based worldviews. The focus of these cultures is often centered around fear of spirits and the supernatural world. The importance of fear is paramount to understanding their worldview.

Fear-based cultures are found in Africa, Central and South America, and some islands in the Far East. In some nations, there are deep tensions between worldviews and clashes between cultures. As an example, Muller writes about how Native Americans would choose to die rather than to face the shame of living on a reservation, and Muller attributes this to a clash of guilt/innocence and shame/honour cultures. In South Africa, tensions are equally evident between the two worldviews of guilt/innocence and fear/power.

The dominant factor when contemplating persecution from an African perspective is therefore that "it is something to fear" and it needs to be overcome. This worldview presents two challenges to the church:

1. Firstly, African believers find it difficult to see victory in persecution because it is perceived as defeat and something to fear. The reason why the prosperity gospel is so popular in Africa is not because of an erroneous theology but because of a fear/ power worldview that creates a platform for this theology to prosper. According to the worldview, power and blessings are displayed by how we live, what we possess and how people respect us.
2. Secondly. Even though persecution is still God's design to display the cross to the ends of the earth, African believers still see it as defeat and would prefer to proclaim the powerful God through miracles, wealth and possessions. This world view will therefore misinterpret God's sovereign plan for the Gospel to be proclaimed to the ends of the earth because of an unbiblical worldview that persecution is defeat.



OVERVIEW

CONTEXTUAL PERSECUTION

Now that we understand the different worldviews it is equally important to understand how Jesus addressed persecution in the context of these respective worldviews. When Jesus spoke about the end times and addressed the reality of persecution, He included all three world-views and allowed every believer to feel included when contemplating the blessing of persecution. Listen to His words in Matthew 5:11 and then place this teaching in the context of the three worldviews

*Matthew 5:11 "Blessed are you when people **insult** you, **persecute** you and falsely say all kinds of **evil** against you because of me.*

INSULT	PERSECUTE	SLANDER
GUILT	FEAR	SHAME
 MENTAL - hurtful	 PHYSICAL - painful	 SOCIAL -shameful
Breaking you down mentally	Breaking you down physically	Breaking you down socially
Verbal abuse	Threats and harassment	To sow suspicion
Scorn or mocked or to make fun of	Cultural discrimination	Character assaults
Portrayed as being stupid	Economic discrimination	Saying evil things
Looked down upon by people	Physical assault.	Falsely accuse you.
Display of open hatred	Detention or arrests	Censure or complain against you.
Rudeness and isolation	Can lead to martyrdom	Belittle your character.

We often think about persecution as a random act of hostility. But facing persecution is far more complex than just confronting opposition. We need to understand the reality that persecution will be executed within a world-view context and packaged in way where it will hurt the most. The faces, the types, the reasons, and the examples of persecution is never a fit-for-all tailored made attack. It will vary from culture to culture and even within cultures, from group to group. It will seek to find the weakness in every individual and expose it to the maximum.

DISCUSSION GROUPS

In a physical war it is a matter of life and death to be sufficiently prepared for the battle, to identify the strategy of the enemy and to respond appropriately to the attack launched. We therefore need to:

- Identifying your world-view and where the enemy would find your weakest spot
- Is the opposition you face for righteousness sake or for other reasons?
- How do you respond to opposition? Be honest. Do you think it's wrong, shameful of a sign of defeat?



OVERVIEW

7 FACES OF PERSECUTION

The New Testament has various descriptions and definitions to explain the different ‘faces’ of persecution. In all cases it would involve acts of mental attacks, physical abuse, and social slander. Here are seven faces of persecution that are probably best described in Revelation 2:8 in the words of God to His suffering Church in Smyrna. These different expressions of persecutions are intentionally used and are still the trademarks of those who follow Christ in more than 50 nations today:

*“To the angel of the church in Smyrna write: ‘These are the words of him who is the First and the Last, who died and came to life again. I know your (1) **afflictions** (tribulations)) and your (2) **poverty** – yet you are rich! I know the (3) **slander** of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan. Do not be afraid of what you are about to (4) **suffer**. I tell you, the devil will put some of you in (5) **prison** to test you, and you will suffer (6) **persecution** for ten days. Be faithful, even to the point of (7) **death**, and I will give you the crown of life.”*

The Lord's second letter is addressed to the angel of the church at Smyrna, which name is derived from the word for **myrrh** and means **crushed**. This is not a coincidence! This name will be significant to the church, for myrrh has to be crushed in order for its fragrance to be released. Smyrna is located in Turkey, in the modern city of Izmir, just 35 miles north of Ephesus. It is estimated that ancient Smyrna had a population of one hundred thousand people. To the suffering Church in Smyrna the Lord acknowledges the seven trials that they face:

1 AFFLICTIONS



Afflictions means grievous trouble, hard times, and suffering. Christians in Smyrna were being persecuted for not worshiping the emperor, very much like in **North Korea** when Christians refuse to bow before the statues of Kim Jong-il, the father of the current ruler Kim Jong-un. China also experience persecution because of a communist government. Their punishment will entail grievous hardship and suffering.

2 POVERTY



This form of persecution does not refer to poverty in general but poverty as a measure of punishment for bearing the name of Christ. These Christians refused to say “Caesar is Lord.” With that came the consequences of being excluded from work and trade. The Greek word here for poverty is “*ptocheia*” which means to be so poor that you beg for food. These people had everything taken away and were now beggars because of their faith. In many Muslim countries like Egypt and Afghanistan your ID document will also display your religion. Christians who seek employment will face the scrutiny of not being a Muslim and will find it a challenge to participate in trade, currency and employment. This will mostly result in poverty.

3 SLANDER



Persecution always starts with slander, sowing suspicion in the community and breaking down the integrity and the dignity of believers. In countries like India, Nepal, and Bhutan, Christians will be accused of angering the gods when there are natural disasters. In countries like Iran and Afghanistan Christians will be accused of being American spies and face the consequences of arrests or being ostracised by the community. As mentioned earlier, this form of persecution in a shame and honour culture could be more difficult to bear than the infliction of physical pain.



OVERVIEW

7 FACES OF PERSECUTION

4

SUFFERING AND

5

IMPRISONMENT

The suffering, accompanied by imprisonment, that the Bible refers to, was beyond comprehension. Simón Apablaza, in an article on SCRIB, describes the conditions of a prison in the days of the early church, as equal to death, despair, sickness of mind and body, and humiliation. The physical constraints in imprisonment were, to say the least, horrendous. He elaborates as follows:

Firstly, we can be quite sure that comfort for sleep, were non-existent. Prisoners had the floor to make themselves comfortable, or if they were lucky, a rough sleeping pallet near the floor. Prisons generally were also completely devoid of light. The psychological impact of total darkness on the prisoners was far reaching. A further hardship were chains. The manner in which prisoners wore chains was varied: they could be fettered by one or both legs; wearing manacles on one or both wrists; chained from the neck; they could be chained in pairs; sometimes at night all prisoners could be chained together. The chains were made of rough iron, that would eventually rust with the perspiration of the prisoners, causing untold pain, saying nothing of the weight of the chains, normally around 7 kg. The chains weight would be debilitating and the potential for the chain to render the limbs useless was increased when the prisoner was deprived of sufficient nourishment..

And then there was the lack of diet and hygiene. The food of prisoners was about half the amount of food given to slaves. The food barely sustained life, and they could be turned easily into a weapon of punishment, torture or even execution when withheld by guards. A further complication was hygiene. The stench that emanated from prisons was vile. Barbers knives were a danger to security; therefore prisoners had to put up with long unkempt and matted hair, and full of lice. The clothes worn in the filth of the prison, on bodies that were seldom washed or bathed, became absolutely soiled and deteriorated rapidly as it was used as work clothes and night wear.

With little space, especially when prisons were overcrowded, prisoners had to do “everything” in the same place. Moreover, the dead (those who died of lack of air, or illness, or changes of temperature) were piled in a corner to be taken away latter.

Thousands of Christians are imprisoned today in countries such as Burma, China, Eritrea, North Korea, and Pakistan, because of their active Christian witness.



Many commentators have expressed different views as to what it means when the Lord says **“and you will suffer for ten days”**. Some say it represents 10 years, others that it represents the 10 Roman dynasties. Others say it is a literal 10 Day Sentence in jail. But an explanation that makes sense in the context of the message to the church in Smyrna is thought that, since the number 10 is significant in the Bible, there must be a significance here as well.

Two examples are when Jacob promised God the tenth of everything He would give him if God would take care of him (Genesis 28:20-22); and when God wrote the 10 commandments on tablets of stone to represent the Mosaic covenant between Him and Israel (Deuteronomy 4:13). Thus, the number 10 seems to represent commitment and responsibility. Thus, by trying the believers for 10 days, Satan would test their commitment and the Lord would honour His commitment to His saints. **Whatever interpretation you choose, the important thing to grasp here is that the time of suffering is limited and in the hands of a sovereign and God. It won't go on for long in terms of eternity.**



OVERVIEW

7 FACES OF PERSECUTION

6 PERSECUTION

In modern history the term “persecution” is used far too lightly within Christian circles. We often hear Christians say: “I face persecution at work because I am a Christian – or at university or school” But while saying this they still enjoy the freedom to go to church on Sunday, find solace from the Christian community and share the Gospel in other places. Sadly, we sometimes nullify the cross, and the sacrifices of the persecuted church, by referring to persecution when we simply face obstacles or opposition.

Spare a thought for Paul and then comprehend what it means to be persecuted for bearing the name of Jesus. In his letter to the Church in Galatia, Paul points to his persecution and his scars as proof of his Christianity: “... let no one give me any more trouble, because the scars I have on my body show that I am the slave of Jesus.” (Galatians 6:17). Paul obtained these scars by (2 Corinthians 11:23-24) being given nearly 200 lashes by the Jews, whipped by the Romans; and once being stoned by the religious leaders.

William Barclay comments on this Scripture as follows:

“Paul was stripped and tied to some kind of stake so that he could not run or fall. Then a trained person in flogging would take a whip, with or without shards in the leather, and lash Paul’s back 39 times. Halfway through, or earlier, the skin would begin to break and tear. By the end, parts of Paul’s back would be like jelly. The cuts would not be clean. The skin would be torn and shredded, so that the healing would be slow and perhaps complicated by infection. There was no sterilization or antiseptics. It would take months before Paul could put a shirt or garment on his back again.

Now, with this in view, consider that this happened a second time on the same back. Opening all the scars. It healed more slowly the second time. Then consider that some months later it happened for a third time. Imagine what his back must have looked like. Then it happened again. And finally for a fifth time. And this was just one of his sufferings.”

Paul never once attributes these sufferings to the works of Satan. Suffering for Christ was something that he counted as an honour (Philippians 1:29). *For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe on Him, but also to suffer for Him...*



Acts 12:6 *The night before his trial, Peter was chained to two guards and sentries stood guard at the entrance. Peter was waiting to hear the news about his fate – not **if** he would be executed, but **how** he would be executed – crucified like Jesus, beheaded like James or maybe ripped apart by animals like so many others?.*

So, where do we find Peter at this point? Anxiously walking around in his cell crying out to God for release and rescue? Pleading for an intervention and that God would grant him victory over his enemies? **No. Peter is fast asleep.** Try and picture it. Chained, guarded, convicted and condemned – and fast asleep!

Peter could sleep because not only did he believe in God, he believed the God that he believed in. You see, Peter held on to the promises that the Lord gave him in John 21:18 when Jesus declared “... when you are old you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go”. Peter believed this word and knew it wasn’t his time to be martyred yet. He knew that the Lord had promised him he would reach an age of maturity and he rested in the knowledge that nothing would happen to him outside the will of God. He found his stillness in his contentment in God’s promises. Believing in God’s promises will bring a stillness. Stillness will reveal contentment. Contentment and godliness is a great gain



OVERVIEW

7 FACES OF PERSECUTION

7

MARTYRDOM

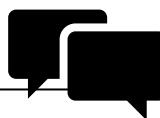
Looking at the lives of the apostles, we find that martyrdom was a calling that applied to almost all of them. It was not a group of people that was “persecuted”. It was normal Christianity. And even though the Bible does not expressly give details about the ways in which all the apostles died, we know much from early church historians. (see next chapter)

Today, the situation is not much different. Open Doors' 2021 World Watch Report an important trend in 2020: Most of the Christians killed gave up their lives to extremist groups, not governments.. The number of Christians killed has increased by 60% over the previous year, mostly because of Islamic violence against Nigerian Christians.

In Nigeria, over 2,200 Christians were murdered by radical Islamists. This number makes up slightly less than half of the 4,761 Christians killed for their faith worldwide, according to Open Doors statistics.

Top Countries where Christians are killed

1. Nigeria
2. DRC
3. India
4. Uganda
5. Myanmar
6. Burkina Faso
7. Cameroon
8. CAR
9. Colombia
10. Ethiopia



DISCUSSION GROUPS

What faces of persecution do you recognise in your country and in your community?

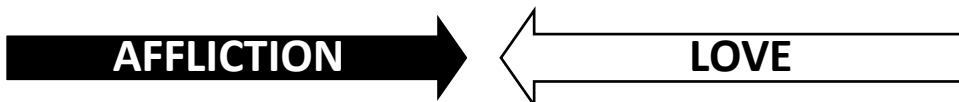
What faces of persecution do you think might be implemented in the future should freedom deteriorate?



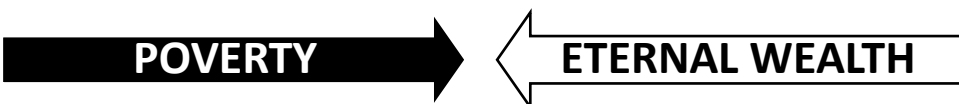
OVERVIEW

7 FACES OF PERSECUTION

But God not only acknowledges the suffering of His saints with honour, he also taught, and exemplified, how we should respond when we are faced with opposition:



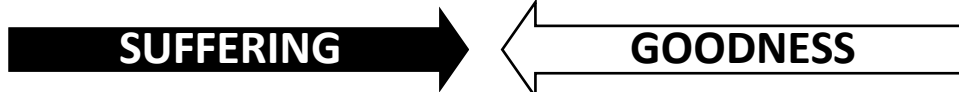
Matthew 5:44 But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you,



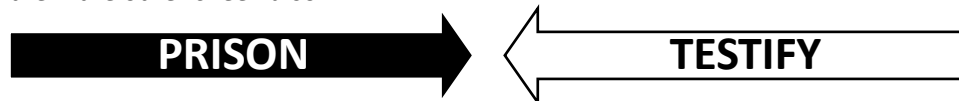
Matthew 6:19-20 "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven,



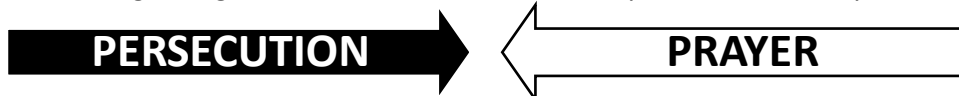
1 Corinthians 4:12(b). When we are cursed, we bless; when we are persecuted, we endure it;



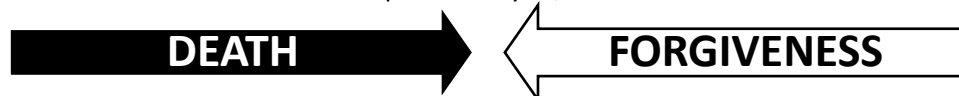
Matthew 5:39 But I tell you, do not resist an evil person. If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to them the other cheek also.



Luke 21: 12 "...They will hand you over to synagogues and put you in prison, and you will be brought before kings and governors, and all on account of my name. 13 And so you will bear testimony to me.



Matthew 5:44 But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you,
Romans 12:14 Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse.



Acts 7:59-60 While they were stoning him, Stephen prayed, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." Then he fell on his knees and cried out, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them."



Question: Does God sing?

Answer: Apparently yes, God sings of delight when He thinks of you, the pinnacle of His creation.

Listen to Zephaniah 3:17: *"The LORD your God is with you, the Mighty Warrior who saves. **He will take great delight in you; in his love he will no longer rebuke you, but will rejoice over you with singing.**"*

The Lord delights in us. When He watches us from heaven and observes our faithful perseverance as we display the cross of salvation to those around us, He delights in us. No, He is not only pleased but He delights to the extent that He sings over us with joy. What an overwhelming thought. No other god does this. He delights over us with singing. I don't even know if other gods know how to sing. God delights in us delighting in Him.



OVERVIEW

6 TYPES OF PERSECUTION

There are various reasons why Christians are persecuted - and countries, regions and cultures vary in their approach to the message of Salvation. It is crucial to not only understand the realities of persecution but also the types of persecution.

1

DICTATORSHIP PERSECUTION

Under a **dictatorship**, people are persecuted for various reasons, including their cultural and political affiliations, religion or their economic status. Even though not all dictatorships result in the persecution of believers, **of the top 30 nations where Christians are persecuted 20 are ruled by dictators. Of those 20, 15 are Muslim dictators**

What makes persecution under dictatorships so dangerous is the fact that they have their own controlled secret police, the power to make indiscriminate arrests, and the ability to place people in jails and concentration camps without the approval of a judicial system. In Eritrea Christians are placed in Metal Ship Containers without any legal representation.

As of 2018, there are currently 50 nations with a dictator or authoritarian regime ruling the country. There are eight dictatorships in Asia, seven in the Eurasian region of the world, and twelve spanning from Africa's northern parts to the Middle East. Africa has several long-standing dictators; however, they are beginning to lose power across the continent. In the last four years alone, 26 African countries have had transfers of power. Most recently, Algeria's Abdelaziz Bouteflika and Sudan's Omar Hassan al-Bashir were forced to step down. There are currently 17 dictators in Africa, some worse than others.

Dictatorships where Christians are persecuted - 2021

COUNTRY	DICTATOR	WWL #
Afghanistan	Ashraf Ghani Ahmadzai	2
Algeria	Abdelkader Bensalah	24
China	Xi Jinping	17
Eritrea	Isaias Afwerki	6
Iran	Hassan Rouhani	8
Iraq	Barham Salih	11
Laos	Bounnhang Vorachith	22
Libya	Nouri Abusahmain	4
Mauritania	Mohamed Ghazouani	20
North Korea	Kim Jong-un	1
Qatar	Tamin Al Thani	29
Saudi Arabia	Abdullah Aziz Al Saud	14
Somalia	Abdullahi Mohamed	3
Sudan	Abdel Fattah Burhan	13
Syria	Bashar al-Assad	12
Turkey	Recep Erdogan	25
Turkmenistan	Berdimammedow	23
Uzbekistan	Shavkat Mirziyoyev	21
Vietnam	Nguyen Phu Trong	19
Yemen	Abd Al-Hadi	7

Of the top 30 nations where Christians are persecuted, 20 are ruled by dictators. Of those 20, 15 are Muslim dictators



1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.

When do we need to give thanks? We are encouraged to give thanks in "**ALL** circumstances" - always, under dictatorship or in freedom, without interruption in all, any and every situation – for this is the will of God.

BUT, the Bible doesn't encourage us to give thanks **FOR** everything, but to give thanks **IN** everything. We don't thank the Lord **FOR** the hardship of life under dictatorships but we thank the Lord **IN** the hardship because He has not changed. His grace is still sufficient, His love is still abounding, and His mercies are still unending.



OVERVIEW

6 TYPES OF PERSECUTION

2

AUTOCRATIC PERSECUTION

The main difference between an Autocracy and a Dictatorship is that the Autocracy is a governance system headed by a single ruler and a Dictatorship is a person who leads a dictatorship. The autocrat's decisions are not subject to legal restraints, and the autocrat exercises unlimited and undisputed power. While autocratic countries are not always evil, they are continuing to face rising resistance. Of the top 50 most closed countries for Christians to live, 6 are ruled by autocratic systems. Countries like North Korea, Saudi Arabia and Turkey are regarded as both an autocratic system and a dictatorship.

COUNTRY	WWL #
---------	-------

North Korea	1
Egypt	38
Oman	31
Brunei	44
Saudi Arabia	13
Turkey	50

3

RELIGIOUS PERSECUTION

David T. Smith, in *Religious Persecution and Political Order in the United States*, defines religious persecution as "*violence or discrimination against members of a religious minority because of their religious affiliation,*" referring to "*actions that are intended to deprive them of their rights and to force religious minorities to assimilate, leave, or live as second-class citizens.*"

There is a distinction however between religious persecution, religious discrimination and religious intolerance. Religious intolerance is motivated by the sentiment of the population, which may be tolerated or encouraged by the state. Religious discrimination refers to the denial of people's civil rights on the basis of their religion. Examples of religious persecution include the confiscation or destruction of property, incitement of hatred, arrests, imprisonment, beatings, torture, murder, and executions. Religious persecution can be considered the opposite of freedom of religion.

Some nations might be politically tolerant of Christian activities but the religion of the majority of people limits any Christian activities and also discriminate against it. Most Muslim-majority country are examples of religious intolerance. Egypt as example host the oldest Church in the world and Christians are politically seen as part of the Egyptian society but there are frequent attacks on Churches from the Islamic community. Saudi Arabi on the other hand has a combination of a Dictatorship motivated by religious restrictions and an autocratic governance system which makes the lives of Christians unbearable.

Of the top 25 nation restricted to the Gospel, 18 experience restrictions due to religious persecution. Sadly, in the top 50 most restricted nations, countries like Mexico and Ethiopia are nations where Christians persecute fellow believers

COUNTRY	RELIGION
---------	----------

Afghanistan	Islam
Algeria	Islam
India	Hindu
Iran	Islam
Iraq	Islam
Libya	Islam
Mauritania	Islam
Nigeria	Islam
Pakistan	Islam
Qatar	Islam
Saudi Arabia	Islam
Somalia	Islam
Sudan	Islam
Turkey	Islam
Turkmenistan	Islam
Uzbekistan	Islam
Yemen	Islam

Of the top 50 nations:

34 have Islam as a main religion,

10 have Christianity.

4 have Buddhism,

2 have Hinduism,

1 has atheism,

1 has agnosticism

SOURCE: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Religious_persecution



OVERVIEW

6 TYPES OF PERSECUTION

4

CULTURAL PERSECUTION

Culture could include nationality, religion, language, or customs. Persecution of Christians due to the local culture is mainly where they form a minority, and the Christian faith would be non-ethnic to the local culture. India as example, is the world's largest democracy with laws that guarantees freedom of religion and yet in strong Hindu villages, Christians often face severe persecution. In a very superstitious community Christians will be accused of being responsible for floods or droughts because they angered the gods by not praying and sacrificing to them. Even though national laws should protect believers, the local culture would often override those laws and Christians will be refused services such as water, food and basic necessities.

Most countries closed to the Gospel would be because of cultural diversities where Christianity is foreign to the local culture, whether it be in a Muslim nation like Saudi Arabia, a Hindu village in India, a Buddhist town in Bhutan, an animist village in Cameroon or a Catholic community in Mexico.

5

CROSS-FIRE PERSECUTION

Cross-fire persecution will often involve conflict-zones where Christians are caught in the middle of a conflict. In Colombia (#34 on the list) Christians are often forced by drug cartels or government militia to join forces or suffer the consequences. In war torn countries like Syria (#12 on the list) Christians are also caught in the cross-fire between ISIS, rebels and government forces. Mozambique (#39 on the list) is the latest casualty where ISIS moved into the north and started executing believers.

6

FAMILY PERSECUTIONION

Family persecution even happens in countries with complete political and religious freedom. South Africa has one of the most liberal constitutions with complete freedom of religion. Yet, there are areas in Cape Town where safe-houses exist for Muslims who come to know Christ in the more radical Islamic areas.



DISCUSSION GROUPS

Discuss amongst one another the types and examples of persecution that are happening in your region, country and neighbouring countries

Be careful not to confuse opposition with persecution. The inflicting of suffering, harassment, imprisonment, fear or pain are all components of persecution, but there is a danger of randomly classifying any opposition simply as "persecution". This creates a victim mentality which has sadly become a trade-mark of Western Christianity. Jesus never saw himself as persecuted nor as a victim. Neither did the early church. The apostles saw their severe suffering as a privilege to share in the suffering of Christ, and as a joy set before them (Hebrews 12:2).



To randomly refer to opposition as persecution is both unbiblical and also nullifies the cross of Christ. Paul had one desire, (Philippians 3:10) "to know Christ—yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death." Paul never saw himself as a victim of a hostile society. He never sought pity and would probably have been offended by the modern Church for bemoaning those that inflicted his suffering. He understood the necessity of not only believing in Jesus but also to suffer for him.



OVERVIEW

4 REASONS FOR PERSECUTION

Mark 13:9 "You will be handed over to the local councils and flogged in the synagogues. **On account of me** you will stand before governors and kings as witnesses to them."

1 Peter 3:17 For it is better, if it is God's will, to suffer for **doing good** than for doing evil.

When Jesus spoke about persecution in Mark 13:9 He used these words:
"On account of ME..."



These were the same words that Jesus asked Saul on his way to Damascus (Acts 9) as he was still "breathing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples". As he neared Damascus on his journey of destruction, he was brought to a sudden stop when a light from heaven flashed around him. He fell to the ground and then heard a voice from heaven saying to him, "Saul, Saul, **why do you persecute me?**"

"Why do you persecute ME?"

This is key in understanding persecution. As Christians we are not the ones being persecuted; it is Christ in us that is persecuted. We are persecuted simply because we are Christ bearers. If we are persecuted for any other reason than reflecting the Christ that lives within us, then we are simply adding unnecessary hardship. We need to understand that our persecutors do not have an issue with us personally – but with Christ who lives in us. He is the object of their hatred.

If we understand and believe this Biblical truth, that it is Christ in me that is being opposed and threatened, then it demands a response that will reflect the character of the One who is being attacked. If it was me being attacked, then I had the right to respond in self-defence. But since it is Christ under attack, I need to allow Christ to respond. This will inevitably lead us to the cross where we find our Saviour, not whining, complaining, criticizing or slandering but responding with forgiveness and grace. He was meek by showing authority and strength under complete control, harmonising conviction with compassion and displaying an inner strength with an outward calm.

"As Jesus is lynched in the name of religious orthodoxy and executed in the name of imperial justice... we discover that the God revealed in Christ would rather die in the name of love than kill in the name of freedom."

Brian Zahnd

Persecution is generally defined as the systematic mistreatment of an individual or group by another individual or group. The most common forms are religious persecution, racism and political persecution, though there is naturally some overlap between these terms. The inflicting of suffering, harassment, imprisonment, internment, fear, or pain are all factors that may establish persecution, but not all suffering will necessarily establish persecution.

We should therefore not confuse the **ACT** of being persecuted with the **REASON** for being persecuted. Persecution in itself is not a blessing. Being persecuted for righteousness's sake (the Christ revealed through us) is the blessing.

It is therefore important to distinguish between the following definitions that could so easily all be defined as PERSECUTION:

- 1** Facing persecution because of your **FAITH**
- 2** Facing persecution because of your **CONVICTIONS**
- 3** Facing persecution because of your **ASSOCIATION**
- 4** Facing opposition because of your **OPINIONS**

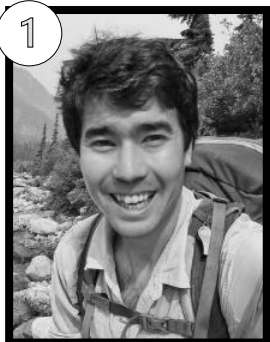
Here are some current examples of how these definitions get confused



OVERVIEW

4 REASONS FOR PERSECUTION

1



Facing persecution because of your **FAITH**

We all remember John Allen Chau, the 27-year-old American missionary who was killed in 2020 by unidentified individuals in India's Andaman and Nicobar Islands. Chau had reportedly visited the Andaman and Nicobar Islands on five previous occasions and had expressed a strong desire to meet with the Sentinelese tribes to preach the gospel. He died "in service" while bearing Christ and preaching the righteousness found in the Gospel. This is the Biblical understanding of martyrdom and persecution for your faith.

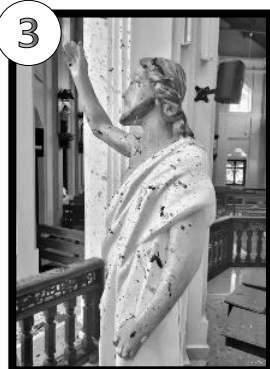
2



Facing persecution because of your **CONVICTIONS**

In March 2019, Nasrin Sotoudeh, an internationally renowned human rights lawyer jailed in Iran, has been handed a sentence of 38 years in prison and 148 lashes. Sotoudeh, who has represented opposition activists including women prosecuted for removing their mandatory headscarf, was arrested in June 2018 and charged with spying, spreading propaganda and insulting Iran's supreme leader, her lawyer said. Sotoudeh will face this injustice not because of her faith but because of her conviction. ***This does not make it less important or less traumatic but should not be seen as persecution for her FAITH.***

3



Facing persecution because of your **ASSOCIATION**

On Sunday 21 April 2019 three bomb explosions in Sri Lanka killed a number of believers attending the Easter Sunday services. We acknowledge their obedience of being in a place of worship in a nation where Christianity is not always welcomed or accepted. But these attacks were not directed directly at those in the Church because of their Christian witness but solely because of their association with the Christian faith. ***Again, this does not make it less important or less traumatic but those who were killed should not be seen as being martyred for their witness.***

4



Facing opposition because of your **OPINIONS**

Australia's rugby union authorities have issued Israel Folau, one of Australia's top rugby players, with a code of conduct breach notice over his controversial social media post which said "hell awaits" gay people. Folau posted an image on Instagram listing "drunks, homosexuals, adulterers, liars, fornicators, thieves, atheists and idolaters," reading underneath, "Hell awaits you." This harsh response to his post was not because of his faith – bearing Christ - he has always enjoyed the privileges of a sport hero as a confessing Christian, but because of his opinion. ***Again, this does minimise his willingness to stand up for what he believes but should not be seen as persecution for his faith.***



OVERVIEW

3 RESPONSES TO PERSECUTION

We should be careful not to romanticize persecution and assume that all Christians will embrace the cross of Christ with courage and humility. The reality is that under pressure, many believers turn their back on Christ. This is not an unforgivable sin and there are even those who deny Christ at first and then repent and become faithful and courageous witnesses in the Kingdom. Peter, in the Bible, is a perfect example: First a weak follower who denies Jesus at the cross and then becoming a faithful and courageous warrior in the Kingdom of God.

There are generally three responses to persecution and is best described in the following story: (Taken from *Standing Strong through the Storm*)

THE CARROT, THE EGG AND THE TEA BAG



A young woman went to her mother and told her that things were so hard for her, she did not know how she was going to make it and wanted to give up. She was tired of fighting and struggling. It seemed as soon as one problem was solved a new one arose. Her mother took her to the kitchen. She filled three pots with water. In the first she placed carrots, in the second she placed eggs, and in the last she placed tea bags. She let them sit and boil without saying a word. In about twenty minutes she turned off the burners. She fished the carrots out and placed them in a bowl. She pulled the eggs out and placed them in a bowl. Then she poured the tea out into a bowl.

Turning to her daughter, she asked, “What do you see?” “Carrots, eggs, and tea,” she replied. Her mother brought her closer and asked her to feel the carrots. She did and noted that they were soft. She then asked her to take an egg and break it. After pulling off the shell, she observed the hard-boiled egg. Finally, she asked her to sip the tea. The daughter smiled as she tasted its rich aroma. The daughter then asked, “What does it mean, mother?”

Her mother explained that each of these objects had faced the same adversity—boiling water—but each reacted differently. The carrot went in strong, hard and unrelenting. However, after being subjected to the boiling water, it softened and became weak. The egg had been fragile. Its thin outer shell had protected its liquid interior. But, after sitting through the boiling water, its inside became hardened. The tea bags were unique, however. After they were in the boiling water, they had changed the water.

“Which are you?” she asked her daughter. “When adversity knocks on your door, how do you respond? Are you a carrot, an egg, or a tea bag?”

Think of this: Which am I? Am I the carrot that seems strong, but with pain and adversity, do I wilt and become soft and lose my strength? Am I the egg that starts with a malleable heart, but changes with the heat? Did I have a fluid spirit, but after opposition and hardship or some other trial, have I become hardened and stiff? Does my shell look the same, but on the inside am I bitter and tough with a stiff spirit and a hardened heart? Or am I like the tea bags? The tea bags actually changed the hot water, the very circumstance that brings the pain. When the water gets hot, it releases the fragrance and flavour. If I am like the tea bags, when things are at their worst, I get better and change the situation around me through Christ-likeness.

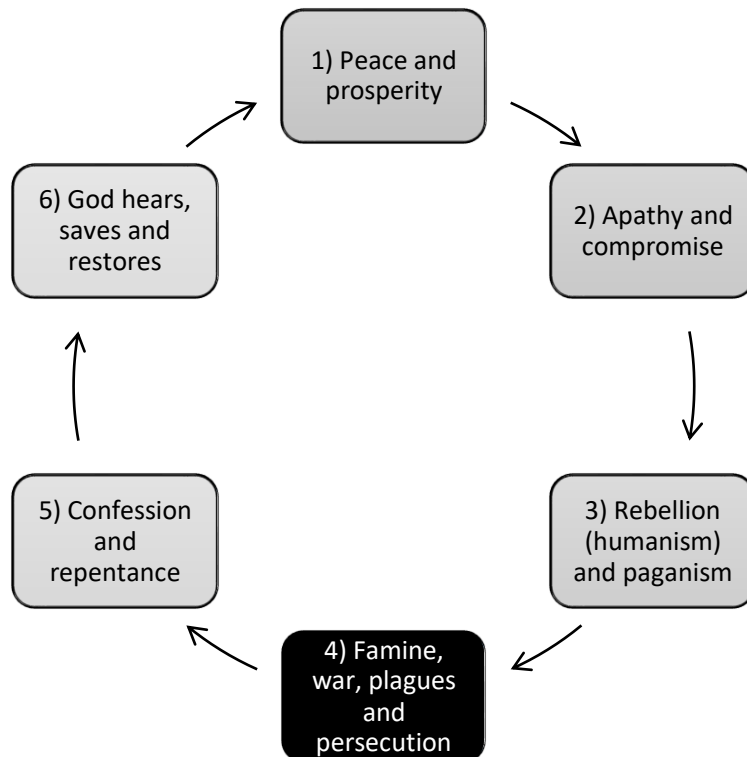


OVERVIEW

PERSECUTION AND THE CYCLE OF FAITH

The old Testament nation of Israel reveal a cycle of freedom, compromise, exile and slavery - and ultimately back to redemption. This is important to understand this cycle of faith from a Christian perspective. Then, as now, hardship and persecution is always a path to transformation and repentance. The book of Judges shows the oft-repeated cycle:

- 1. Peace and prosperity:** God's gifts to the people He loved.
- 2. Apathy and compromise:** They took His gifts for granted and forgot to thank Him.
- 3. Rebellion and paganism:** They traded God for other sources of strength.
- 4. Famine, war, plagues and slavery:** Showing the people the inadequacy of their own resources, God would bring them back to Himself.
- 5. Confession and repentance:** The people recognized their need for God.
- 6. God hears, saves and restores:** He blesses His people with peace -- as long as they follow Him. When they turn to other gods, He stands back and waits.



DISCUSSION GROUPS

Where in the cycle of faith do you see

- 1. The Church in Europe?**
- 2. The Church in the USA?**
- 3. The Church in Asia?**
- 4. The Church in Africa?**
- 5. The Church in your nation?**

"These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us, on whom the fulfilment of the ages has come."

1 Corinthians 10:6-10

CHAPTER 2

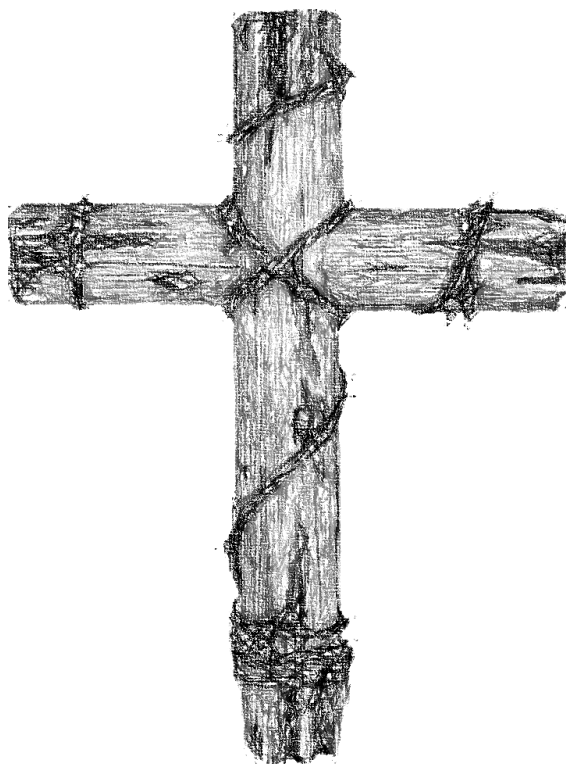
HINDSIGHT

Looking at the reality of persecution of the early Church



HINDSIGHT

NORMAL CHRISTIANITY



One of the major challenges in sharing the Gospel of salvation is that we neglect to share the Gospel of the cross. We desire that people will fall in love with Jesus, but we preach a cross-less faith. We neglect not only to preach on the suffering of Christ but we forget the suffering of all who dared to follow Him. Unless we make the cross the centre of the Gospel we preach, we will make new believers follow an uncrucified Christ and a false Gospel.

Since the beginning of Christianity persecution was the message, the life-style and the teaching upon which faith was built. It is telling that Paul explains his full theology in these words: (1 Corinthians 2:2) *For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.* Not “Him resurrected” or “Him being glorified” but “Him crucified”. This was the theological fibre of the early church. Persecution was normal Christianity and the cross reminded every believer of the Christ who's cross they were sharing. This was the **ONLY** Christianity that the believers knew. Persecution was not a theology nor was it strange, it was the DNA of everything they believed. Confessing Christ meant carrying their crosses. Nothing less, nothing more.

The PROMISE of persecution

But the early church also saw persecution as a fulfilment of what Jesus promised. They did not ask where Jesus was in times of hardships, they understood His promises, they accepted the calling and they rejoiced in their suffering. Jesus said it, they believed it and that settled it.

It is therefore important to understand early Christianity before it got polluted with a sacrifice-free theology that made persecution a foreign concept and something to be avoided. We when we neglect the cross, we neglect the Gospel.

Glenn Penner, CEO of **Voice of the Martyrs**, wrote an article that focused on the clear Scriptural link between persecution and discipleship. According to Penner, *“there can be no discipleship without persecution; to follow Christ is to join Him in a cross-carrying journey of reconciling the world to the Father.”* This journey takes place within the context of conflict, self-sacrifice and suffering, as Jesus calls believers to follow Him faithfully on the path of martyrdom. As we **re-evaluate** our motives for following Christ, we need to **re-commit** to the calling of being sent out as sheep among wolves. We need to follow the call of a crucified Saviour.

Penner writes: *“Without His death there is no redeemed community. But just as Christ's cross was needed to establish His Church, our crosses are needed to build His Church. Both are needed. To be called to follow Christ is to receive a call to suffer (Acts 9:16 and 14:22; 1 Thes.3:3; 1 Peter 2:21; Philippians 1:29).”* Believe it, expect it, live it!



HINDSIGHT

NORMAL CHRISTIANITY

The PRIVILEGE of persecution

Penner continues about the understanding the early followers of Christ had concerning persecution:

"It was this understanding that sacrifice, suffering, shame, and even death were the normal cost of discipleship that fuelled the evangelistic efforts of the first century Church. They did not expect to experience all of the blessings of heaven in this world. They knew that by their faithfulness, even unto death, they were storing up rewards in heaven. They knew that it was the persecuted who are blessed (Matthew 5:10-12). The early Christians thanked God for the honour of suffering for His sake (Acts 5:41). They knew that in order to bring life to others, they must die; to see others experience peace with God, they would have to suffer the violence of the world; to bring the love of God to a dying world, they would have to face the hatred of those whom they were seeking to reach. It is in this context that the Biblical authors described spiritual warfare; not freedom over bad habits or psychological problems, but the brutal reality of witnessing to the faithfulness of God in the face of suffering, sacrifice and death. It was only in this context that the purposes of God would be accomplished."

These principles are still at work today: *"Weakness, suffering and sacrifice are God's modus operandi. This is how God accomplishes His work: not through strength or compulsion but through love and invitation. As so, the Servant of God suffers and dies, as do those who follow Him. This is to be expected; this is God's way of reconciling the world to Himself."*

- **Matthew 10:16** *"I am sending you out like sheep among wolves."*
- **Acts 9:16** *"I will show him how much he must suffer for My name."*
- **Acts 14:22** *"... 'We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God,' they said."*
- **1 Thessalonians 3:3** *"... so that no one would be unsettled by these trials. For you know quite well that we are destined for them."*
- **1 Peter 2:21** *"To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in His steps."*
- **Philippians 1:29** *"For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for Him..."*
- **Acts 5:41** *"The apostles left the Sanhedrin, rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name."*





HINDSIGHT

THE EARLY CHURCH

Rick Wade (<https://probe.org/persecution-in-the-early-church/>) provides a brief summary of the persecution suffered by the early church in the first three centuries and how the church grew stronger as a result of this attention. He suggests that we should be prepared to face similar trials as our culture becomes less tolerant of true Christian faith. This was normal Christianity for those who took the cross of Christ seriously.

In this article we'll look at the persecution of believers in the first few centuries after Christ. We'll talk about some of the reasons for persecution and identify some of the emperors under whom Christians suffered. This provides an important understanding of how the early church grew through the message of the cross and their willingness to not only preach the cross but to display it.

REASONS FOR PERSECUTION OF THE EARLY CHURCH

There are several important and interrelated reasons for the persecution of the early church. First was the problem of identity. Christianity was identified at first with Judaism, but people quickly came to see it as a different religion. Jews were left alone for the most part; it seemed best to Rome to just confine them and leave them alone. Christianity, however, was a strange, new movement, known by their counter-culture principles of love, forgiveness and reconciliation. People felt threatened by this strange new religion.

The next problem was with the religious activities of the Christians, it focused more on what they *didn't* do than what they *did* do. In the days of the Roman empire, the worship of pagan gods and the emperor was a part of everyone's life. Two problems arose because of this. First, because they didn't participate in pagan rituals but tended to keep to themselves. They were indeed in the world but obviously not of the world. Second, since Christians wouldn't join in with the religious activities which were believed to placate the gods, they became a threat to the very well-being of the community. Writing in about A.D. 196, Tertullian said, "The Christians are to blame for every public disaster and every misfortune that befalls the people. If the Tiber rises to the walls, if the Nile fails to rise and flood the fields, if the sky withholds its rain, if there is earthquake or famine or plague, straightway the cry arises: 'The Christians to the lions!'"

Finally, Christians' reluctance to offer worship to the emperor and the gods was considered madness, considering what would happen to them if they didn't. Why not just offer a pinch of incense to the image of the emperor? In a pluralistic society, the narrowness of Christian beliefs seemed absurd, especially considering what would happen to Christians who *wouldn't* go along.



DISCUSSION GROUPS

To what extent are we identified by the principles Jesus and the early Christians died for?

How would the world identify Christianity today?

Are we as Christians known for our sacrifice or our comfort?



HINDSIGHT

THE EARLY CHURCH

Let's turn now to a brief survey of some of the emperors under whom the church suffered persecution.
(taken from: <https://probe.org/persecution-in-the-early-church/>)

NERO
AD 54-68

CAESAR DOMITIAN
AD 81-96

TRAJAN
AD 98-117

NERO: A.D. 54-68

Claudius Nero was named emperor at age 16 and reigned from A.D. 54-68. He had about five good years under the guidance of such men as Seneca, the Roman poet and philosopher. But that all changed when he had his mother killed in A.D. 59. She was too powerful. Her "insanity and her fury at seeing her son slip out of her control" led Nero to believe she was a threat to his power. In A.D. 62 he had his wife killed so he could marry another woman. He later killed a brother and his teacher, Seneca.

Christians became the object of his anger following the Great Fire of Rome in A.D. 64. Some people suspected that Nero started the fire himself, so he pointed the accusing finger at Christians. The fact that he felt confident in doing this indicates the low regard in which people held Christians already. Historian Philip Schaff says that "there began a carnival of blood such as even heathen Rome never saw before or since....A 'vast multitude' of Christians was put to death in the most shocking manner." Some were crucified, some sewn up in animal skins and thrown to the dogs, some were covered in pitch, nailed to wooden posts, and burned as torches. It was in the fallout of this that Peter and Paul gave their lives for their Saviour, probably within a year of each other.

CAESAR DOMITIAN: A.D. 81-96

Domitian was Roman Emperor from 81 to 96 CE and his reign, although one of relative peace and stability, became engulfed in both fear and paranoia. The emperor saw himself as an absolute ruler and took pride in being called master or god: "*dominus et deus*." His paranoia led him to take extreme measures such as employing informers. As a means to obtain information on possible plots or rebels, he ordered interrogators to cut off the hands (or scorched the genitals) of prisoners.

Caesar Domitian is considered to be emperor when John was on Patmos (circa AD 94-96) and wrote Revelation. In AD 92, Caesar Domitian (who demanded Caesar worship) was responsible for 40,000 Christians martyred empire wide.

TRAJAN: A.D. 98-117

Emperor Trajan ruled from A.D. 98-117. One of his governors, a man called Pliny the Younger, wrote to Trajan seeking advice on what to do with the Christians. They were becoming very numerous, and Pliny thought the pagan religions were being neglected. He began sentencing Christians who refused to honour the gods and the emperor to death. Pliny believed that, even if the Christians' practices weren't too bad, just their obstinacy was enough to be rid of them. The question he asked of the Emperor was; should he sentence them for carrying the name *Christian* only, or did they have to commit specific criminal acts? Trajan responded that if someone made a credible charge against a Christian, the Christian should be sentenced unless he or she recanted and gave proof by invoking pagan gods.

Persecution was especially bad in Syria and Palestine during Trajan's reign. In 107 he went to Antioch and demanded that everyone sacrifice to the gods. Ignatius, Bishop of Antioch and pupil of the apostle John, refused and was martyred by being thrown to wild animals. Ignatius wrote this to Polycarp, another disciple of John, on his way to Rome: "*Let the fire, the gallows, the wild beasts, the breaking of bones, the pulling asunder of members, the bruising of my whole body, and the torments of the devil and hell itself come upon me, so that I may win Christ Jesus.*"



HINDSIGHT

THE EARLY CHURCH

HADRIAN

ANTONIUS PIUS
A.D. 138-161

MARCUS AURELIUS
A.D. 161-180

HADRIAN

Trajan's ruling was carried on by the next few emperors. Emperor Hadrian, "the most brilliant of the Roman emperors," says Will Durant, required specific charges against Christians as well. He didn't allow governors "to use mere clamorous demands and outcries" as a basis for judgment. There were to be no frivolous lawsuits.

However, Christians still needed to prove loyalty to the state and the pagan religions. Hadrian hated Jews, and was somewhat "indifferent to Christianity from ignorance of it." Philip Schaff tells us that "he insulted the Jews and the Christians alike by erecting temples of Jupiter and Venus over the site of the temple and the supposed spot of the crucifixion." Not all officials required Christians to denounce Christ. All they wanted was homage to the divine character of the emperor. "It was beside the point for Christians to argue that the malicious tales circulated about them were false,...Deeds, not words, were required by the state; and if they were in fact loyal citizens, as they protested, there was a simple way of demonstrating their loyalty; let them offer a pinch of incense in honour of the Emperor, let them swear by his divinity, let them invoke him as 'Lord.'"

ANTONIUS PIUS: A.D. 138-161

The policy of not actively pursuing Christians was continued under Antonius Pius who ruled from A.D. 138-161. During the reigns of emperors such as Hadrian and Antonius, however, Christians sometimes suffered persecution at the hands of the local townspeople without any direct encouragement from government officials. During Antonius' reign, Polycarp, a pupil of the apostle John, was martyred in Asia during one such outburst of violence. After this persecution settled down somewhat. The execution of this 86 year old man seemed to turn the tide against persecution for a time.

MARCUS AURELIUS: A.D. 161-180

In A.D. 161 Marcus Aurelius took power and reigned until 180. It was during his reign that Justin Martyr met his death. Although he didn't directly lead persecutions against Christians, he had no sympathy for them because he saw them as being disgustingly superstitious. We're told that "a law was passed under his reign, punishing every one with exile who should endeavor to influence people's mind by fear of the Divinity, and this law was, no doubt, aimed at the Christians."

During Aurelius' reign Christians were blamed for a number of natural disasters because they wouldn't sacrifice to the gods. In A.D. 177, in Gaul, horrible persecution broke out in a wave of mob violence. Slaves were tortured to give testimony against their masters. "The corpses of the martyrs, which covered the streets," says Philip Schaff, "were shamefully mutilated, then burned, and the ashes cast into the Rhone, lest any remnants of the enemies of the gods might desecrate the soil." It is said that the courage of a slave girl named Blandina "strengthened all the others; her tormentors exhausted themselves in their attempts to make her renounce Christ." "At last," Schaff tells us, "the people grew weary of slaughter," and the persecutions died down.



HINDSIGHT

THE EARLY CHURCH

SEPTIMIUS SEVERUS
A.D. 193-211

DECIUS TRAJAN
A.D. -251

DIOCLETIAN
A.D. 303-311

SEPTIMIUS SEVERUS: A.D. 193-211

Another emperor under whom Christians suffered terribly was Septimius Severus who ruled from 193-211. Writing during his reign, Clement of Alexandria said, "Many martyrs are daily burned, confined, or beheaded, before our eyes."

In 202 Septimius enacted a law prohibiting the spread of Christianity and Judaism. This was the first universal decree forbidding conversion to Christianity. Violent persecutions broke out in Egypt and North Africa. Leonides, the father of Origen, a Christian apologist, was beheaded. Origen himself was spared because his mother hid his clothes. A young girl was cruelly tortured, then burned in a kettle of burning pitch with her mother. A poignant story of the breaking down of class distinctions in the suffering church comes out of the persecution in Carthage. It is reported that Perpetua, a young noblewoman, and Felicitas, a slave girl, held hands and exchanged a kiss before being thrown to wild animals at a public festival.

DECIUS TRAJAN: A.D. -251

In his few short years on the throne, Emperor Decius Trajan undertook to restore the old Roman spirit. In A.D. 250 he published an edict calling for a return to the pagan state religion. Local commissioners were appointed to enforce the ruling. According to Philip Schaff, "This was the signal for a persecution which, in extent, consistency, and cruelty, exceeded all before it." It was the first to extend over the whole empire, so it produced more martyrs than any other persecution.

When people were suspected of being Christians, they were given the opportunity of offering sacrifice to the gods before the commissioners. Certificates were issued to prove a person's loyalty to the pagan religions. Many Christians gave in to the pressure. Those who didn't were put in prison and repeatedly questioned. Rulers weren't looking for martyrs; they wanted to see the Christians conform. Christians who stood their ground were subject to confiscation, exile, torture, imprisonment, and death. Some rushed forward "to obtain the confessor's or martyr's crown." Some, however, obtained certificates through bribery or forgery. Those who offered sacrifices were excommunicated.

DIOCLETIAN: A.D. 303-311

During the years 303-311, the church endured persecutions so terrible that all before were forgotten. Historian Philip Schaff saw this as the final struggle between the pagan Roman Empire and the rule of Christ in the West. The primary sources of persecution were Diocletian and Galerius.

Diocletian came to power in 284, and for twenty years upheld edicts of toleration made by a previous emperor. His wife and daughter were Christians, as were most of his court officers and eunuchs. But Diocletian allowed himself to be persuaded by two of his co-regents to turn on the Christians. Four edicts were issued in A.D. 303 and 304. "Christian churches were to be burned," Schaff tells us, "all copies of the Bible were to be burned; and all, without exception, were to sacrifice to the gods upon pain of death." As a result, Christians either had to commit apostasy or starve. Says Schaff: "All the pains, which iron and steel, fire and sword, rack and cross, wild beasts and beastly men could inflict, were employed" against the church. Executioners grew tired with all the work they had to do.



HINDSIGHT

THE EARLY CHURCH

MARCUS AURELIUS
A.D. 161-180

SEPTIMIUS
SEVERUS
A.D. 193-211

DECIUS
TRAJAN
A.D. -251

DIOCLETIAN
A.D. 303-311

CONSTANTINE
A.D. 272-337

CONSTANTINE: A.D. 272-337

The tide finally turned in the terrible struggle between paganism and Christianity when Constantine (c. 272-337) legalized Christianity and it became the official religion of the Roman Empire in 380. This new expression of faith allowed for believers to integrate into a new social order where Christianity was not only accepted but now enjoyed privileges unknown to the early Church.



Richard Rohr wrote an article stating that the single most unfortunate thing that happened to Christianity was the disappearance of persecution. He wrote the following:

I'm sure the Emperor Constantine thought he was doing Christians a favour when he ended official persecution and made Christianity the established religion of the empire. Yet it might be the single most unfortunate thing that happened to Christianity. Once we moved from the margins of society to the centre, we developed a new film over our eyes. After that, we couldn't read anything that showed Jesus in confrontation with the establishment, because we were the establishment, and usually egregiously so. Clear teaching on issues of greed, powerlessness, nonviolence, non-control, and simplicity were moved to the side-lines, if not actually countermanded.

As long as the Church bore witness from the margins in some sense, and as long as we operated from a minority position, we had greater access to the truth, to the Gospel, to Jesus. In our time we have to find a way to disestablish ourselves, to identify with our powerlessness instead of our power, our dependence instead of our independence, our communion instead of our individualism. Unless we understand that, the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7) isn't going to make any sense.

Reflections

In his work called *Apology*, the Latin apologist Tertullian made this now-famous comment: *"The oftener we are mown down by you, the more in number we grow; the blood of the martyr is the seed of rival."* Somehow, the suffering of some Christians spurred others to more faithful living. The apostle Paul noted that "most of the brethren, trusting in the Lord because of my imprisonment, have far more courage to speak the word of God without fear" (Phil. 1:14). Through all the terrible persecutions of the early centuries the church continued to grow.

It remains a miracle that the church not only survived more than 300 years of brutal persecution but that it actually grew and revived. It is a clear testimony that the divine design by God for His church to prosper is neither prosperity nor security, it is persecution - it is taking up our crosses, denying ourselves and following Christ to the cross and through the cross. (Matthew 16:24)



HINDSIGHT

THE DEATH OF THE APOSTLES



Looking at the lives of the apostles, we find that martyrdom was a calling that applied to almost all of them. They were not referred to as “the persecuted Church”. It was normal Christianity. And even though the Bible does not expressly give details about the ways in which all the apostles died, we know much from early church historians. Let’s examine the historical evidence of how these men died (As explained by Jack Wellman).

- **How the Apostle Peter Died**

Peter was crucified but he thought himself unworthy of the same type of death that Jesus suffered and so asked to be hung upside down which was done in Rome.

- **How the Apostle Andrew Died**

Andrew was also crucified but he was crucified on an x-shaped cross in Greece. The fact that he was in Greece may mean that he was participating in the Great Commission and taking the gospel to the “known” world.

- **How the Apostle Matthew Died**

Matthew, like most of the apostles late in their lives, became a missionary and was arrested in Ethiopia. It was there that he was staked or impaled to the earth by spears and then beheaded.

- **How the Apostle Bartholomew or Nathaniel Died**

Bartholomew (Nathaniel) was martyred in Armenia, where he was basically flayed to death by whip, where he was literally torn to shreds. He too must have been taking the good news into that part of the world.

- **How the Apostle Thomas Died**

Not very much is known about the method of Thomas’ execution but that maybe due to the fact that he was a missionary in India when he was stabbed with a spear and died from the wound.



HINDSIGHT

THE DEATH OF THE APOSTLES

- **How the Apostle Philip Died**

According to most historians, Philip's death was exceedingly cruel. He was impaled by iron hooks in his ankles and hung upside down to die. Precious little else is known about the process but it is enough to know how he died.

- **How the Apostle James (son of Zebedee) Died**

The apostle James is not the same James as Jesus brother . James was far from any reliable historical writers or church historians but it is thought that he was beheaded by King Herod near Palestine.

- **How the Apostle Jude Died**

The apostle Jude, who wrote the next to the last book in the New Testament by the same name, went all the way to Persia and it was there that he was crucified by the Magi. Apparently Jude was in Persia on a missionary trip.

- **How the Apostle Matthias Died**

Matthias was the apostle that was selected to replace Judas who hung himself. He was apparently stoned and then beheaded late in the 1st century.

- **How the Apostle John Died**

This is the disciple whom Jesus loved and was the only one that died a natural death...that is by old age and not martyred. However he was imprisoned on the island of Patmos where he wrote the Book of Revelation.

- **How the Apostle James the Less Died**

He was called James the Less to distinguish him from the other apostle named James and the James who was Jesus half-brother. James the Less was thrown from the pinnacle of the temple and then beaten to death.

- **How the Apostle Simon Died**

The apostle Simon is not Simon Peter (Andrew's brother) but Simon the Zealot. Very little is known about him inside or outside of the Bible. All that is known about his death is that he was also was crucified.

- **How James, the Brother of Jesus Died**

James, was not an apostle but he was one of the early church leaders and the account of his death is horrific. He died early in the church history while the New Testament was still being compiled. He was believed to have been thrown some 100 feet off a wall. This was done to him after he repeatedly refused to deny his faith in Jesus. After the fall, he was somehow still alive and was then beaten to death with clubs.

- **The Apostle Paul**

Most historians, both secular and church, say that Paul was beheaded.

Nearly all the disciples died on mission trips. They were not martyred for their convictions but because of their witnesses, as the Lord promised in Acts 1:8. They were not inconvenienced but brutally killed



HINDSIGHT

THE ABC OF PAUL'S PERSECUTION

In Acts 9:15 the Lord instructs Ananias to go to Saul, later to be called Paul, and to prepare him for ministry. But the message that Ananias is to bring to Saul is not one of affirmation; it is not how much he will be used, what powerful impact he will have on future generations or how special he is as an elect messenger. No, the only message Ananias must bring to Saul is to (Acts 9:16) *"show him how much he must suffer for His name."*

It will do all teachers well to remember these words. This should be the very first introduction of every Church planter to a every new group of believers. Tell them that forgiveness didn't come cheaply and even though it is free, it will cost them something. If this is not the message we teach our disciples then we are introducing followers to a false Jesus.

Paul later followed the same model of discipleship. To his young disciple, Timothy, Paul encourages him "to join with me in suffering for the gospel" (2 Timothy 1:8). Paul was mentoring this young disciple into a life of sacrifice. It was not taught, it was caught. Timothy must have watched Paul closely as he suffered persecution. Not only did he listen to the teachings of Paul, but he saw the scars on his body. An example to imitate and follow wholeheartedly. But what did the sufferings of Paul entail? Paul actually lists some of his sufferings in 2 Corinthians 11:23-28 1. *in labours more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequently, in deaths often. From the Jews five times I received forty stripes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods; once I was stoned; three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I have been in the deep; in journeys often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils of my own countrymen, in perils of the Gentiles, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; in weariness and toil, in sleeplessness often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness besides the other things, what comes upon me daily: my deep concern for all the churches."*

We tend to read over this too quickly and too lightly and then move on to explore Paul's teachings, as if suffering was an unfortunate by-product of a faithful life. But suffering was his teaching and persecution his message. His teachings were a by-product of his life, and not the other way round. So, in order to fully understand the Christianity that Paul preached, let's contemplate his life, his death and the joy he endured in between. This might be comprehensive to read but it is important to read and comprehend. "I don't want you to be uninformed about my sufferings" said Paul to the Church in Corinth (2 Cor. 1:8), so, let's do the same and take this to heart. Let us spend some time to understand Paul, his sufferings and how he embraced his cross.: *(taken from The Sufferings of Paul - <http://www.biblecharts.org/apostlepaulcharts/>)*

A. "In labours more abundant."(23)

The sufferings of Paul in labouring for the advancement of the cause of Christ were unparalleled and alone when compared to others. He literally gave his life.

B. "In stripes above measure."(23)

This particular suffering probably refers to scourging inflicted by the heathen. Their scourging would not be limited to forty stripes, save one, which the Jews restricted. Scourings from the Jews will be mentioned later.

C. "In prisons more frequently."(23)

Up to this point in Paul's life (A.D. 57), Luke has recorded only one imprisonment of Paul, and that at Philippi. (Acts 16:23-29). It should however be observed that Luke does not give a complete account of Paul's life and work in his writing of Acts. Many details are omitted. Therefore, much that was said and done is simply not recorded in Acts nor referred to in any of Paul's writing.



HINDSIGHT

THE ABC OF PAUL'S PERSECUTION

D. "In deaths often."(23)

Paul was frequently confronted with situations that could have resulted in death. (2 Corinthians 4:11 – "For we who live are always delivered to death for Jesus' sake, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh.")

E. "From the Jews five times I received forty stripes minus one." (24)

Some simple calculations would indicate that Paul was assigned a total of 200 stripes with 195 actually being inflicted. None of these occasions is mentioned in Acts. However, it is possible that he had been whipped at Damascus after his conversion. Perhaps he was also beaten in Jerusalem and Antioch in Pisidia. We cannot know conclusively. The chiefs of the synagogues had the power to inflict stripes on their people. No doubt, they would delight in inflicting such on Paul as he would frequently preach in their synagogues that which they thought to be heresy. (Deuteronomy 25:2-3 – "Then it shall be, if the wicked man deserves to be beaten, that the judge will cause him to lie down and be beaten in his presence, according to his guilt, with a certain number of blows. Forty blows he may give him and no more, lest he should exceed this and beat him with many blows above these, and your brother be humiliated in your sight.") For this type of punishment, the victim was stripped to the waist and tied in a bent position to a low pillar, and the stripes with a whip of three thongs were inflicted on the back between the shoulders.

F. "Three times I was beaten with rods." (25)

This was a Roman method of scourging. It sometimes resulted in death. Only one of these three occasions is recorded in Acts, and that in Acts 16:22-24. On this recorded occasion in Philippi, it was an illegal act in Paul's case. With backs bleeding and sore, Paul and Silas were cast into the dark dungeon and their feet were made secure in the stocks in the inner prison (maximum security).

G. "Once I was stoned."(25)

Stoning was the usual Jewish mode of punishing blasphemy. This occasion is recorded in Acts 14:19 and occurred at Lystra during Paul's 1st missionary journey. Paul, then known as Saul, is first mentioned in the Bible in Acts 7:58 on the occasion of Stephen's being stoned to death. One cannot help but wonder if perhaps Paul thought of Stephen as he himself was being stoned.

H. "Three times I was shipwrecked." (25)

None of these instances are recorded in Acts. However, Paul frequently travelled by ship. Defective navigation, unskilled shipbuilding, and want of the mariner's compass, shipwrecks were frequent. However, Paul would suffer at least one more shipwreck, and that on his way from Caesarea to Rome. Acts 27:14-44.

I. "A night and a day I have been in the deep." (25)

Perhaps Paul was able to support himself on some floating piece of debris from the ship until he was rescued. It is not hard to imagine that Paul would spend this time in closeness to God much as he and Silas had done when cast into the inner prison (maximum security) in Philippi in Acts 16.

J. "In journeys often." (26)

Traveling in the days of Paul was both difficult and dangerous. According to Christian History Magazine the estimated distance of Paul's three missionary journeys was nearly **22,000 km**: He covered many of the kilometres by foot. Paul's ministry brought him into contact with the Jews, Gentiles, magistrates, mobs, and soldiers. His travels brought him into a variety of perils.



HINDSIGHT

THE ABC OF PAUL'S PERSECUTION

K. "In perils of waters." (26).

Perhaps this would involve rivers and streams. Many of the countries Paul travelled in abounded in unbridged streams, rivers, and mountain torrents. There was a constant danger of death from drowning or being swept away by the sudden rush of swollen streams.

L. "In perils of robbers." (26).

Many areas were infested with robbers. It is very likely that with so much traveling, Paul was often attacked and his life endangered.

M. "In perils of my own countrymen." (26).

This would be the Jews. In most cases the Jews were the first to stir up opposition to Paul. This was done at:

a. Damascus.	Acts 9:23	b. Jerusalem.	Acts 9:29
c. Antioch in Pisidia.	Acts 13:50	d. Iconium.	Acts 14:5.
e. Lystra.	Acts 14:19	f. Thessalonica.	Acts 17:5.
g. Berea.	Acts 17:13	h. Corinth.	Acts 18:12

The Jews had deep enmity against Paul as a follower of Christ and as an apostle. He was in constant danger of being put to death by the Jews. a. Acts 21:31 b. Acts 23:12-13 c. Acts 25:3

N. "In perils of the Gentiles." (26).

This would refer to non-Jews—the Gentiles. The Gentiles were generally stirred up against Paul by the Jews. At various times the gentiles were stirred up against Paul because of their idolatry and superstitions. This was done at:

a. Iconium.	Acts 14:1.	b. Philippi.	Acts 16:9.
c. Ephesus.	Acts 19:23		

O. "In perils in the city." (26)

This happened in:

1. Damascus.	Acts 9:23	2. Jerusalem.	Acts 9:29
3. Antioch in Pisidia.	Acts 13:50	4. Iconium.	Acts 14:5.
5. Lystra.	Acts 14:19	6. Philippi.	Acts 16:9.
7. Thessalonica.	Acts 17:5.	8. Berea.	Acts 17:13
9. Corinth.	Acts 18:13	10. Ephesus.	Acts 19:23

P. "In perils in the wilderness." (26)

In traveling through the wild waste tracts of land between Perga and Antioch in Pisidia, or thence to Lystra and Derbe, or crossing the mountain of Taurus into the cities of Galatia, etc., there would be great dangers:

a. Weather	b. Wild beasts
c. Hunger and want.	d. Inadequate shelter
e. Robbers	



HINDSIGHT

THE ABC OF PAUL'S PERSECUTION

Q. "In perils in the sea." (26)

Perils in the sea could come in many forms. Among them would be: Storms, Shipwreck, being at the mercy of the sea and weather, being lost, and pirates. Since Paul frequently travelled by sea in the course of his journeys, the risk of these type of perils was greatly increased.

R. "In perils among false brethren." (26)

Paul saw the treachery of those who professed to be his brothers in Christ, and yet endeavoured to deliver him unto the power of his enemies. Betrayal hurts! It hurts worse when the betrayer is a friend.

S. In weariness and toil." (27)

Wearisome toil and consequent exhaustion from his labours were frequent companions to Paul.

T. "In sleeplessness often." (27)

Paul experienced many sleepless periods in his Christian walk. He pursued his work by night as well as by day. On some occasions he sacrificed sleep for teaching and preaching. On some occasions he sacrificed sleep for prayer and meditation.

U. "In hunger and thirst." (27)

Through the lack of necessary food, Paul experienced hunger and thirst on a number of occasions. This may have been brought on by:

- a. Danger keeping him away.
- b. Not being around where food could be purchased.
- c. Lack of money at times to buy the necessary food.

No doubt there were many times when Paul was well nourished spiritually, while being famished physically.

V. "In fastings often." (27)

Fasting (the abstinence from food) was practiced by Paul when he preferred the service of Christ and labour for the salvation of men to the satisfaction of physical want.

W. "In cold and nakedness." (27)

In traveling to and through many half-civilized countries, Paul was often insufficiently clad. In his labours and travels his clothing became old and badly worn. Many times, there were no friends to replace them. Many times, there was no money with which to buy new clothes. From his prison cell in Roman, Paul penned these words to Timothy "Bring the cloak that I left with Carpus at Troas when you come -- and the books, especially the parchments . . . Do your utmost to come before winter . . ." 2 Timothy 4:13, 21.

X. "my deep concern for all the churches."(28)

In addition to all of these many bodily afflictions, Paul felt the care of all the churches resting upon him. Paul's writings indicate his constant concern and prayer for those to whom he was writing. The anxiety which Paul had for the churches was more real and intense than that which many ordinary people have for food and raiment.



HINDSIGHT

THE ABC OF PAUL'S PERSECUTION

The number of sufferings listed in 2 Corinthians 11:23-28 by category is twenty-four (24). One third of that number (8) are "perils." So many, so varied, and so terrible, and yet in the Lord's service he had come safely through them all. Paul was truly owned by Christ. He literally bore in his body the marks of his devotion and faithfulness.

Paul's other sufferings is also Recorded in the Book of Acts

- | | |
|--|------------------|
| 1. His life was threatened in Damascus. | Acts 9:23 |
| 2. His life was threatened again in Jerusalem. | Acts 9:29 |
| 3. Persecuted and run out of Antioch in Pisidia. | Acts 13:50 |
| 4. Faced possible stoning at Iconium. | Acts 14:5. |
| 5. Stoned and left for dead in Lystra. | Acts 14:19 |
| 6. Opposed and made the centre of controversy. | Acts 15:11 |
| 7. The loss of a co-worker, Barnabas. | Acts 15:39 |
| 8. Beaten with rods and imprisoned at Philippi. | Acts 16:23 |
| 9. Cast out of Philippi. | Acts 16:39 |
| 10. His life was threatened in Thessalonica. | Acts 17:5-7, 10. |
| 11. Forced out of Berea. | Acts 17:23-14. |
| 12. Mocked in Athens. | Acts 17:18 |
| 13. Taken before the judgment seat in Corinth. | Acts 18:12 |
| 14. Opposed by the silversmiths in Ephesus. | Acts 19:23-41. |
| 15. Plotted against by the Jews in Greece. | Acts 20:3. |
| 16. Apprehended by the mob in Jerusalem. | Acts 21:27-30. |
| 17. Arrested and detained by the Romans. | Acts 22:24 |
| 18. Barely escaped being scourged. | Acts 22:24-29. |
| 19. Rescued from the Sanhedrin mod action. | Acts 23:1-8. |
| 20. Assassination plot against him. | Acts 23:12-22. |
| 21. Two-year imprisonment in Caesarea. | Acts 23:33-27:2. |
| 22. Shipwreck on the island of Melita (Malta). | Acts 27:41-28:1. |
| 23. Suffered a snakebite. | Acts 28:3-5. |
| 24. First Roman imprisonment. | Acts 28:13-15. |

Yes, Paul did Suffer. But through it all, Paul's faith continued to excel. 2 Corinthians 12:10 – "Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

DISCUSSION GROUPS



If you were a companion on Paul's journeys, how would you approach it?
What has your faith cost you? Discuss the challenges you face in the light of Paul's sufferings and evaluate your response in comparison with Paul's call to rejoice



In the light of all of this consider Luke. Luke was the author of the books of Luke and Acts in the Bible and also that he was a physician .He was a close friend of Paul, who referred to him as "the beloved physician" (Colossians 4:14) and also as a "fellow labourer" (Philemon 1:24).

But something hidden by his own pen reveals a virtue so great, that it cannot be kept a secret. From scripture we know that Luke was the author of the book of Acts. Some parts of Acts were written in the third person where Luke mostly refers to Paul and his companions as "**they**". In Acts 14:26, as example, Luke reports how "**they**" sailed back to Antioch from Attalia, where **they** had been committed to the grace of God for the work **they** had now completed. This was Paul and Barnabas travelling and Luke reporting.

However, in Acts 27 we get a remarkable new glimpse into Luke's life. Luke now reports that "*When it was decided that **we** would sail for Italy, Paul and some other prisoners were handed over and **we** boarded a ship from Adramyttium.*

Paul was arrested and was now being shipped to prison in Italy. But this time Luke is not writing in the third person. He is there. Luke now travels side by side with the great apostle. It is not **they** anymore, it is **we**. From this we can deduct a wonderful lesson. According to history, a prisoner on his way to Rome for the court hearing was allowed to take only two slaves with him. No-one else. Therefore, it is probable that Dr. Luke signed himself in as a slave so that he could accompany and nurture Paul. He goes from doctor to slave. Commitment can hardly go further than that.



HINDSIGHT

MODERN HISTORY

Persecution is however not only a historical fact. In a recent article, Justin D. Long emphasized the startling fact that more people have died for their faith in the Twentieth Century than in all of the previous centuries combined. “During this century, we have documented cases in excess of **26 million martyrs**. From AD 33 to 1900, we have documented 14 million martyrs.” Below are a few names representing countless martyrs in modern-day history (1600 -).

Francis Taylor, 1621
 Vietnamese Martyrs, 1625 - 1886
 Magdalene of Nagasaki, 1634
 Lorenzo Ruiz, 1637
 Canadian Martyrs, North American Martyrs, 1642–1649
 Arthur Bell, O.F.M., 1643
 Isaac Jogues, S.J., 1646
 John de Britto, 1647–1693
 Francis Ferdinand de Capillas 1648
 Diego Luis de San Vitores, S.J., and Pedro Calungsod, 1672
 Feodosia Morozova, 1675
 Oliver Plunkett, 1681
 Felipe Songsong, S.J., 1685
 Salem Witch Trials, 1692
 Devasahayam Pillai, 1712-1752
 Constantin Brâncoveanu, 1714
 Vicente Liem de la Paz, 1773
 Luís Jayme, 1775
 Cosmas of Aetolia, 1779
 Francisco Garcés, 1781
 Martyrs of Compiègne, 1794
 Andrés Quintana, 1812
 Pedro Marieluz Garces, 1825
 Tārore, 1836
 Andrew Dung-Lac 1839
 Hyrum Smith, 1844
 Korean Martyrs, 1839, 1846, 1866
 Peter Chanel, S.M., 1841
 Andrew Kim Taegon, 1846
 Marcus and Narcissa Whitman, 1847
 Lucy Yi Zhenmei, 1862
 Thomas Baker, 1867,
 Martyrs of Uganda, 1885–1887
 Victor Emilio Cárdenas, 1897

Amandina of Schakkebroek, 1900
 Maria Goretti 1902
 Armenian Martyrs, 1915-1923
 Duchess Fyodorovna, 1918
 Tsar Nicholas II of Russia 1918
 Nun Barbara (Yakovleva), 1918
 James Coyle, 1921
 Gregory of Cydonia, 1922
 Miguel Pro, S.J., 1927
 Cristóbal Magallanes Jara, 1927
 Mateo Correa Magallanes, 1927
 Toribio Romo González, 1928
 Manche Masemola, (1913–1928)
 José Sánchez del Río 1928
 Innocencio of Mary 1934
 Bartolome Blanco Marquez, 1936
 Alexander Hotovitzky, 1937
 Peter of Jesus Maldonado, 1937
 Paul Schneider (pastor), 1939
 Martyrs of Songkhon, 1940
 Maximilian Kolbe, 1941
 Edith Stein O.C.D., 1942
 Gorazd, 1942
 Lucian Tapiedi, 1942
 Franz Jägerstätter, 1943
 Dusty Miller, 1945
 Marcel Callo, 1945
Dietrich Bonhoeffer, 1945
 Rolando Rivi, 1945
 Peter To Rot, 1945
 Martyrs of Albania, 1945-1974
 Theodore Romzha, 1947
 Nykyta Budka, 1949
 Beda Chang, S.J., 1951
 Alberto Hurtado, S.J., 1952

Francis Xavier Ford, M.M., 1952
 Martyrs of Laos, 1954-1970
 Zdenka Cecilia Schelingová, 1955

Jim Elliot, 1956

Nate Saint, 1956

Ed McCully, 1956
 Pete Fleming, 1956
 Roger Youderian, 1956
 Esther John 1929–1960
 Wang Zhiming, 1973
 Martyrs of La Rioja, 1976
 Janani Jakaliya Luwum, 1977
 Óscar Romero, 1980
 Ita Ford, 1980
 Maura Clarke, 1980
 Dorothy Kazel, 1980
 Jean Donovan, 1980
 Stanley Rother, 1981
 Jerzy Popiełuszko, 1984
 Martyrs of Algeria, 1994-1996
 Rani Maria Vattalil, 1995
 Kosheh Martyrs, Egypt, 1998–2000
 Rufus Halley, 2001
 Martin Burnham, 2002
 Mary Stachowicz, 2002
 Andrea Santoro, 2006
 Fabianus Tibo, 2006
 Leonella Sgorbati, 2006
 Ragheed Ganni and companions, 2007
 Paulos Faraj Rahho, 2008
 Nicholas Pillai Pakiaranjith, 2008
 Nag Hammadi martyrs, Egypt 2010
 Baghdad martyrs, 2010
 Luigi Padovese, 2011
 Shahbaz Bhatti, 2011
 Nigerian martyrs, 2012
 Frans van der Lugt, S.J., 2014
 Christians martyred by ISIL, 2014-2019
21 Coptic Martyrs of Libya, 2015
 Jacques Hamel, Normandy 2016
 Cairo martyrs, 2016
 Alexandria martyrs, 2017
 Sutherland Springs martyrs, 2017
 John Allen Chau, 2018
 Sri Lankan martyrs, 2019



DISCUSSION GROUPS

How many names do you recognise?
 Now, pick any names of the above list and do some research into their lives, their ministries and their deaths.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_Christian_martyrs

<https://www.christianity.com/church/church-history/timeline/1901-2000/modern-persecution-11630665.html>

ADONIRAM JUDSON

Yes, there is much to celebrate about a victorious God. But there is also a need for Christians to become Good Friday people – crucified, sacrificial and Christ-like. There needs to be a balance.

Adoniram Judson and his wife Ann arrived as missionaries in Rangoon, Burma, in 1813, not knowing if they'd be executed immediately by the king, who put to death anyone he pleased on a whim. They spent six years learning the language and seven years before seeing their first convert. All three of their children died, followed by Ann. Adoniram married again, and was widowed again. In total, six of his children died. The only time he went back to the US in 38 years was when his second wife was sick and needed repatriating, but she died at sea. He took 20 years to translate the Bible.

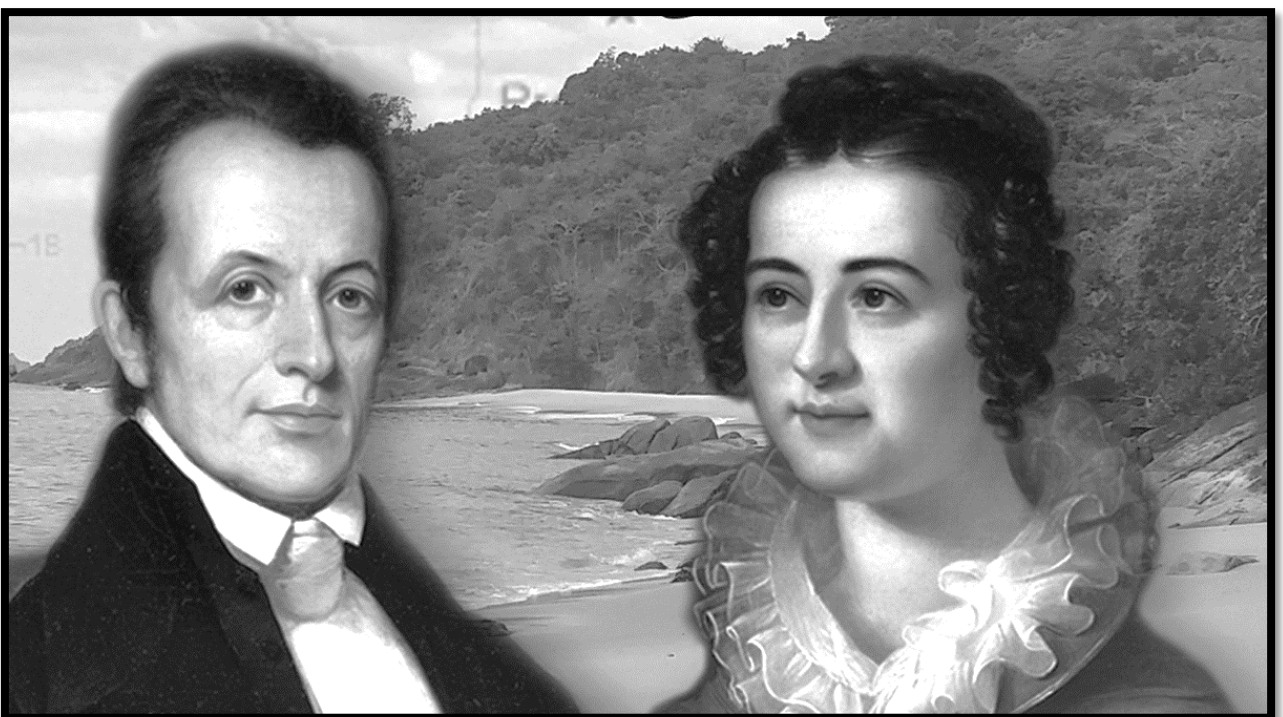
Judson spent 17 horrific months in the notorious Ava prison during the Anglo-Burmese war, suffering indescribable treatment. For the rest of his life he bore the scars made by the chains and iron shackles which had bound him during that time.

Yet upon his release, he went back to the regional authority to gain permission to resume preaching the Gospel. The scornful ruler denied his request, saying:

"My people are not fools enough to listen to anything a missionary might say, but I fear they might be impressed by your scars and turn to your religion!"

When he first arrived, nobody had ever heard the name of Jesus in the Burmese kingdom. When he died, there were 7,000 baptised.

We are indeed called to be a Good Friday people, not only an Easter Sunday people. The idea of the sacrificial, wounded Saviour is central to Christian theology. The testimony of freedom lies not in the fact that we are free to choose, but in the fact that we are free to become imitators of a crucified Christ, in word and in deed.





PIERRE KORKIE

Pierre Korkie was a **South African teacher** who, together with his wife Yolande and two children, worked and lived in Yemen with a deep desire to radiate the life of Christ to people of this closed nation. Pierre was working as a teacher along with his wife Yolande, who did relief work in hospitals

Pierre was kidnapped by al-Qaeda militants in May 2013 along with his wife Yolande Korkie. He was held hostage for more than 18 months before he was killed by the militants during a failed rescue attempt by US and Yemeni special forces on December 6, 2014.

Yolande was also kidnapped but was released on January 10, 2014, following negotiations with tribal leaders. The couple had lived in Yemen for four years along with their two teenage children.

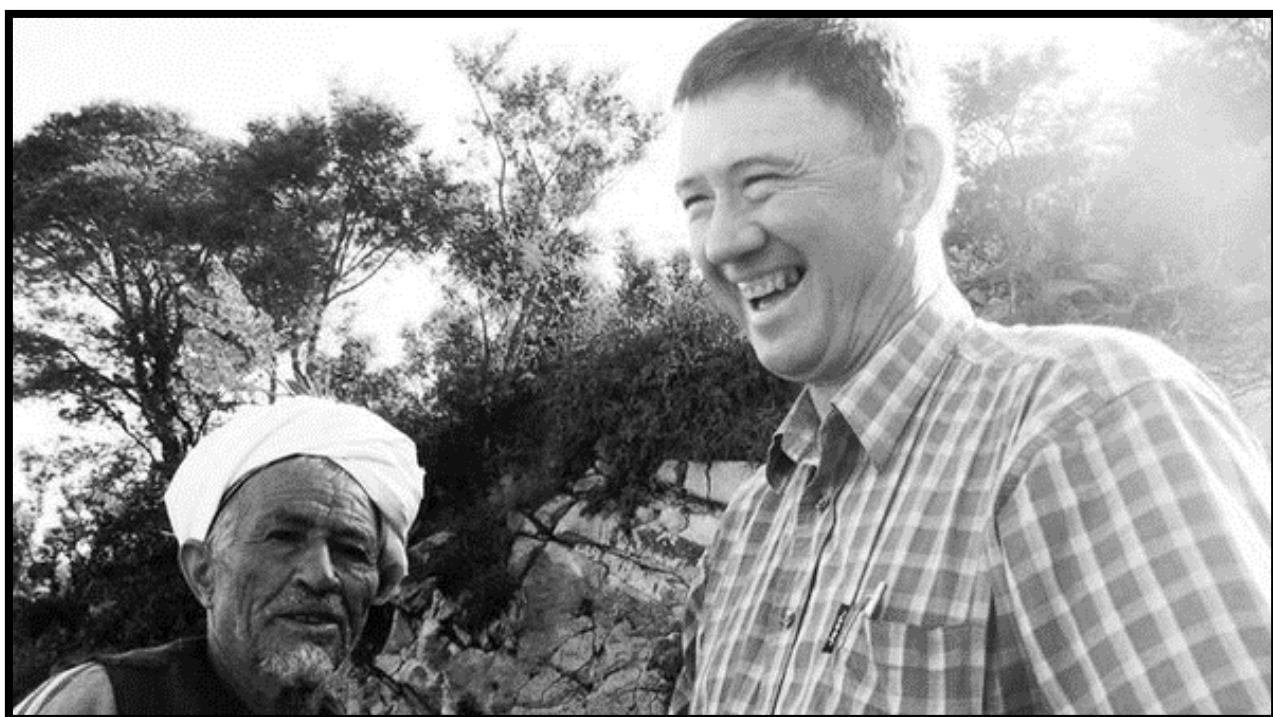
Yolanda Korkie, said the following words at press a conference after the killing of Pierre:

“Today we choose to forgive. We choose to love. We choose to rejoice in the memories of Pierre and keep him alive in our hearts. We honour Pierre’s legacy and give glory to God for his life and death.”

She closed with the following statement: “Unforgiveness is like drinking poison and then hoping the other person dies.”

The full story of their lives, and Pierre’s death, is available in book form at:

<https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/29104814-558-days>





JOSEPH TSON

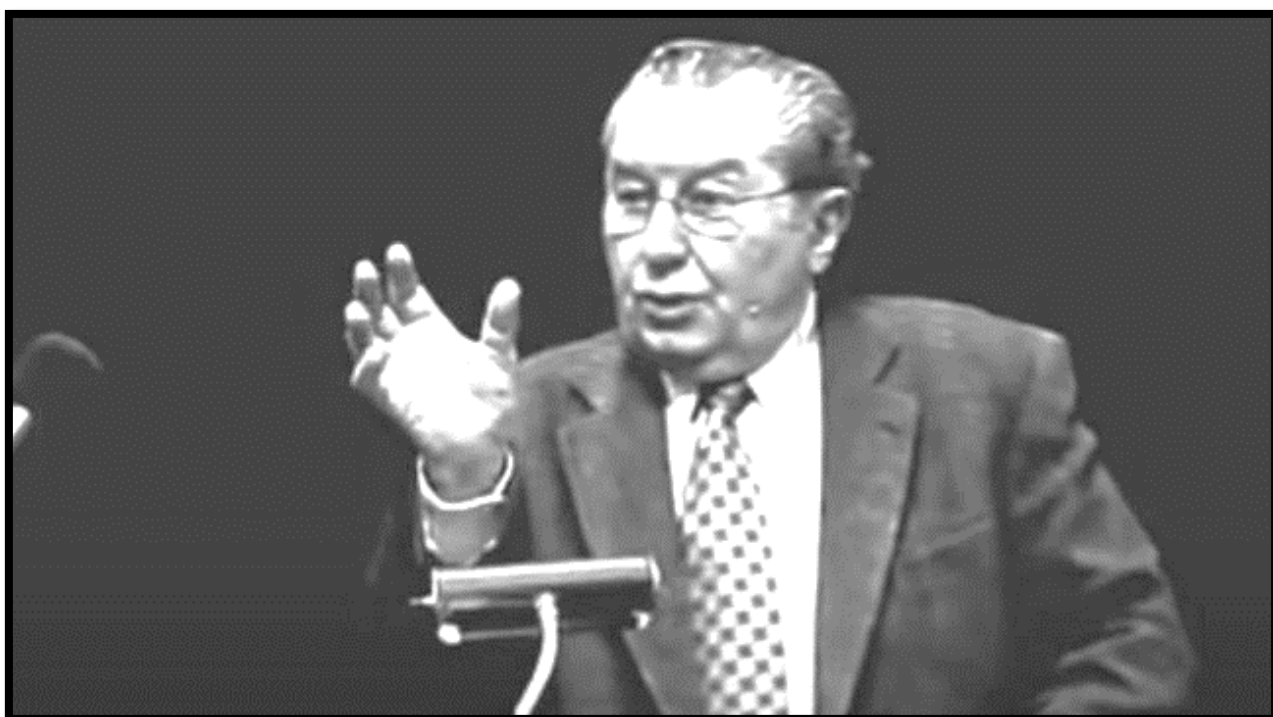
Living as a Christian under the dictatorship of Chauchescu in Romania had extreme difficulties and dangers. Josef Tson, once the best-known pastor in Romania, was ONE OF Romania's suffering saints. At a time when the Christian faith had become virtually illegal, he openly preached the gospel. Police threatened him repeatedly with imprisonment and arrest.

Even though Reverend Tson had counted the cost and served the Lord and His flock faithfully, he feared the day that he would be called in by security. He knew the possibility of facing death was inevitable. Interrogators threatened him with death every day for six months.

The day that Joseph feared arrived as the security arrived at his home one day and took him to the headquarters. Joseph was instructed to sit on a chair and a gun was put to his head. "The choice is easy," came the commander's voice. "Deny Jesus or we pull the trigger." This was indeed the moment that Joseph had feared all through his ministry, but suddenly the Spirit of the Lord filled his whole being. "If you kill me today you will do me a great favour. All my sermons that were recorded will be in great demand because I will be a martyr for Christ. You will help me greatly to share my messages. You will also help me to go to my Lord quickly!" Joseph fearlessly replied. He then concluded "Your supreme weapon is killing. My supreme weapon is dying. My preaching will speak ten times louder after you kill me."

The officer dropped the gun. "You Christians are crazy!" he shouted before commanding the officers to take Joseph back home. Joseph's life was spared, but in a sense, he lost it that day. "Never again did I fear what man can do to me. Never again did I fear for losing my life," Joseph told us later

"During the time I was expecting to be crushed by the Romanian secret police interrogators, God became more real to me than ever before or after in my life. It is difficult to put into words the experience I had with God at that time. It was like a rapture into a sweet and total communion with the Beloved. God's test for me then became the pathway to a special knowledge of the reality of God." Finally, in 1981, the Romanian government exiled him.





LABIB MADANAT

Pastor Labib Madanat was the Executive Secretary of the Palestinian Bible Society before he sadly passed away in 2021

During his decades of ministry, Labib Madanat repeatedly passed through Israel's main international airport. So regularly did security detain and thoroughly search him, he developed his own response.

"Ben Gurion is my mission field," Madanat [would say](#). "When I tell them that I am a Palestinian Arab Christian, and that I love the God of Israel and their Messiah, I get their full attention!"

The son of Jordanian missionaries who later led his father's Jerusalem church, Madanat's role as director of the Palestinian Bible Society (PBS) and later coordinator of all the Bible societies in the Holy Land offered him a [platform](#) to live out the gospel in a polarized region. He died on November 14 2021 at the age of 56, after suffering three consecutive seizures during a ministry trip to Baghdad, Iraq.

Pastor Labib said the following after an attack on the Bible Society in 2006

"Death - we have to face it, one day or another. It is inescapable. But the sting of death has been broken by the cross of Jesus, by the love of Jesus Christ.

I know it is very difficult for the Church world-wide to see other Christian believers being harassed, threatened and persecuted. And out of this concern they want to be involved. They want to come to the rescue of the family. And this is wonderful because this is the spirit of the fellowship.

BUT, we need to be careful. Do not rob us of the courage which Christ give us. Stand with us to grow even stronger and stronger in this courage. Refrain from any act which might look like strengthening any trace of self-pity. Do not highlight the Muslims as the enemies. Muslims are not our enemies, they are our beloved. Do not let Satan define your vision. Let the love in Christ define your vision. Again, we are not naïve, but this is what we are called for."





PHILEMON

Philemon, a young pastor in Bhutan, had a ministry amongst Christians in his region who were persecuted and oppressed.

His activities were soon discovered and he was arrested. He was taken to a police station where his Bible was confiscated and he was beaten until he lost consciousness.

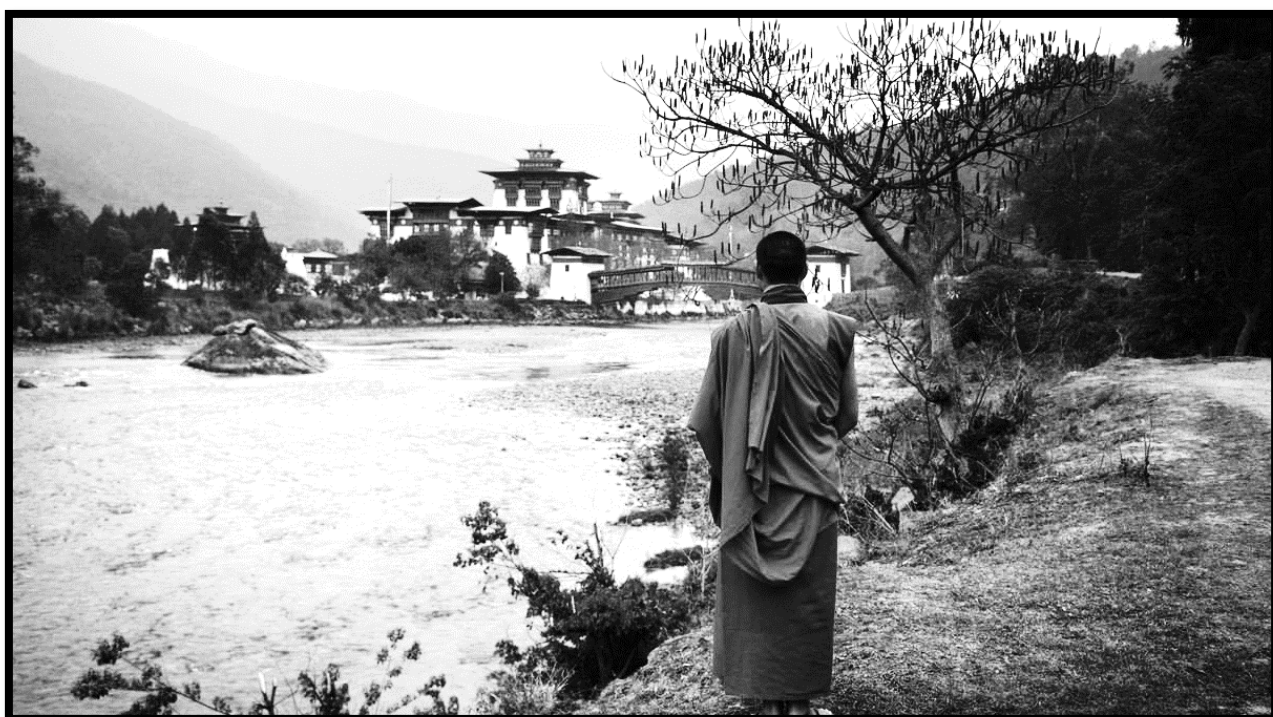
When Philemon regained consciousness, he was filled with so much joy – what a privilege to suffer for the Lord! For days on end the police would beat Philemon until he was unconscious and then take him away, only to face the beatings again the next day with the same consequences.

Of all his ordeals, Philemon had the following to say:

“While they were beating me, I only had one concern. I knew that other believers were watching me and I didn’t want them be filled with fear or be discouraged, so I knew I had to keep on smiling while they were beating me.”

What a testimony of self-denial and of true worship. What a selfless act – to think about those who surround you instead of your own pain. What a wonderful Christ-like attitude!

* Due to security a picture of Philemon can not be shown





NABIL QURESHI

In his book “Seeking Allah, Finding Jesus”, Nabeel Qureshi outlines the long and often painful process that led him to walk away from his faith as a Muslim and embrace Christ as his Saviour.

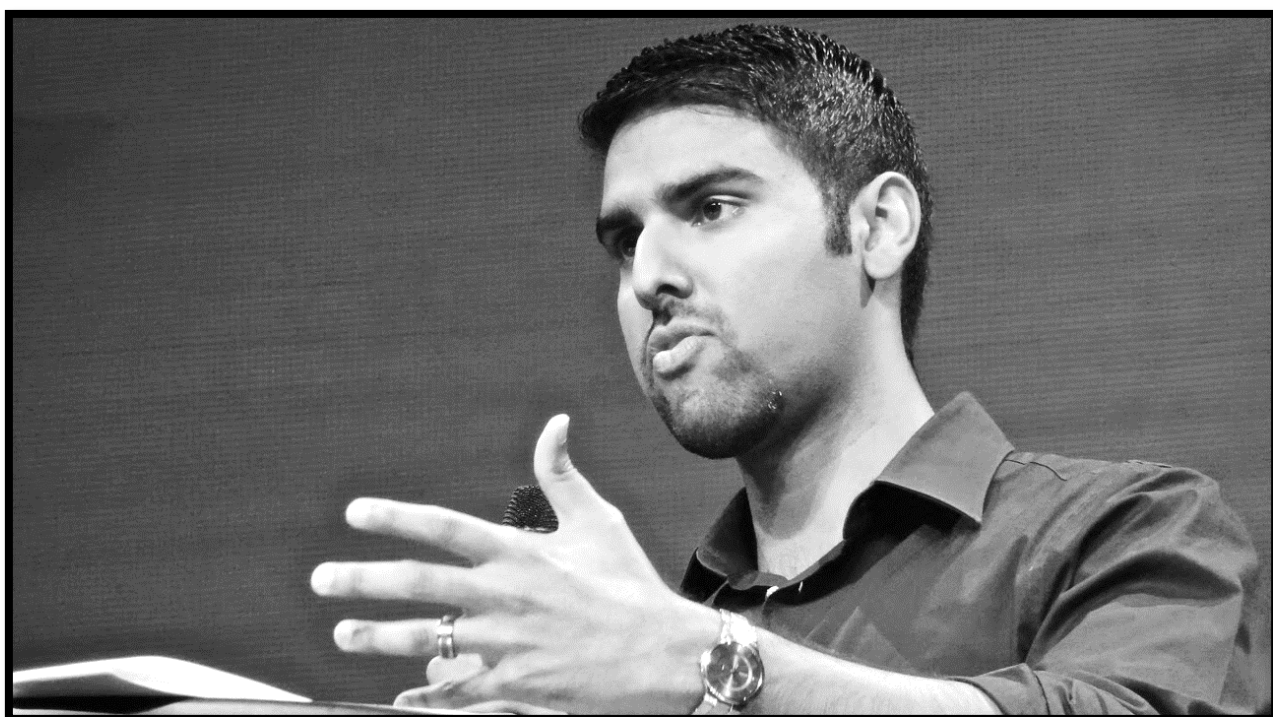
Qureshi’s maternal grandfather and great-grandfather had been Muslim missionaries and he saw himself in that light – as a missionary with the job of converting others to Islam. The logical place to start was with his Christian friends, and Nabeel challenged those who embraced Christ with the usual scepticism about Scripture and arguments of a corrupted Bible. As a result, Qureshi was challenged to consider the Quran’s dubious history. Taught that it was ‘a perfect book, dictated by Allah through the Archangel Gabriel to Muhammad and never changed at any point in history’, Nabeel discovered that it had been altered.

Initially, Qureshi was certain that even if he didn’t have the answers to the challenges that his friends presented to his faith, Muslim scholars/leaders and his own father would. But they didn’t. Qureshi writes: “It was then that I realised that... all my life, barriers had been erected that kept me from humbly approaching God and asking Him to reveal Himself to me. The arguments and apologetics tore down those barriers, positioning me to make a decision to pursue God or not.”

*But how could he hurt his parents by becoming a Christian? They had honestly done everything they thought was best for him. They loved him so much and he loved them equally in return. To abandon Islam would be to shame them in a way that they might never forgive. Would it be the end of his relationship with them? Qureshi notes that on the night that he finally gave his life to Christ, he told God that he wished he could die right then because of the pain his conversion was going to cause himself and his family. He asked God why it had to be like that. God’s response surprised him. He said to the new member of His family, **“Because this is not about you.”***

Qureshi has passed away in 2017 at the age of 34 after being diagnosed with advanced stomach cancer in August 2016.

Seeking Allah, Finding Jesus: A Devout Muslim Encounters Christianity” by Nabeel Qureshi





IBRAHIM

In March 2007 I had the joy of training a group of young Arab Christians who were on their way to an outreach to various Muslim nations in North Africa. Having a clear understanding of the cost of discipleship in a region where faith cost most, the training focused much on the purpose of the outreach, to ultimately bring Glory to God, and also a Biblical understanding of opposition, persecution and hardship. I used a number of inspirations from other closed countries as teaching and we spoke of the supremacy of God in worship and persecution. The students ended the week with a declaration as they stood up one by one and committed themselves to live to the Glory of God. They declared to live a life to be forgotten so that Christ can be remembered.

In early April 2007 the outreach teams completed their training and were commissioned to various countries in North Africa. One team was sent to a remote village in a mountainous region where the people were still unreached and untouched by the Gospel of Christ. The teams travelled from village to village where they showed the Jesus film and, through word and deed, witnessed about their relationship with Christ.

Then, in a matter of seconds, all the teachings and theology the students learnt in the months before suddenly became a reality. On the evening of April 26 as they were leaving a village they were ambushed by armed gunmen. The driver drove away as quickly as possible, but a number of students on the truck were wounded in the shooting. Four of them died.

When I heard the news my heart broke. I realised that I actually trained a group of believers for death. The theology of martyrdom for the sake of Christ suddenly had names and faces. My ministry would never be the same again.

The following year I returned to the school to train another group of young believers. Some of them were on their way back to the town where the tragedy occurred a year earlier. The group committed themselves to go back to the region of the traumatic event, not despite the tragedy but because of the tragedy. Two of the students who witnessed the death of their friends were now leaders in the school and as they shared their testimonies of the events a new dimension in my attitude towards worship unfolded. They simply started by referring back to the moment when they committed their lives to the glory of God.

The one young leader, mature beyond his years, shared his testimony with tears. Ibrahim shared that when he committed his life to the glory of God on that day a year ago it was more a theory than a reality, but he desired it more than anything else. Then the tragedy happened. Sitting in the back of the truck, the events that unfolded were unthinkable. Everything happened so quickly.

“When the flashes of gunfire exploded it seemed like time stood still. My best friend, Markos, was sitting next to me on the truck and as the bullet hit his chest he simply slumped into my arms. We first drove frantically to the nearest town looking for a clinic to tend to the wounded and the dead. With no facilities or medicine available we then had to drive a further five hours to the nearest hospital for help. The darkness and hopelessness turned the journey into an eternity. The questions, the fear and yet the serenity of it all made it feel surreal. When we finally reached the hospital Markos died in my arms. It was too late. But as he breathed his last words it reflected his commitment to his beloved saviour: “Tell my father I died for the glory of God” were his last words.

“At that moment” Ibrahim testifies, “The theory of the glory of God became a reality in my life. I felt it in its fullness. Now I am satisfied with the glory of God.”





CALEB

Brother Caleb came to know the Lord in the war torn country of Eritrea during his military training. Eritrea is the most closed country on the continent of Africa

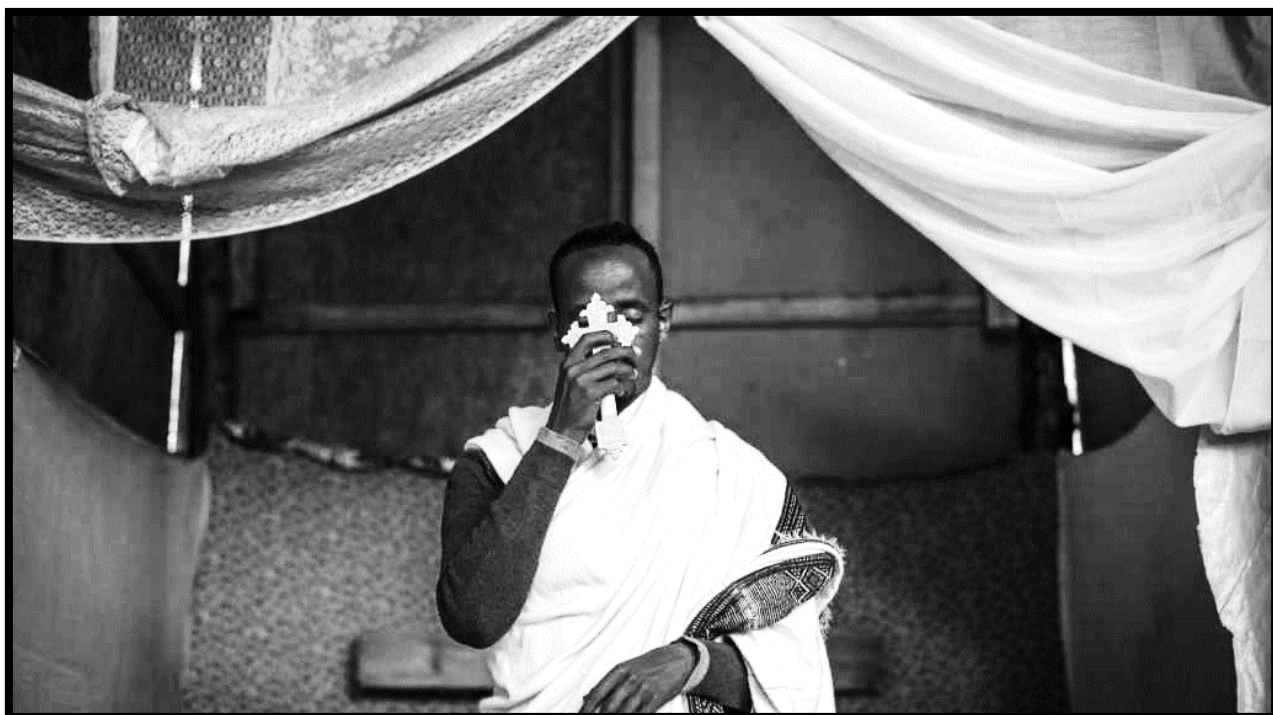
The moment Caleb came to know the Lord, the persecution started. His rations were immediately withdrawn, and for the next year, Caleb had no income from which to live. But he continued to serve the Lord faithfully and was rewarded a year later when he met believers in a nearby town who gave him his first copy of the Bible.

Caleb knew the risks increased by owning a Bible, so he immediately buried the Bible close to his living quarters. For three days, during lunch breaks, Caleb would secretly dig up his Bible and read it with joy.

But on one fatal day one of the officers followed him to the hiding place and discovered his secret. As Brother Caleb was busy digging up the Bible, the officer arrived on the scene and told him to keep on digging. He dug a hole nearly four meters deep. He was then forced to get into the hole and his hands were tied to his feet behind his back into the so-called 'helicopter' position. For the next month, Brother Caleb would do hard labour during the day and spend every night in that position in the hole.

Brother Caleb was in prison for many years. This brother has not known one day as a believer without persecution, yet he is one of the strongest ones among the nearly 2,000 believers in prison in Eritrea.

* Due to security a picture of Caleb can not be shown



JACKIE PULLINGER

Jackie Pullinger, at the age of 22 decided to be a missionary and had a dream that impressed upon her the idea of going to Hong Kong. She followed the vicar's advice and went to Hong Kong by boat in 1966.

However, when she arrived she knew no one there and had only \$10 on hand. The only reason the immigration officers allowed her in was because her mother's godson was a police officer there. She found work as a primary school teacher in the Kowloon Walled City, which in the 1960s was not policed and consequently had become one of the world's largest opium producing centres, run by Chinese criminal Triad gangs. Later she established a youth centre that helped the drug addicts and street sleepers inside the walled city. She also taught music at St. Stephen's Girls' College.

In 1981, she started a charity called the St Stephen's Society which provided rehabilitation homes for recovering drug addicts, prostitutes, and gang members. By December 2007 it housed 200 people. The charity's work was recognized by the Hong Kong government who donated the land for the rehabilitation homes.

Jackie Pullinger said the following: “

The principle of the Gospel is this: The Gospel always brings life to the receiver, and death to the giver. If the Gospel brought death to Jesus Christ, why do we think that in preaching the Gospel it would be any different to us?”





MARKO

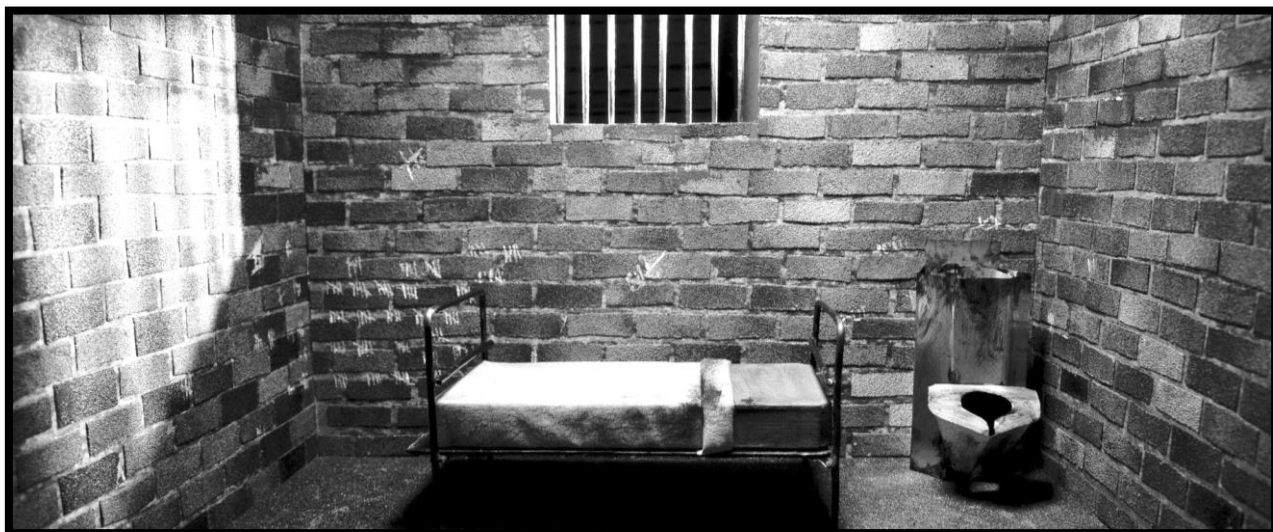
25 December is a time of peace and joy for those who are fortunate enough to celebrate the birth of their Saviour in freedom. For Marko and his two fellow believers this was the 15th Christmas that they had to celebrate behind the bars of a prison cell in a Muslim country.

26 December – We knew we had no option. We had to visit Marko as an encouragement and confirm to him once again the love of a Saviour who is called Immanuel. From the outset we understood the difficulties as we approached the grey prison building. Our Arab friend, Joshua, did everything in his power to assist us securely through the iron gates, but we knew that only a miracle from a loving Father would open doors to two westerners into this closed area. We were searched and most of the gifts were confiscated according to the needs and wants of the guards. We were then told to wait in a room that bore the marks of many tears and sorrows. We waited patiently as Joshua approached the dirty counter. “We would like to visit Marko Abraham,” he asked. The guard paged through a long list of names and unceremoniously answered “There is no one by this name.” Experience surfaced as Joshua tried again. “Sorry, I forgot, we would like to see prisoner number 9979.” The guard paged through the list again and answered abruptly, “Wait till you are called.”

Sadness filled our hearts. A human soul, a brother and a loved one, has been reduced to a number. We knew now even more than before that this was the right place and the right time for us to be. An even greater sense of sadness filled our hearts as we entered the “visiting quarters”. Even though we have often heard the saying that a prison cell in the Middle East is the closest to hell that you will experience on earth, nothing prepared us for the sense of hopelessness that we experienced in this room of despair. As the prisoners entered it was not difficult to recognize Marko and his two friends. Beaming eyes and smiling faces immediately assured us that they had not been separated from the love of God. Tears flowed freely as they shared how lonely they were on Christmas day and how glad they are to know that they are not forgotten.

“It was so difficult yesterday,” Marko spoke softly. “Apart from being a Christian prisoner in a ‘Muslim’ prison, it was also the fast of the Ramadan. We were not allowed out of our cells and we were not allowed to talk to anyone. Fortunately, a week ago the three of us got hold of a piece of cake and we hid it underneath our cushions especially for Christmas day. Yesterday, when the fast was broken, we walked to one another, held the slices of cake together and simply said ‘Merry Christmas’ – that was our Christmas.”

We felt so inadequate in the comfort that we tried to bring. We cried, we prayed but most of all we rejoiced. We knew once again that nothing can separate us from the love of God. The visiting hour flew past and soon it was time to say goodbye. Before being marched off back to his prison cell we looked at Marko and asked him a final question: “Marko, what are you going to do now when you get to your cell and once again you are all alone?” Marko smiled and with a deep sense of anticipation and serenity answered the following: “I simply spread the wings of my spirit and I fly to Jesus.”





JIM ELLIOT

Jim Elliot was an American Christian missionary who was killed during Operation Auca, an attempt to evangelize the Huaorani people of Ecuador. He was born in Portland, Oregon, and as a little boy growing up, he listened carefully as visiting missionaries told him about life on faraway mission fields. He asked them questions and dreamed about being a missionary himself someday.

On January 2, 1956, Jim Elliot and four other missionaries set out to set up camp in the territory of a dangerous and unreached tribe known then as the Auca tribe.

Even though it was dangerous, Jim Elliot had no doubt God wanted him to tell the Aucas about Jesus. After many months of dropping gifts to the Aucas and using an amplifier to speak out friendly Auca phrases, Jim and the other missionaries felt the time had come to meet the Aucas face-to-face.

One day while flying over Auca territory, Nate Saint spotted a beach that looked long enough to land the plane on. The five missionaries landed and made contact with the Aucas.

However, on January 8, 1956, five Auca Indians of Ecuador killed Jim Elliot and his four missionary companions. Four young wives lost husbands and nine children lost their fathers.

Elisabeth Elliot wrote that the world called it a nightmare of tragedy. Then she added, "The world did not recognize the truth of the second clause in Jim Elliot's credo:

'He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose.'"



CHAPTER 3

INSIGHT

Gaining a Biblical insight into persecution



INSIGHT

NORMAL CHRISTIANITY

Jesus was an honest and straightforward teacher. He never left anyone in any doubt as to what would happen if they chose to follow Him. Many modern-day preachers of the Gospel do, but Jesus never placed His disciples under any illusions. He did not say, “*Follow Me and everyday will be a Friday. God has a wonderful plan for your life!*” No. Jesus warned, whoever follows Him will face persecution. Today, the message is equally clear. Following Him is not a ‘walk in the park,’ it’s a walk with a cross. The fact is, following Jesus is difficult, and knowing what He says about persecution will have a huge impact on our journey of faith. It is therefore a key component for spiritual survival to follow a process where we engrave scripture in our hearts. So, **read** the verses below, take some time to **reflect** on each verse, do some **research** and find similar scriptures, **repeat** the verses and memorise them, and then apply it – **reproduce** what Christ taught in a way that will glorify Him. With the help of the Holy Spirit, you will then be able to stand firm in your faith.



- *Matthew 5:10 Blessed are those who have been **persecuted** for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*
- *Matthew 5:11 “Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me.*
- *Matthew 5:12 Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great; for in the same way they **persecuted** the prophets who were before you.*
- *Matthew 5:44 But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who **persecute** you,*
- *Matthew 10:16 “I am sending you out like sheep among wolves.”*
- *Matthew 10:19 But when they **hand you over**, do not worry about how or what you are to say; for it will be given you in that hour what you are to say.*
- *Matthew 10:22 You will be **hated** by all because of My name, but it is the one who has endured to the end who will be saved.*
- *Matthew 10:23 “But whenever they **persecute** you in one city, flee to the next; for truly I say to you, you will not finish going through the cities of Israel until the Son of Man comes.*
- *Matthew 24:9 “Then they will deliver you to **tribulation**, and will kill you, and you will be hated by all nations because of My name.*
- *Luke 21:12 “... they will lay their hands on you and will **persecute** you, delivering you to the synagogues and prisons, bringing you before kings and governors for My name’s sake.*
- *John 15:20 Remember the word that I said to you, ‘A slave is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted Me, they will also **persecute** you; if they kept My word, they will keep yours also.*
- *John 15:21 But all these things they will do to you for My name’s sake, because they do not know the One who sent Me.*
- *John 16:2 They will make you **outcasts** from the synagogue, but an hour is coming for everyone who kills you to think that he is offering service to God.*
- *Acts 9:16 “I will show him how much he must suffer for My name.”*
- *Acts 5:41 “The apostles left the Sanhedrin, rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name.”*
- *Acts 14:22 “... ‘We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God,’ they said.”*
- *1 Thessalonians 3:3 “... so that no one would be unsettled by these trials. For you know quite well that we are destined for them.”*
- *1 Peter 2:21 “To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in His steps.”*
- *Philippians 1:29 “For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for Him...”*



INSIGHT

NORMAL CHRISTIANITY

UNDERSTANDING THE CROSS

<https://www.crossway.org/articles/10-things-you-should-know-about-the-cross/>

Sometimes we fail in understanding persecution because we fail to understand the cross. In an article on Crossway, Patrick Schreiner - associate professor of New Testament and Biblical Theology at Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Kansas City, Missouri - explores **10 THINGS WE SHOULD KNOW ABOUT THE CROSS**

1 The cross is a Trinitarian event.

The Christian faith is distinctively Trinitarian and cross-shaped. Therefore, the cross must reveal the Trinity. God the Father sent the Son to save the world, the Son submitted to the Father's will, and the Spirit applies the work of redemption to Jesus followers. Redemption is predestined by the Father (Eph 1:3–6), accomplished by the Son (Eph 1:7–10), and applied by the Spirit (Eph. 1:13–14). The sacrifice, while uniquely the Son's work, is also the will of the three persons.

2 The cross is the center of the story of the Scripture.

A Bible without a cross is a Bible without a climax, a Bible without an ending, a Bible without a solution. The spiral of sin that began in Genesis 3 must be stopped; the death of Jesus terminates the downward spiral. In Jesus's body, he took on the sin of the world and paid the price of all humanity. Redemption is found not beyond the cross, not above the cross, not below the cross, but in the cross.

3 The cross redefines power in the kingdom.

Jesus's announcement that the kingdom of God has come is conclusively revealed in the Christ-event on the cross. The Scriptures narrate how God will manifest his kingship on the earth. Jesus comes as the true Son and redefines power by displaying strength through weakness. He does not exploit his power like Adam, but empties himself (Phil. 2:5–6). He becomes a servant of all, and thereby is exalted as ruler of all (Phil. 2:9–11). The cross is not only where our sin is paid for, where the devil is conquered, but the shape of Christianity.

4 The cross inaugurates the new covenant.

At the Last Supper Jesus interprets his death as bringing in the new covenant. It is by his body and blood that his new community is formed. Just as the people of Israel were sprinkled with blood as they entered a covenant with Yahweh, so the disciples are members of the new community by the pouring out of Jesus's blood. The new covenant community now has the Torah written on their hearts and they all know the Lord because of the gift of the Spirit (Jer. 31:33–34).

5 The cross conquers sin and death.

The cross cancels the record of debt that stood against humanity (Col 2:14). On the cross Jesus bore our sins in his body, so that we might die to sin and death (1 Pet. 2:24). The curse of sin and death was placed on Jesus so that we might obtain the blessings of Abraham (Gal 3:13). Understanding the cross and resurrection as a single event is important here, for it is through the death and resurrection of Christ that death is swallowed up in victory (1 Cor. 15:54–55).



INSIGHT

NORMAL CHRISTIANITY

6 The cross vanquishes the devil.

On the cross, Christ did not only conquer sin and death, but he conquered the spiritual forces of darkness. A cosmic eruption occurred at Golgotha; a new apocalyptic force entered the world and the old magic was conquered by a deeper magic. He disarmed the power and authorities, putting them to open shame, and triumphs over them on the cross (Col. 2:14). When Christ rises from the dead he is seated at the right hand of the Father in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power (Eph. 2:20–21).

7 The cross is substitutionary.

The cross is for us, in our place, on our behalf. He laid down his life for His sheep. He is our sacrificial lamb. “Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29). Just as Abraham raised his eyes and looked and saw a ram to offer as a burnt offering in the place of his son (Gen 22:13), so too we look up and see Jesus as our replacement. He became a curse for us (Gal 3:13), meaning he takes the place of all the enslaved, the rebels, the idolaters, and the murderers. If the conquering of the spiritual forces is the goal, then substitution is the ground or basis for this conquering (Gal. 1:4). “The cross represents not only the great exchange (substitutionary atonement), but also the great transition (the eschatological turn of the ages).”

8 The cross is foolishness to the world.

In a PBS television series the narrator said, “Christianity is the only major religion to have as its central focus the suffering and degradation of its God.” And Paul acknowledges that this message of Christ crucified will be a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles (1 Cor 1:23). It is not an inherently attractive message, until spiritual eyes of sight are granted. The world looks at the cross and sees weakness, irrationality, hate, and disgust. In the early decades of the Christian movement the scandal of the cross was most self-evident thing about it. It was not only the death of the Messiah, but the manner of his death that is an offense.

9 The cross brings peace, reconciliation, and unity.

At the cross the whole world has the opportunity to be reconciled to the Father. The peace that the world has been seeking, the unity of all people is found in blood. “For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility” (Eph. 2:14). Reconciliation for the world, peace, shalom, and unity comes only by the blood of the cross (Col 1:20). No blood means no harmony.

10 The cross is the marching order for Christians.

After Jesus explained to his disciples that he must suffer, he tells them, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me” (Matt 16:24). Paul embodies the cross in his ministry, becoming the fragrance of death as he is lead on the triumphal procession (2 Cor. 2:14–17), and he even says he has been crucified with Christ (Gal 2:20). But Paul does not merely apply the cross to his own ministry, but he instructs the new community at Philippi to have the mind of Christ (Phil. 2:5) which is defined by Jesus’s humility on the cross (Phil. 2:8). The cross is not only where our sin is paid for, where the devil is conquered, but the shape of Christianity. As Rutledge has said, “the crucifixion is the touchstone of Christian authenticity, the unique feature by which everything else. . . is given true significance.”



INSIGHT

WOUNDS

Now that we understand the cross of Jesus in a Biblical context, we need to gain insight into the purpose and the role of suffering in the life of the Church. Once we understand this, everything else will fall into place.

When Jesus told His disciples in **Luke 9:23** that *anyone who desires to follow Him must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow Him*, the disciples were under no illusions as to what He meant. They fully understood that “taking up your cross” meant only one thing and one thing only: DEATH. Not being ridiculed, slandered, or discriminated against, but DEATH.

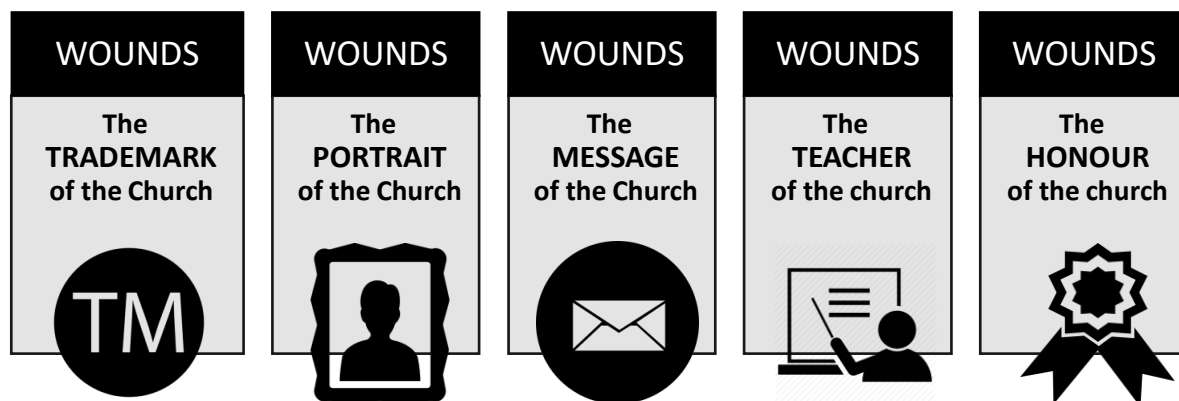
They knew this because... 11 of the 12 disciples were from Galilee where another Judas, Judas of Galilee recently led a rebellion. He gathered a force to throw the romans out but the romans won. The Roman general, Varus, wanted to teach the Jews a lesson and crucified more than 2,000 of them. Their crosses were put up and down all the roads of Galilee. Every day, as the walked the road to and from Galilee, the witnessed the agony of those who carried their crosses to their death.

And then they watched their beloved Teacher taking up His cross and the agony of His death. They understood the cost of followship very very clearly and they were afraid. Bitterly afraid. (John 20:19 On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, **with the doors locked for fear** of the Jewish leaders,

But then everything changed (John 20:19) when suddenly *Jesus came and stood among them. After he greeted them, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord.*

The disciples recognised Jesus by the wounds of the cross and everything they were taught, believed in and hoped for suddenly made sense. Seeing His wounds removed the shame of “taking up your cross” and signalled a new era in spirituality. The cross suddenly became a symbol of victory, not defeat; life not death. The disciples knew that this is the new benchmark for all who seek to share the message of Christ. There can be no victory without the cross, no forgiveness without the cross and no life without portraying the sacrificial lamb on the cross. Wounds will be the proof; the ID document of a true follower of Christ. People will only recognize the resurrected Lord in our lives by the wounds we carry on our bodies. People will only recognize a true follower of Christ by their sacrifices and the crosses they bear.

So, let us start by considering some of these lessons as we explore wounds as:





INSIGHT

WOUNDS – THE TRADEMARK OF THE CHURCH



Let's read John 20:19-23 again:

On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jewish leaders, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!" After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord. Again Jesus said, "Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you." And with that he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone's sins, their sins are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven."

There is a danger of reading over this too quickly. We need to understand the dynamics of what exactly took place. The disciples are gathered together behind locked doors, traumatised by the brutal death of their beloved teacher and meeting under a dark cloud of fear. Suddenly Jesus is in their midst. True to His nature He first puts their minds at peace and He then introduces Himself by showing them His wounds. This was intentional. He does not introduce himself like you and I would do, such as by saying "Look at my face, it is me" or "don't you recognise my voice, it is me". No, He simply shows the marks of the cross and His followers recognise Him. This becomes the trademark of everyone who calls himself a follower of Christ. The "cross marks" of Christ, become the "trademarks" of the Church.

The exalted Redeemer will always reveal Himself open-handed and open-hearted to all who seek redemption. This is His ID document for all to see. He bears the forgiveness of sins on His body and when he manifests His love to non-believers He shows them his hands and his side. This is the only way we, as His ambassadors, are allowed to introduce Him. Any other way is a false Jesus with a fake ID

The disciples recognised Jesus by his wounds and they were glad – but it doesn't end there. The great commission follows directly after the great reveal: *"As the Father has sent me, I am sending you."* (21) and then comes a unique instruction after He breathed on them to receive the Holy Spirit. (22) *"If you forgive anyone's sins, their sins are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven."*

Wow, what power? NO! These words are spoken in the context of the wounds and in the light of the commission. Jesus is not appointing the church as his moral watchdog; nor does he commission it to judge people. In John's Gospel, Jesus talks about sin as **unbelief**, the unwillingness or incapacity to grasp the truth of God's forgiveness manifested through Jesus on the cross. Sin in John's Gospel is not about moral failings; primarily it is an inability or refusal to recognize God's revelation when confronted by it, in Jesus. The wounds are the proof

Consequently, the resurrected Christ tells his followers that, through the Spirit that enables them to bear witness through their sacrifices, they can set people free from unbelief by revealing the wounds of a crucified Saviour.

Failure to bear our crosses, Jesus warns, will result in the opposite: a world full of people left unable to grasp the knowledge of a Saviour. Jesus is simply reporting that a church that does not bear witness to Christ is a church that leaves itself unable to play a role in delivering people from all that keeps them from experiencing the fullness that Jesus offers.

What Jesus in essence is teaching us in John 20 is the following: "Look at my wounds, now bear your own. Experience My peace, now share it with others. Receive My Spirit, now be my witnesses!"

You will always recognize the resurrected Lord by his wounds. You will always recognize a true believer and a true Church by the way they carry their cross. The sign of a true Church is a persecuted Church. The sign of true missionaries lies in the marks on their hands. Accept it or abort it



INSIGHT

WOUNDS – THE PORTRAIT OF THE CHURCH



Colossians 1:24 shares an amazing insight into why the wounds we display are so necessary in the Gospel we proclaim: Paul writes the following: *And now I am happy about my sufferings for you, for by means of my physical sufferings I am helping to complete what is still lacking of Christ's sufferings on behalf of his body, the church.*

There is only one other place where these two words **“to complete what was lacking”** come into conjunction in the Bible and that is in *Philippians 2:30* where it says *“Because he came close to death for the work of Christ, risking his life to complete **what was lacking** in your service to me.” (ISV)*

This provides a perfect interpretation of Colossians 1:24 and John Piper describes it as follows: “The situation is this: Epaphroditus was sent from the Philippian church over to Paul in Rome. He risks his life to get there, and Paul extols him for risking his life. The gift to Paul from the Philippians was a gift of the church as a body. It was a sacrificial offering of love. What was lacking was the church’s presentation of this offering in person. This was impossible, and Paul represents Epaphroditus as supplying this lack by his affectionate, zealous ministry.

So the picture is of a church that wants to communicate love in the form of money over to Rome, and they can’t do it. There’s too many of them. And it’s too far away. So they say, “Epaphroditus, represent us and complete what is lacking in our love. There’s nothing lacking in our love except the expression of our love in person there. Take it and communicate it to Paul.”

Now that’s exactly what Colossians 1:24 means. Jesus dies and he suffers for people all over the world in every nation. Then he is buried and, according to the Scriptures, raised on the third day. Then he ascends into heaven where he reigns over the world. And he leaves a work to be done.

Paul’s self understanding of his mission is this: That he is called by his suffering to complete the afflictions of Christ on the cross. That’s a design. This does not mean he atones for anybody’s sin or that Christ’s atoning death was in any way deficient. It means this. That the afflictions of Christ, acted out by Him in **FULLY** atoning worth are meant to be displayed and portrayed by his suffering Church for the ingathering of the nations. The one thing lacking in the sufferings of Christ Jesus is that His fully atoning love offering needs to be presented in person through missionaries to the peoples for whom he died. And Paul says, “I do this in my sufferings. In my sufferings I complete what is lacking in the sufferings of Christ.”

This means that Christ intends for the Great Commission to be a presentation to the nations of the sufferings of his cross through the sufferings of his people. That’s the way it will be finished. If you sign up for the Great Commission, that’s what you sign up for.

John Piper says the following:

More and more I am persuaded from Scripture and from the history of missions that God’s design for the evangelization of the world and the consummation of his purposes includes the suffering of his ministers and missionaries. To put it more plainly and specifically, God designs that the suffering of his ministers and missionaries is one essential means in the joyful triumphant spread of the gospel among all the peoples of the world.

It’s the means and **the design for the persecuted Church within the Kingdom of God, to reflect the cross to those who are longing for forgiveness and salvation**



INSIGHT

WOUNDS – THE PORTRAIT OF THE CHURCH

This principle is paramount in our understanding why wounds, sacrifice and suffering are essential elements in the Christian faith. Why can't the Lord just reveal His goodness through wealth, health and prosperity – like so many pastors preach. Well in a nutshell: Salvation came through the cross and therefore salvation needs to be displayed through the cross.

God's design for the advance of His Kingdom and the making of disciples is through the suffering of His Saints. We really need to understand this. Salvation came through the sacrifice on the cross, it can only be displayed and portrayed by showing the cross to those watching. We cannot proclaim a Saviour on a cross by portraying Him as source of wealth. That is a false Jesus

This is important, so let's elaborate

When Jesus mentored His disciples into a life of obedience he did so with a clear understanding that they would need to display the cross that He would embrace. He never left room for any misunderstandings or misinterpretations.

- *John 20:20-21 After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord. Again Jesus said, "Peace be with you! **As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.**"*
- *Luke 21:12-19 "But before all this, they will lay hands on you and persecute you. They will deliver you to synagogues and prisons, and you will be brought before kings and governors, and all on account of my name. **This will result in your being witnesses to them.** But make up your mind not to worry beforehand how you will defend yourselves. For I will give you words and wisdom that none of your adversaries will be able to resist or contradict. You will be betrayed even by parents, brothers, relatives and friends, and they will put some of you to death. All men will hate you because of me. But not a hair of your head will perish. By standing firm you will gain life.*
- *Romans 8:36 As it is written: "**For your sake** we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered."*
- *Acts 9:16 I will show him how much he (Paul) must suffer for my name."*
- . The witness of the suffering Church will come through displaying the cross of Jesus, and the answer is found in Colossians 1:24 *And now I am happy about my sufferings for you, for by means of my physical sufferings I am helping to complete what is still lacking of Christ's sufferings on behalf of his body, the church.*

DISCUSSION GROUPS

How does your ministry reflect the cross of Christ? Is it a central focus of your ministry or only a small component? How can this be more evident in your portrayal of Jesus?

"It's easy to wear a cross, but it's not so easy to bear a cross"



INSIGHT

WOUNDS – THE MESSAGE OF THE CHURCH



Persecution, opposition, suffering – this is all part and parcel of Christianity. Paul uses some very descriptive words when he explains it:

- *Philippians 1:29 For it **has been granted to you on behalf of Christ** not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for him,*
- *1Thesalonians 3:3 so that no one would be unsettled by these trials. **You know quite well that we were destined for them.***
- *2Timothy 1:11-12 And of this gospel I was appointed a herald and an apostle and a teacher. That is why I am suffering as I am.*

Read the words again that Paul use: **Destined, appointed, granted**..... Scripture clearly teaches that suffering is the message and the mandate for every believer, not just the consequence of a faithful life. But we should not misunderstand this spiritual principle. This is not about depression and hardship. It's about a joy that reflects the fullness of life in the privilege of sharing in the cross of Christ.

After presenting his wounds Jesus said to his disciples: *"Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, I am sending you."* (John 20: 21) This Jesus said as He showed them his wounds. Jesus came into the world to give His life as ransom for many (Mark 10:45). There was a divine necessity for Him to suffer. Because this was His calling, it also becomes the calling of those who follow Him. *"As the Father has sent me, I am sending you."*

Arm yourself with this thought: In 1 Peter 4:1 Peter says that we need to arm ourselves with the attitude that just as Christ suffered in the flesh, we need to expect it also. Suffering with Christ is not strange, it is our calling.

We should not ask why God allows suffering. We read that God sometimes even appoints it. In 1 Thessalonians 3:3 Paul explains that we should know quite well that we were destined for trials

As Christians we can never and should never seek to avoid scars. It is part and parcel of Christianity. When we see the scars of Jesus we have this command – go and expect the same. This is our message. The gift of salvation that came through sacrifice. Any message that seeks to bypass the cross can bring comfort but not redemption.

The Coptic Church in Egypt is the oldest Church in the world. The early Church suffered persecution under the Roman Empire and this persecution continued under Islamic rule. With the Arab invasion came great difficulties for Christians in the country; Copts had to endure the challenges of converting to the Islamic faith. Religious persecution persisted throughout Egypt and heavy taxes were imposed on families who wanted to remain Christian. In some cases where the family was unable to pay these taxes, the empire would forcefully take away young Christian boys, convert them to Islam and transform them into state soldiers. This is often why parents tattooed the Coptic cross on their kids' wrists, so that when they grew up, they will remember their true origins and where they came from. In other cases where Christians were unable to pay this tax, they would be forced to convert or die. Those Christians that were able to pay these taxes still had to get this tattoo as an identification. They faced major persecution, discrimination, and restrictions — which continues to this day.

Today, the cross tattoo on everyone's right wrist is a testimony to their strong Coptic faith. Even though having this tattoo makes it easier for those you meet to identify you as a Christian, the Copts carry it with pride. People of all ages are persecuted and killed over this cross, and yet the tradition lives on. During protests and funeral chants, this phrase is often repeated: "With our souls and our blood, we will protect the cross".

<https://sttekla.org/2019/09/the-meaning-of-our-coptic-cross-tattoo/>



INSIGHT

WOUNDS – THE TEACHER OF THE CHURCH



But suffering is also a window through which we learn everything we need to know about God. It becomes God's university.

What can be more telling than the words in Hebrews 12:10 where we learn that God disciplines his Church through suffering. His aim for His Church is not comfort nor wealth, but a deeper faith and a deeper holiness.

In 2 Corinthians 1:8-9 Paul says: We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about the hardships we suffered in the province of Asia. We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired even of life. Indeed, in our hearts we felt the sentence of death. But this happened that we might not rely on ourselves but on God, who raises the dead.

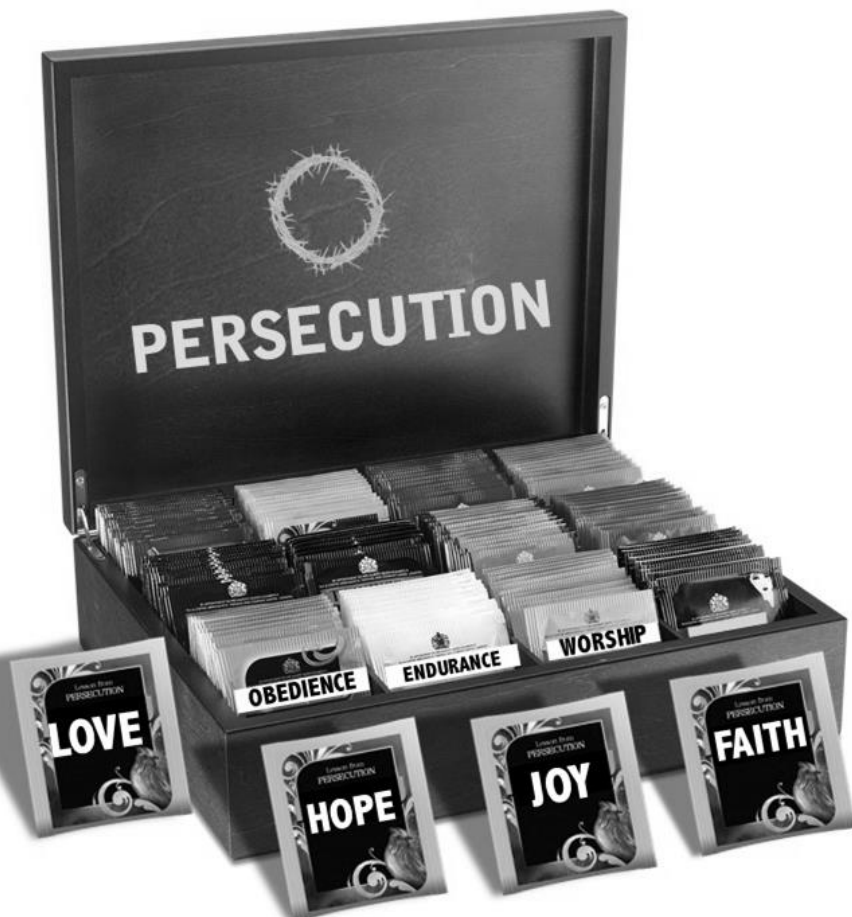
Paul does not concede his suffering to the hand of Satan but says that God ordained it for the increase and teaching of his faith. The sufferings of life become the school of Christ where lessons of faith are taught that will not be learned anywhere else. Comfort, ease, affluence, prosperity, safety and freedom often cause a tremendous inertia on the church. It produces weakness, apathy, lethargy, self-centeredness and preoccupation with security.

Hebrews 12:10 Our fathers disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in his holiness.

We sometimes tend to think that the Gospel is a “box” that contains all the lessons in life, necessary to grow spiritually. We then feel we have the luxury of picking lessons from the “box”, choosing the lessons we feel comfortable with and inevitably disregarding the lessons we feel uncomfortable with. Suffering, as a lesson to spiritual growth, is then ignored and not applied simply because it does not fit into our western spiritual frame of mind.

The truth is that the “box” is actually suffering and the lessons of the gospel; hope, joy, endurance, holiness, godliness, maturity and everything else are contained in this “box”.

The next page contains a list of teachings that can be found in the “box” of suffering and persecution.





INSIGHT

WOUNDS – THE TEACHER OF THE CHURCH

A list of truths that can be found in the “box” of suffering:

- **Persecution teaches true BLESSING:** *Matthew 5:11 “Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me.
1 Peter 4:14 If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed*
- **Persecution teaches true HOPE:** *Romans 5:3-4 ...but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope.*
- **Persecution teaches true UNITY with Christ :** *Philippians 3:10 I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in His sufferings, becoming like Him in His death*
- **Persecution teaches true GODLINESS:** *2 Timothy 3:12 In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted,*
- **Persecution teaches true SALVATION:** *Matthew 5:10 Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven.
Revelation.2:10 Do not be afraid of what you are about to suffer. I tell you, the devil will put some of you in prison to test you, and you will suffer persecution for ten days. Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life.*
- **Persecution teaches true ENDURANCE:** *Romans 5:3-4 ...we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope.*
- **Persecution teaches true ABUNDANCE:** *James 1:2-4 Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.
Revelation 2:9 I know your afflictions and your poverty—yet you are rich!*
- **Persecution teaches true SERVANTHOOD:** *John 15:20 Remember the words I spoke to you: 'No servant is greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also. If they obeyed my teaching, they will obey yours also.*
- **Persecution teaches true DISCIPLESHIP:** *John 15:20 Remember the words I spoke to you: 'No servant is greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also. If they obeyed my teaching, they will obey yours also.*
- **Persecution teaches true SUBMISSION:** *2 Timothy 4:5 But you, keep your head in all situations, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, discharge all the duties of your ministry.*
- **Persecution teaches true GLORY:** *Acts 7:55 While stoning Stephen he (56) said "Look, I see heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.*
- *1 Peter 4:13 But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed.*
- **Persecution teaches true POWER:** *Philippians 3:10 I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in His sufferings, becoming like Him in His death.*
- **Persecution teaches true JOY:** *James 1:2-4 Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.
1 Peter 4:13 But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when His glory is revealed.*
- **Persecution teaches true WORSHIP:** *1 Peter 1:6, In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. ...(7) and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.*
- **The Suffering Church shares true OBEDIENCE:** *Hebrews 5:8 Although he was a son, he learned obedience from what he suffered.*
- **Persecution teaches true FAITH:** *Philippians 1:28 For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe on Him, but also to suffer for Him.*



INSIGHT

WOUNDS – THE HONOUR OF THE CHURCH



Wounds for the sake of Christ are an honour you have to earn. In all his sufferings Paul describes this as a gift from God. In Philippians 1:29 Paul refers to these sufferings as an honour. *(For you have been given the privilege of serving Christ, not only by believing in him, but also by suffering for him. – GNB)*

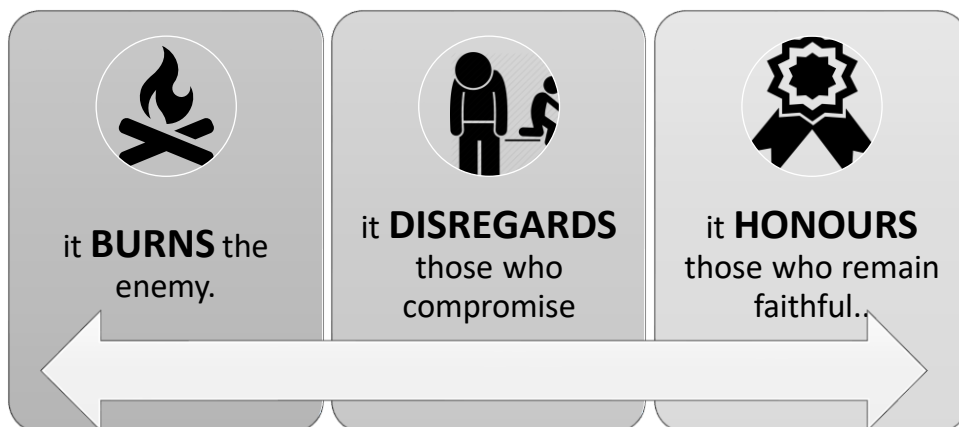
Persecution does not come to those who compromise. It is an honour that will be bestowed only upon the faithful who refuse compromise. When reading the story of Daniel, one asks the question: Where were the other 100 000 Jews? Why were they not in the furnace? Did they bow down to an idol? Only three men chose not to bow before a false god and because of that, we still know their names and courageous act. And they themselves had the greatest privilege of their lives – to walk with an angel of God here on earth and to feel a completely different sensation from the fire that killed the soldiers.

After a sermon in Egypt the leader, Dr Adel, immediately came to me after the message. “Oh my brother, thank you for the testimonies of other persecuted believers you shared. I am so encouraged to hear about the faithfulness of believers in other closed countries. We, in Egypt, have shared so many similar experiences and we rejoice to know that we are not alone.”

He then started sharing the testimony of one of his beloved friends who lives in the same village in Upper Egypt as he does. During the presidency of Sadat, he was arrested and taken to a prison in the desert, between Cairo and Alexandria. He was placed in a prison cell that measured less than 2m by 2m. There was only one small hole in the prison which was to be used as a toilet. This hole was connected to a canal that was opened once a day. The problem arose in the evenings when the canal was opened and instead of sucking the waste out, the pressure pushed all the waste into the cell. This dear brother then had to stand in human waste for hours in his small cell until the pressure subsided. A further complication was when his food was pushed into his cell. The food was simply placed in a hole in the door and then firmly pushed by the guards. This resulted that the food often fell into the waste on the floor and made living conditions unbearable.

Despite severe torture this brother never denied his faith. As Dr Adel shared this testimony, my heart broke. I could not reconcile my own comfort and safety with the pain and torture of my own brother in Christ. I knew my comfort will cost me something. Then Dr Adel concluded the testimony with a joyful comment. “My brother, in all we suffer we have this wonderful promise from God, that all who desire a godly life in Jesus, will be persecuted.”

We need to remember that the fiery trial that comes to every believer, like it did with Daniel and his friends, will have one of the following three effects – depending on how we respond:





INSIGHT

HONOURING THE EMPEROR

An important insight from Scripture is not only how we deal with persecution, but how we view our persecutors. Is it possible not to hate your persecutors? Listen to Peter:

1 Peter 2:17 Show proper respect to everyone, love the family of believers, fear God, honour the emperor.

The words “**show respect** to everyone” and “**honour** the emperor” in 1 Peter 2:17, are both the same word and translated from the Greek word **tim-ah'-o** which literally means to “*fix a valuation upon; by implication to revere: - honour, and value.*” A more literal translation of this text can therefore read as follows: “*Place a proper value on every soul you encounter, even the emperor*”.

This is a profound and liberating truth. Respect therefore refers to the value of a soul and not the evaluation of a person. And if we want to place a value on every soul we encounter, we need to calibrate it according to the value system of the One we represent. And, once again, scripture provides the answer: In 1 Timothy 2:1 we are urged to *petition, pray, intercede and give thanks for ALL people — for this is good, and pleases God our Saviour, who wants ALL people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth.*

We show respect to EVERYONE, not because they deserve it but because they are valued by God and He wants ALL to be saved. The emperor was as much an object of the cross as we were. Because God fixed a value on souls, to the extent that He sent His Son to redeem us, we understand that respect should be given to all people, without any strings attached. This is quite serious.

But here's the difficult part. Peter intentionally includes the hated emperor in his call to reverence. “*Fear God and honour the emperor*” is his instruction. Wasn't this maybe a mistake by Peter? Surely he meant: “*honour God and fear the emperor*”? Not so. Peter knew exactly what he was writing. He was present when the Lord told the crowd whom they should fear: “*Fear him who, after your body has been killed, has authority to throw you into hell. Yes, I tell you, fear him.*” were the words of Jesus. (Luke 12:5)

But to honour the emperor? This must have been as offensive as it was hurtful to the Church. The emperor was morally corrupt, spiritually evil, by any definition deranged, and mentally cruel beyond words. Humanly speaking, he deserved no respect and definitely no honour. He deserved utter contempt. And yet Peter instructs (not suggests) that the Church honours him.

The emperor Peter is referring to was most probably Nero. Nero's extreme punishment on the Christians was perhaps one of the most evil displays of cruelty in the history of the church. He held parties in his gardens while the Christian's punishment served as entertainment. Covered with the skins of beasts, they were torn by dogs and perished, or were nailed to crosses, or were doomed to the flames and burnt, to serve as a nightly illumination. This public spectacle was on display in the Forum courtyard for all Romans to witness, while he paraded around in a chariot dressed in costume.

“*Honour him? You must be joking!*” was probably the first response of most Christians. But Peter provides the reason why in the next verses (19) *Because it is commendable if someone bears up under the pain of unjust suffering because they are conscious of God.* (21) *To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps.*

We respect because redemption is our calling, we honour because Christ values souls. It is as simple and as difficult as that. Remember, your greatest enemy was one of the reasons Jesus was crucified. He has value.

So, show proper respect to everyone. Yes, that includes the corrupt politician, the foul-mouth neighbour, the inconsiderate taxi driver... and we can add countless more.

CHAPTER 4

FORESIGHT

Spiritual preparation for persecution in the future



FORERSIGHT

GLOBAL TRENDS

Persecution is at an all time high. The previous year has seen the highest levels of persecution ever recorded in history. Persecution is also no longer just a theology. We are now entering a season where the numbers, the role-players and the methods of persecution are ever evolving. If we look at current trends and global events, then all indicators are that normal Christianity for the future will involve opposition and persecution. Brother Andrew, author of *God's Smuggler* and founder of Open Doors, once said that *"The Church in the last days will not be a triumphant Church but a persecuted Church. She will spend her last days on earth just like Jesus did; on the cross."*

As Church leaders and Church planters we therefore need to continuously prepare our groups and leaders accordingly. There are four major trends that Christians need to take note of:

1. **PERSECUTION IN SUB SAHARA AFRICA**
2. **WARS**
3. **TERRORISM**
4. **RELIGIOUS NATIONALISM**
5. **TECHNOLOGY**

1

PERSECUTION IN SUB SAHARA AFRICA

Since the fall of the final strongholds in the Middle East, ISIS has seen a resurgence through their distributed network across Africa with cells in Nigeria, Mali, and DRC all growing in strength and ability. The Islamic State West Africa Province is probably the strongest and most active of the ISIS affiliates today. They operate out of Northern Nigeria, after splitting from Boko Haram. They have been able to cause mass devastation throughout much of Nigeria, and parts of Niger, Chad and Cameroon. This resulted in a 60% increase over the previous year in the number of Christians killed for their faith. More than nine out of 10 of the global total of 4,761 deaths were in Africa.

The Islamic State Central African Province, is a growing cell that is based out of DRC. It is unclear when the group first formed in the region, but is believed to have amalgamated from two separate jihadists groups, Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) out of DRC and al-Shabab out of Mozambique. Since their first claims of attacks in 2019, they have been able to displace tens of thousands of people in northern Mozambique and kill hundreds in eastern DRC. More than 530,000 people are now displaced in Cabo Delgado, Nampula, Zambezia and Niassa provinces

- According to the Global Terrorism Index (25 November 2020), ISIS has moved from the Middle East to Africa. The total deaths by ISIS fighters in sub-Saharan Africa is up by **67%** over last year.
- **7 of the 10** countries with the largest increase in terrorism were in sub-Saharan Africa: Burkina Faso, Mozambique, DRC, Mali, Niger, Cameroon and Ethiopia".
- In 2019 Sub-Saharan Africa recorded the largest number of ISIS-related terrorism deaths at **41%** of the total.

With these groups and others continuing to operate in Africa, it is hard to believe that ISIS will be completely defeated anytime soon. As these groups grow, Christians throughout Africa will be in greater danger of persecution and suffering at the hands of these violent organizations.



FORERSIGHT

GLOBAL TRENDS

2

WARS

The fighting in Ukraine, Sudan, Yemen and Gaza will continue to expand in the years to come and Christians will continue to be caught in the crossfire. In Gaza a number of churches have been destroyed and the small Christian community is facing extinction. Some leaders have stated that 2024 could be the last chapter of Christianity in Gaza history, the birthplace of Christianity.

In Ukraine, according to the **Institute for Religious Freedom**, at least **494 religious buildings** have been destroyed, damaged, or looted as a result of the Russian invasion.

But wars have a way of involving more than just two parties in conflict. Western nations could be drawn into a war with Iran, Syria, Lebanon and also Saudi Arabia and Egypt. Christians will also face the unfortunate consequences of being seen as Western allies and persecution will increase. The major current challenge would be a decision by either Israel or Hezbollah to attack the other. Top Israeli leaders have pledged to “remove” the threat from Hezbollah. If Israel were to attack preemptively, the U.S. military would provide support, and Iran would assist Hezbollah, its most important regional proxy

3

TERRORISM

On a global level, several developments could increase terrorism in certain parts of the world. With the United States drawing down forces in the Middle East, South Asia, and throughout Africa, al Qaeda, the Islamic State (ISIS), and their respective affiliates could make a renewed push to capture new territory and destabilize countries and regions. Syria, Iraq, Yemen, Afghanistan, Somalia, and Nigeria are home to jihadist groups linked to al Qaeda and ISIS. Even with the current state of its leadership in question with uncertainty surrounding the health of Ayman al-Zawahiri and the recent assassination of al Qaeda veteran Muhammad al-Masri, the coming year could prove to be a banner year for al Qaeda as it seeks to reassert itself through affiliates around the globe. Under this scenario persecution will not only increase but also expand.

Ironically COVID-19 did little to slow the operational tempo of Islamic State attacks in Syria. In all of 2019, there were 144 total attacks, but through the first three quarters of 2020, ISIS managed to conduct 126 attacks, expanding significantly in southern Raqqa and eastern Hama. This year may present more, not fewer, opportunities for terrorist groups to recruit and launch strikes throughout the Levant.

In West Africa and the Horn of Africa, jihadist groups are gaining momentum, which will likely continue well into next year. Many of the countries most at risk of suffering terrorist attacks are now located in Africa, a shift in the counterterrorism centre of gravity from the Middle East. Even as the Islamic State’s physical caliphate has been destroyed in Iraq and Syria, the group continues to expand through affiliates, especially throughout Africa, where it now maintains provinces in West Africa (ISWAP), the Greater Sahara (ISGS), and Central Africa (ISCAP). Al Qaeda- and Islamic State-linked jihadists have destabilized countries that had previously escaped the scourge of terrorism, including Cameroon, Burkina Faso, and Mozambique.



FORERSIGHT

GLOBAL TRENDS

4

RELIGIOUS NATIONALISM

According to a report by **Release International**, Christian persecution in India is set to increase in the coming years. Release International reports the growing influence of radical Hindu nationalism in India is the main driver of increased persecution. According to the Evangelical Fellowship of India (EFI), violent attacks on Indian Christians have more than doubled the recent years. In 2014, the year the BJP rose to political power, EFI recorded 147 violent attacks on Indian Christians. In 2019, after five years of BJP rule, EFI recorded 366 violent attacks. In 2023 Open Doors recorded 2,228 attacks

Another country where the trend of “citizenship tied to faith” is evident and religious identity is increasingly tied to national identity is Turkey. In the past decade, scholars have noted the rise of a different conception of Turkish nationalism, called Muslim or Islamic nationalism, which has led to a transformative shift in the official state discourse. Challenging the secular and Westernist character of nationalism, they emphasize Muslim identity as the key element in defining Turkishness. Accordingly, the ideal Turk should have a strong moral character informed by Sunni Islamic values. Christians are therefore seen as “foreign”, western and European and persecuted.

Nationalism is also taking on a new meaning in Saudi Arabia. Though the idea of nationalism is not new, it has become especially important now. The King and his proclaimed successors – Crown Prince Mohammed bin Nayef and Deputy Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman – will surely be pushing the nationalist agenda and any non-Muslim, including the small Christian community of secret believers, will pay the ultimate price.

This trend of national identity by religion could affect many nations where Christianity is a minority.



In the year 380 the Roman Emperor, Constantine, legalised Christianity and it became the official religion of the Roman Empire. This new ‘culture of freedom’ allowed Christians to integrate into a new social order, where Christianity was not only accepted but now had to be defended and protected. The Church increasingly moved from being persecuted, serving from the bottom up, to a privileged position, serving from the top down. Slowly but surely the church lost its ability to be light and to be salt the community.

As long as those who followed Jesus were on the bottom edge of society, as long as they shared the rejected and betrayed status of Jesus, they could grasp his teaching more readily. Principles of loving your enemy could only be fully understood when they were persecuted. Values like forgiveness came into practice when they were wronged and imprisoned. Teachings like love for the enemy only took root when they were despised by others. And philosophies like harmony could be more easily practiced when they were gathering secretly in the catacombs. Because of their position in society their faith was untouched by empire, corruption, greed, and compromise. They had nothing to lose and nothing to prove. Their strength lay in their weakness and their relevance in their irrelevance. They served from the bottom up.



DISCUSSION GROUPS

To what extent have you identified religious nationalism in your region, whether as a Christian minority – being a victim of persecution, or as a Christian majority – being intolerant of other religions



FORERSIGHT

GLOBAL TRENDS

5

BEHAVIOURAL ENGINEERING

Behavioural engineering is the concept of combining technology and psychology to nudge people to act a certain way, and it's something that will deeply impact Christians in nations where faith is unwelcome. The use of technology, monitoring the movements of believers and being able to pinpoint behaviour and gatherings of Christians are advancing and strengthening religious persecution. There is no doubt that the methods of 'techno persecution' are becoming more sophisticated, and thus pose a greater threat to 'secret believers' than ever before because governments now have the ability to observe, engineer and oppress on a massive scale.

In China, the government has increased surveillance, with facial recognition systems installed in state-approved churches in some areas and online services monitored. Reports from counties in Henan and Jiangxi provinces say cameras with facial recognition software are now in all state-approved religious venues. Churches that have refused to install these cameras have been fined raided and even banned, like the 1,500-member Zion Church in northern Beijing.

China's facial recognition system logs nearly every single citizen in the country, with a vast network of cameras across the country. A database leak in 2019 gave a glimpse of how pervasive China's surveillance tools are -- with more than 6.8 million records from a single day, taken from cameras positioned around hotels, parks, tourism spots and mosques, logging details on people as young as 9 days old.

The idea that China's facial recognition would automatically put your name and photo on a billboard for jaywalking and privately text you a fine instils fear in people to behave a certain way. Technology now has the ability to affect behaviour, even outside of China.

Iran, with one of the fastest growing Churches in the Middle East, is also interested in this technology and we can only imagine how, in the hands of an Islamic dictatorship, this could affect other minority groups.

We need to remember that every challenge is often only an opportunity in disguise. I remember meeting a Pastor in Iran who shared how all their conversations were listened to and all their telephones were being tapped. The government was seeking an opportunity to arrest them for evangelism and behavioural engineering was at the order of the day.



"That's terrible" I responded.

"NO my brother, that's wonderful" was his reply.

"My friend would phone me when we knew a certain officer was on duty and my friend would then ask questions about salvation. I would then explain in detail, knowing that the officer listening in has no option but to listen to the full conversation. It is a great opportunity to share the Gospel with our persecutors and to disciple them at the same time" He said

Isn't it wonderful that technology is now holding us accountable for our discussions, who we visit, what we say and how we behave. If I am monitored, I hope I will be found guilty



DISCUSSION GROUPS

Are you aware how you could be monitored in the future and what precautions are you already taking?



FORERSIGHT

THE KEY

Matthew 16:24 *Then Jesus said to his disciples, "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me."*



So where do we start?

As we prepare our hearts to explore the possibility of persecution, it is important that we take a step back and identify fears that might be rooted in our own inability to cling to Christ. We often approach persecution from a departure point of fear – both for what might happen to us but also the fear that we might deny Christ.

The key is found in the words of Christ. It is no coincidence that Jesus told his disciples to deny themselves before he told them to take up their crosses and follow Him (Matthew 16:24). When we view persecution (taking up our crosses) as step 1, we will encounter fear. But if we start our preparation with the step 1 that Jesus recommends, denying ourselves, the process will be a lot easier.

If we can attain the spiritual maturity to forget about ourselves when we face persecution, we will be able to embrace opposition with joy. When we realise it is Christ in us that is being attacked, and we can deny ourselves when we behold the Christ in us – like Stephen did when he was stoned to death and he saw Christ standing on the right hand of God - if we can do this – then fear and uncertainty will subside.

The following steps should therefore be etched in our minds as we work through this book and PREVISION persecution

STEP 1

This is the first and deciding step. Taking up your cross will be impossible if step 1 is bypassed. This is an invitation to forget about yourself. Jesus is appealing to us not to rely on our own abilities but to rest in Him, assured that just as our eternal salvation rests in Christ alone, so our eternal security and safety rest in Him as well. What a relief! Only when we stop depending on our own abilities, our own strength and our own understanding can God step in

**DENY
YOURSELF**

TAKE UP YOUR CROSS

STEP 2

Take up your cross like Jesus did – on your knees in Gethsemane, with a heart of redemption on the cross, beholding the glory while being transformed, finding joy in the wounds, and with the joy set before you in every step you give. Embrace a "forward faith" – focus on the glory that awaits, and not the pain of the present

STEP 3

God never calls us to face persecution on our own. We are called to **follow** Him – to walk behind Him in the shadow of His peace and His protection. Don't run ahead – stay behind Jesus and follow His example so that we might stand firm and be faithful when we face opposition. Follow Him to the cross and through the cross so that you too may know the power of His resurrection

FOLLOW ME

"Denying yourself is not thinking less about yourself but thinking about yourself less"



FORESIGHT

OIL IN OUR LAMPS

Christianity should never be a reactive faith. It should always be a proactive faith, preparing for the unexpected and armouring ourselves for the onslaughts of the enemy who walks around like a roaring lion seeing who he can devour. Wars are won and lost through the element of surprise

The challenge for every believer is therefore to make “life-choices” before “life happens”. We should not wait for things to happen and trust ourselves to make godly choices on the spur of the moment.

Research in countries that moved from freedom to persecution shows less than 10% of all Christians remained faithful. More than 9 out of every 10 Christians compromised or denied Jesus in times of opposition.

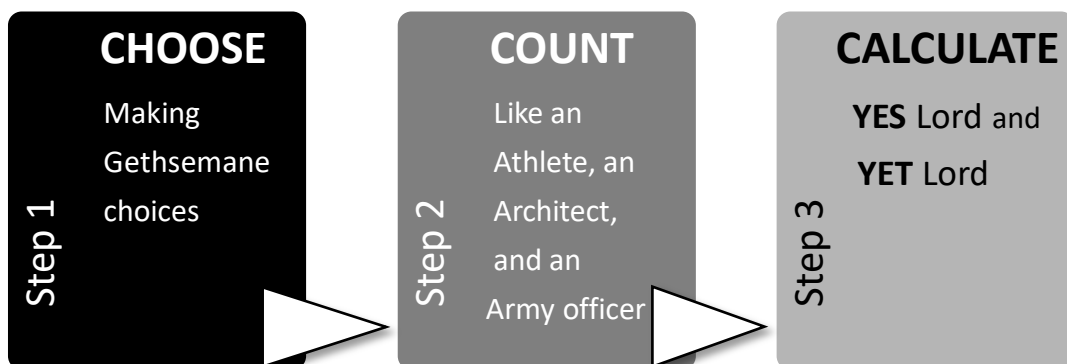
Foresight does not answer the question “are you ready?” It answers the question “Are you prepared?” Many believers would be quick to give an affirmative answer to the question “*Are you **ready** to meet your Saviour?*” But not all of them would be ready to express that they are “**prepared** to meet their Saviour”. The Lord actually addresses the concept of readiness and foresight on a number of occasions but one, in particular, rings the warning bells. And, make no mistake, this is a matter of life and death.

We read this story of the ten bridesmaids in Matthew 25:1-13. This parable is about foresight: There is a real sense of readiness and expectation as the bridesmaids await the coming of the groom. Five were ready and prepared and have brought enough oil for their lamps for the wait, while the other five were ready but unprepared. Their lack of foresight made them miss the grandest moment they were waiting for. Their unpreparedness saw their oil running out.

The five bridesmaids who are prepared for the bridegroom's arrival are rewarded, while the five who's oil ran out had to hear the words of the groom that must have sent shivers down their spines (12): *'Truly I tell you, I don't know you.'* This parable has a clear theme: Simply waiting for Christ to return is not good enough. Confessing Him as the Lord is not sufficient enough. Foresight is needed. Being ready is simply not good enough, our lamps need to be full with enough oil for our midnight encounters.

Jesus presented His followers with a calling that required life choices that few accepted. It was a calling that would ultimately lead to their deaths and although thousands followed Him, only a handful imitated Him. If we truly seek to prepare for persecution and embrace a fellowship of Christ, it will require wise choosing, detailed counting and intentional calculating.

There are three components in preparing for persecution:





FORESIGHT

CHOOSE - GETHSEMANE CHOICES

STEP 1 MAKE THE CHOICE

The first step to prepare our hearts for difficult times start in Gethsemane. This is important

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a German pastor and author of the classic book “The Cost of Discipleship”, became known for his staunch resistance to the Nazi dictatorship. He was arrested in April 1943 by the Gestapo and executed by hanging in April 1945. While imprisoned at a Nazi concentration camp, Bonhoeffer wrote the following on embracing persecution and making choices that enable us to carry our crosses when we face them.

“The cross is laid on every Christian. The first Christ-suffering which every man must experience is the call to abandon the attachments of this world. It is that dying of the old man which is the result of his encounter with Christ.

As we embark upon discipleship, we surrender ourselves to Christ in union with his death—we give over our lives to death. Thus, it begins; the cross is not the terrible end to an otherwise god-fearing and happy life, but it meets us at the beginning of our communion with Christ. When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die. It may be a death like that of the first disciples who had to leave home and work to follow him, or it may be a death like Luther’s, who had to leave the monastery and go out into the world. But it is the same death every time—death in Jesus Christ, the death of the old man at his call.

*The Christian life is a crucified life. ‘Take up your cross and follow Me...’ was the command of Jesus. ‘I am crucified with Christ’ was the confession of Paul. But just as we must all take up our cross daily and be crucified with Christ, **before we get to Calvary, we always pass through Gethsemane**; the place where our will meets the will of God. It is here, in this garden, that the battle is fought – and either won or lost. The Roman soldiers did not take Jesus’ life when they crucified Him. He had already laid it down Himself. You cannot kill a man who is already dead! **Jesus was victorious at Calvary because He was victorious in Gethsemane.** The disciples faltered and fled at the crucifixion because they slept in Gethsemane.*

Gethsemane is the place where you make the decision every day to get on the cross or to run from it.”

The truth is that this calling will not come easy. Choosing to forgive those who hurt us is not the easy option but not doing it will have far more devastating effects; it will damage our relationship with Christ. Choosing to love our enemies will never come naturally and will require intentional Gethsemane moments, relentlessly, progressively and continuously.

This will be true for every believer who confesses a crucified Christ. Our Gethsemane choices will determine our Calvary conduct. Choose today!





FORESIGHT

COUNTING THE COST

STEP 2 COUNT THE COST

Luke 14:25-33 Once when large crowds of people were going along with Jesus, he turned and said to them ... If one of you is planning to build a tower, you sit down first and figure out what it will cost, to see if you have enough money to finish the job. If you don't, you will not be able to finish the tower after laying the foundation; and all who see what happened will make fun of you. 'You began to build but can't finish the job!' they will say. If a king goes out with ten thousand men to fight another king who comes against him with twenty thousand men, he will sit down first and decide if he is strong enough to face that other king. If he isn't, he will send messengers to meet the other king to ask for terms of peace while he is still a long way off. In the same way," concluded Jesus, "none of you can be my disciple unless you give up everything you have.

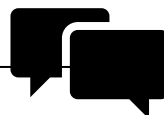
COUNT THE COST!

Let's get straight to the point: the road marked out for us, as described in Luke 14, is one that will demand utter seriousness and ultimate selflessness. Jesus compares the journey of faith to the building of a tower and to the engagement in a battle. Paul describes it as running a race. Whether we live in the 'homey' comforts of freedom or the painful battles of persecution, when we decide to become true disciples of Jesus Christ we will find that hell and earth will unite in an attempt to destroy us. Before even starting this journey, we need to consider what it will cost. **Jesus is not interested in making half-hearted, half-committed and half-way disciples**

According to Scripture, one of the first duties of every believer is to count the cost. Not to count the blessings or promises as we so often emphasise during our altar calls but to count the cost. In Luke 14:28, we are clearly instructed to count the cost. Christianity is not for the faint-hearted.

For the persecuted Church this is not an option. Faith and persecution go hand in hand. If you don't count the cost, you don't survive. You become an object of mocking as Jesus predicted. It truly is as simple as that. This is part of the teaching and preparation of every believer in closed countries.

The point is this: Fearful faint-hearted people are not fit to be employed for God; and, among those that are enlisted under the banner of Christ, there are more such than we think there are.



DISCUSSION GROUPS

To what extent did you count the cost when you came to know Christ?

To what extent do you challenge new believers to count the cost when they come to know Christ?

Is counting the cost a central part of the Gospel message you proclaim?



FORESIGHT

COUNTING THE COST – LIKE AN ATHLETE

STEP 2 COUNT THE COST – Like an Athlete

Those who GET UP for daily training

In Hebrews 12:1-2, the apostle Paul compares the Christian life to running a race. There is no doubt that Paul is not referring to a 100-meter sprint but to the long, gruelling, torturing endurance race of an ultra-marathon in which the runner's primary goal is not necessarily to come in first but to complete the race. Everyone who finishes is a winner.

But nobody wakes up on the morning of a marathon and suddenly decides to attempt the race. Enrolment for the race does not end with a “show of hands” but calls for ongoing preparation and daily commitments. Long-distance running requires discipline, sacrifice, training and perseverance – and lots of it. At some stage, months before the actual event, the athlete will sit down, set the goal and start training. There should be careful thought and detailed examination as to why one wants to enter the race. And once it has started, there should be no turning back.

This is also the first step on the journey of faith. A decision to follow Christ is not something that should be taken lightly and on the spur of a moment. It does not involve a short ‘sinner’s prayer’ and a welcoming booklet. It calls for an informed decision, a thorough evaluation and good estimation of what it will take to complete what you plan to start.



RENATO CANOVA.

Renato Canova has over 4 decades of marathon coaching experience and is regarded an expert in training athletes in running a sub 2:05 marathon. The 2 most important quotes from Canova that sum up his entire philosophy also applies to our spiritual preparation:

Firstly: “To fulfil your potential as a marathoner, you need to progressively extend the distance you can run your goal pace, over a period of months and years. We need to extend the ability to run at the speed you want and you can produce.”

Spiritually: We need to continue to build capacity in our spiritual fitness and endurance. We should never be satisfied to grow spiritually on spiritual baby food. We need foresight. We need to build our capacity to reflect Christ in the easy times but also to revere Christ in the hard times.

Secondly: “What does a 2-hour easy run have to do with the marathon? Nothing.”

Renato does not understand why anyone training to run a fast marathon would do long easy runs. It is not specific to the marathon in any way.

Spiritually: A challenge in modern-day Christianity is that so many believers want to endure but neglect putting in the “hard miles”. Shaun Groves reflects on this desire for the minimum as follows:

“I want a small tweak that will make me a whole new man. I want a quick read or a short video clip that will make me wise. A three-minute song that will give me intimacy with or revelation from God. Three steps to well-behaved kids. A fight, not marriage counselling. I want a devotion, not a Bible study. A retreat weekend, not a life of early rising for silence, study and prayer. A Sunday service, not an all-week community of shared accountability, time and resources.”

These kinds of minimal expectations make for ‘weak’ Christians who are ill-prepared to overcome the difficult times that will come. The surest way to remain faithful in difficult times is to be well-prepared in easy times. Expect the unexpected. Be ready! Be prepared! Be awake!



FORESIGHT

COUNTING THE COST – LIKE AN ARCHITECT

STEP 2 COUNT THE COST – Like an architect

Those who SIT DOWN for careful planning

Luke 14 also compares the Christian life to a building project. Well before the bricks are laid, there needs to be building plans, cost evaluations and effective resources to ensure the completion of the project.

The project will require a **‘sit down’** and not a **‘jump in’**. It needs to be a calculated decision. It has become far too easy in Western Christianity to accept Christ without first sitting down and “counting the cost” or considering what it will involve.

“Let him compare the charge with his purse, lest he make himself to be laughed at, by beginning to build what he is not able to finish.” These are the words of a Saviour who seeks loyalty and commitment

A man cannot be Christ's disciple unless he loves Christ more than he loves life, and as we start the journey of faith, we are like a man considering the expenses at the start of building a tower.

Matthew Henry explains it as follows [*words in brackets added by author*]:

“Note that all that take upon them a profession of religion undertake to build a tower... Begin low, and lay the foundation deep, lay it on the rock, and make sure work, and then aim as high as heaven.

Note that those that intend to build this tower must sit down and count the cost. Let them consider that it will cost them the mortifying [putting to death] of their sins, even the most beloved lusts; it will cost them a life of self-denial and watchfulness, and a constant course of holy duties; it may, perhaps, cost them their reputation among men, their estates and liberties, and all that is dear to them in this world, even life itself. And if it should cost us all this, what is it in comparison with what it cost Christ to purchase [our salvation] for us, which comes to us without money and without price?

Note that many that begin to build this tower do not go on with it, nor persevere in it, and it is their folly [foolishness]; they have not courage and resolution, have not a rooted fixed principle, and so bring nothing to pass. Nothing is more shameful than for those that have begun well in religion to break off; every one will justly mock him, as having lost all his labour for want of perseverance. We lose the things we have [gained], and all we have done and suffered is in vain.”



DISCUSSION GROUPS

Will your journey of faith be a sprint or a marathon, a ladder or a tower, a playing field or a battlefield?

No matter how far you are on this journey of faith, sit down now and count the cost again... and again. Discuss a plan and strategy how you can prepare yourself and your group



FORESIGHT

COUNTING THE COST – LIKE AN ARMY OFFICER

STEP 3 COUNT THE COST – Like an army officer

Those who GO OUT for victorious battle

The journey of faith is also compared to a battle in Luke 14:31-33 – not a game we play. When we embark on the journey of faith, there must be a clear understanding and an uncompromising willingness to give our lives for the Kingdom we choose to join. No soldier enters battle without the knowledge that the ultimate is required, even though it might not be requested. This is no different for those who follow Christ.

Every Christian needs to answer to four very specific calls in life”

- There is a **call to CONVERSION**:
Matthew 3:2 and saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near."
- There is a **call to DISCIPLESHIP**:
Matthew 4:19-20 "‘Come, follow me,’ Jesus said, ‘and I will send you out to fish for people.’ At once they left their nets and followed Him."
- There is a **call to APOSTLESHIP**:
Mark 6:7 "Calling the Twelve to Him, He began to send them out two by two and gave them authority over impure spirits."
- There is a **call to MARTYRDOM**:
Mark 10:39 "Jesus said to them, ‘You will drink the cup I drink and be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with.’"

Becoming a soldier requires a high level of sacrifice as well as high levels of discipline and endurance. When we come to follow Christ we must start this journey with the aim of taking possession and engaging in battle. If you don’t start with this expectation, you might become an object of mocking as Jesus predicted.

To worship Christ is easy, to follow Christ is costly. Loving Christ is not necessarily the same as following Christ and only the strength of the preparation will determine the length of the journey.

The ability to persevere in battle does not depend on how you deal with hardships at the time but on how well you prepare for them beforehand. The apostle Paul is an excellent example of this. After his dramatic encounter with Christ on the road to Damascus, the first lesson he had to learn was to count the cost. The Lord told Ananias that *"I will show him how much he must suffer for My name"* (Acts 9:16).

This was the first step in Paul’s armour for battle and prepared him for imprisonments, floggings, beatings, stonings, shipwrecks, hunger and various other trials (2 Corinthians 11:23-26).

He persevered because he was prepared. He had counted the cost before setting out.



FORESIGHT

“YES LORD”

Matthew 16:24 “Then Jesus said to His disciples, ‘Whoever wants to be My disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow Me.’”

If you did the math in the previous chapters– making a Gethsemane choice and counting the cost - the numbers should add up in this chapter. The first step was to choose the cross of obedience and the second step to sit down and count the cost. You have decided to follow Christ, no matter what. Good.

Now comes the next step in preparing our hearts for opposition and hardship. This step will involve dedicating yourself to the One you follow: in choice (by denying yourself), in commitment (by taking up your cross) and in action (by following Him).

The disciples would probably have expected that the Lord would have been more encouraging of their desire to follow Him. They may have expected Him to say something like “If any man come to Me, and be My disciple, he shall have wealth and honour in abundance; leave it to Me to make him a great man.” But Jesus told them quite the opposite. He told them they needed to quit that which was very dear to them, and to come to Him thoroughly weaned from all their creature-comforts and dead to their desires.

The Lord gives those who embark on the journey of faith two clear instructions: commit and embrace.

FIRSTLY, WE NEED TO SAY “YES LORD”

Jesus uses the cross to represent true discipleship five times (Matt 10:38 and 16:24-26; Mark 8:34-35; Luke 9:23-24 and 14:27). In the Roman cultural context, “carrying the cross” was an unspoken admission that the one carrying the cross was guilty and that the death sentence was just. Death by crucifixion was excruciatingly painful. The call to “carry the cross” therefore symbolised Jesus’ sovereign right over the lives of His disciples and their submission to the One who they had – at one time – rebelled against. “Taking up our cross” means that we wilfully say:

- YES to a selfless life,
- YES to a Christ-centred life-style,
- YES to a new set of values,
- YES to Kingdom expansion through life or through death,
- YES to pursuing ‘redemptive purposes’ in every aspect of our lives so that others might see Jesus in everything we do,
- YES to the glory of God, regardless of the cost.

DISCUSSION GROUPS

Discuss amongst one another how and when you have counted the cost.
Confess to one another that you wilfully say YES to the cost of following Christ





FORESIGHT

“YET LORD”

SECONDLY, AFTER THE “YES LORD” WE NEED TO SAY “YET LORD”

In the garden of Gethsemane, Jesus knelt down and reached the pinnacle of His own personal journey of faith. With His soul overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death (*Mark 14:34*), He desperately prayed that, if possible, that hour (and His suffering) might pass from Him. “Abba, Father,” He said, “everything is possible for You. Take this cup from Me.” ... And then came the declaration of a self-denying, cross-carrying Saviour that turned tragedy of mankind into triumph: **YET, LORD!**

“Yet, not what I will, but what You will.” These are the words of a Saviour who weighed the glory of God above the pain ahead, and as we follow Him, a similar submission and commitment from us needs to be displayed. Following Christ can never lead to any destination other than the cross. Following Jesus requires us to say

- *“YET, Lord”, when we are persecuted, ridiculed and opposed...*
- *“YET, Lord”, when obeying Christ seems beyond our own abilities...*
- *“YET, Lord”, when we do not fully understand why things are happening in our lives...*
- *“YET, Lord”, when the cross in front seems unbearable...*

... “not what I will, but Your will still be done”.

Jesus understands the heart of man better than man himself, and knows what this kind of commitment involves. This is the departure point for a life of faithfulness. There is no room for self-centredness and there is no other departure point if we seek to persevere in the midst of trials. Abdicate your ‘thrones’ and ‘empires’. Relinquish your rights. Surrender control. Give up your agendas and give your abilities to God. Die to selfish ambitions and self-fulfilment. **Give up** (everything), **take up** (your cross) and **move out** (of your comfort zones).





FORESIGHT

SIX STEPS TO VICTORY

So, how do practically prepare ourselves for hardship? We understand the call to martyrdom, we have counted the cost. What's next?

To finally embrace our wounds with joy will involve 6 steps to a Christ-consciousness and assist us to accept our crosses with the joy set before us.

1. The starting point is always the Word of God. We need to know – and apply – what the Bible says. But just knowing scripture will not be enough.
2. We need to add virtues. We need to add to the Word of God, the consciousness of Christ. We need to know how to respond in times of hardship
3. Then we need to embrace the cross as we move from followers to disciples
4. There is the bridge between discipleship and apostleship, and this happens when we touch the wounds of Jesus
5. Finally, we need to be transformed by the empowerment of the Holy Spirit.

Not one of these components on their own will be enough. Only a combination of all six elements will secure a life of contentment, embracing our wounds with joy.





FORESIGHT

HEARING THE WORD OF GOD

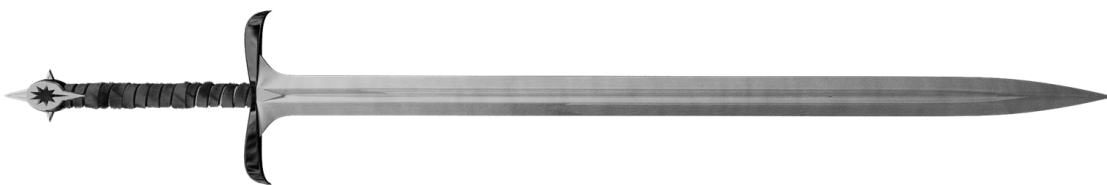
Christianity is based on the revelation of God - His character, His will, His purposes and His expectations – as contained in the Bible. Without the Word of God we have nothing to guide us, nothing to sustain us and nothing to restore us. Neglecting this step will lead to faithlessness and not faithfulness

BUT, it is important to note right from the start that **on our journey of faith, we can never see the Word of God as a ‘spare wheel’ and only use it in times of need – it should be used as a ‘steering wheel’, constantly in our hands, always active and the only tool of giving directions.**

One of the best descriptions of the Bible is found in Hebrews 4:12 “For 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; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.”

Hebrews 4:12 refers to Scripture as a **double-edged sword** that penetrates, divides and judges. If we truly open our hearts and minds to God’s inspired, written Word, we might be surprised to discover something greater and more precious than life itself. When the book of Hebrews was written, the Church was facing very real threats of persecution. The author warned the readers about the temptation of denying their faith for the goal of living more ‘comfortably’.

Let’s face it – it’s a tough world out there today, just as it was then. Temptations are all around us. The path of a Christian disciple is treacherous. And for this reason we need a tool for defence, a tool for attack and a tool that will secure our position before God as we journey to the end. The ‘precepts of God’ refer to the commandments or principles given by God in Scripture as our ‘rule for living and behaviour’. The same Word that confronted the early Church in times of persecution is the same unchanging, infallible Word that confronts us today. It is living. It is active. And it is sure.



Historically, the sword was seen as an emblem of military honour, inciting the bearer to use it as part of a just and generous pursuit of honour and virtue. It represents liberty and strength. Consider these symbolic implications as we contemplate the Word of God as a two-edged sword.

A swordsman will generally apply four principles when engaging in a swordfight

BE ALERT

The first action of a swordsman is to stay alert. We need to be disciplined in our pursuit of God’s Word and to ensure that time spent reading the Bible is central to our lives. Otherwise we may fall prey to the Devil, the “roaming lion” seeking our destruction (1 Peter 5:8).

BE AWAKE

The second action of a swordsman is to know the ‘enemy’. Scripture teaches in Ephesians 6:11 that we are to “*put on the whole armour of God*” that will enable us to “*stand firm against the devil’s strategies*”. On this journey of faith, the two-edged sword of the Word of God will divide ‘*the joints and the marrow*’ – it will divide the moral and spiritual sense of man. Without the two-edged sword, man would have no direction between right and wrong, between what is moral and immoral according to God’s standards. Without the Bible, the ‘sword of the Spirit’, we would act according to what pleases ourselves and our flesh, never discerning between the carnal and the Godly. Scripture helps us to recognise these things in the world around us and in the strategies of the Devil.



FORESIGHT

HEARING THE WORD OF GOD

BE READY

The third action of a swordsman connects with Jesus' warning to His disciples in Mark 13 verse 33: *"Be watching! Be alert, and be praying! For you do not know when the time is."* Not every hill we encounter in life is a mountain to conquer. A good swordsman does not swing his sword back and forth in the hope that one blow might hit his enemy. Much of the journey of faith calls for the sword to be ready, but waiting for the right moment to respond. Many Christians tire on the journey of faith because there is a tendency to see a 'devil behind every bush' and we seek to have an opinion on every issue. The Spirit-filled Word must always direct our thoughts and actions so that God may be glorified in our lives.

BE PREPARED

The final action of a swordsman is found in Luke 14:26 where Jesus gave the following command: *"If anyone comes to me and does not hate.... his own life, he cannot be My disciple."* The challenge for modern-day Christians is to see the sword as something to be used, not as an ornament for discussion. It is easy to refer to the Word of God with great awe and respect without implementing the penetrating, dividing tool in our own lives. The two-edged sword of the Bible is only useful for those who plan on using it for its intended purposes, which may cost you your life.

As a travelling companion, the Bible becomes an irreplaceable, all-in-one road map, user manual, compass, GPS and an emergency kit. The Bible has different images to describe the role of the Word of God in our lives and how it becomes a sustaining power in times of suffering and times of doubt:

- it is food to feed our faith and nourish us (Jeremiah 15:16);
- it is a light to guide our steps and secure our journey (Psalm 119:105);
- it is a weapon with which we can fight our enemy (Ephesians 6:17);
- it equips us for serving Jesus (2 Thessalonians 2:15-17)
- and it keeps us clean as we submit to it (Psalm 119:9-11).

Prayerfully reading and studying God's Word with the purpose of obeying will strengthen your faith in times of doubt, encourage you in times of loneliness and give you courage in times of fear. Your relationship with God will grow as you discover more and more about Him, and you will excel in courage as this relationship strengthens. In every passage you read, you can ask what character quality of God is revealed and how this applies in the challenges you face. The result will be something to praise God for, something to confess to Him and something that requires an act of obedience. If you can, it is a good idea to write these lessons down in a notebook. It is by systematically reading the Word of God and allowing it to speak to you that you will learn to recognise the voice of the Holy Spirit, because it is through Him that God's Word was written (2 Peter 1:20-21). It is especially useful to memorise Scripture, because through this the Holy Spirit can bring Scripture to your mind when you are facing challenges and you are not quite sure what to do (John 14:26). Obeying God's Word will change our hearts and transform us, because in doing so, we are allowing Christ to 'increase' in us. Only then will we be able to stand firm in the midst of trials. Don't travel without it!

Jeremiah 15:16 *"When Your words came, I ate them; they were my joy and my heart's delight, for I bear Your Name, LORD God Almighty."*

Psalms 119:104-105 *"I gain understanding from Your precepts; therefore I hate every wrong path. Your word is a lamp for my feet, a light on my path."*

Ephesians 6:17 *"Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God."*

2 Thessalonians 2:15-17 *"So then, brothers and sisters, stand firm and hold fast to the teachings we passed on to you, whether by word of mouth or by letter. May our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father, who loved us and by His grace gave us eternal encouragement and good hope, encourage your hearts and strengthen you in every good deed and word."*

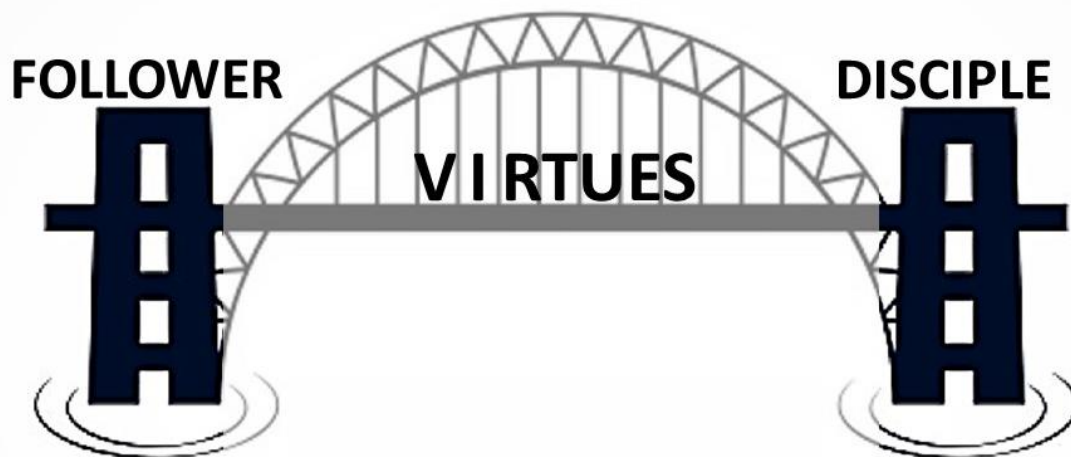
Psalms 119:11 *"I have hidden Your word in my heart that I might not sin against You."*



FORESIGHT

LIVING THE LIFE OF CHRIST

Step two in preparing for persecution comes by adding virtues to our lives. This is the bridge between following Jesus and becoming a disciple of Christ. It moves the follower from Biblical knowledge to practical application and now involves not only the teaching of Jesus but the mind of Christ (*Philippians 2:5 Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus*)



We are made to believe that to become a disciple of Christ we need to add more knowledge to our faith - studying scripture more and accumulating knowledge more. But a disciple is simply one who imitates the one he follows. Imitating Christ means we respond like He did when He faced opposition, hardship, and ultimately the cross. A **FOLLOWER** of Jesus will respond to persecution with Biblical reasoning, a **DISCIPLE** of Christ will respond to persecution with a Christ attitude - by forgiving, loving, and praying like Jesus did. Virtues will both help us to think about persecution like Christ did but will also allow us to respond to persecution like Christ did.

A Virtue, in essence, is adding beauty to our belief. We need to add to our faith virtues that will not only point to Jesus, but reflect Him as well – especially in times of persecution.

But, and this is an important **BUT**, we need to discern between structural virtues – those virtues that **SECURE** what we believe – and decorative virtues – those virtues that **DISPLAY** what we believe. In a sense our faith is like a building, an exhibition for all to see. We can have sound structural foundations with solid walls and a secure roofing, but if the exterior is ugly, it will not attract people. The opposite is also true. If we have a beautiful building but the premises is unsafe and structurally weak, people will also not enter.

Once we secured the building blocks of our faith - our structural virtues obtained by knowing the word of God - we need to add beauty. If we seek to beautify a building, we start by painting the walls. This is not about securing the structure or the foundation but the impression we leave for those who pass by. Structural virtues are virtues like faith, truth, justice, righteousness, commitment, perseverance, and countless more. Our faith will not survive the storms of life if these virtues are not in place. These are critical for our personal growth and endurance.

But, simply having our structural virtues in place is not enough. This is why Peter encourages the Church to make every effort to **ADD** to their faith virtues that will reflect the beauty of a loving Saviour (2 Peter 1:5 For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge) These virtues are not there to sustain our personal relationship with Christ in times of persecution but to reflect it. It becomes the mirror of our souls in times of hardship.



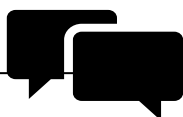
FORESIGHT

LIVING THE LIFE OF CHRIST

However, it is important to understand virtues from a Biblical perspective.

VIRTUES: 7 IMPERATIVES

- ① **First**, a virtue does not reflect what we believe, it reflects who we are. Adding virtues is therefore not about the **adding** but about **becoming**. It does not involve accumulating a higher moral behaviour or a deeper understanding of truth, but developing more like Christ; the kind, gentle, forgiving, loving, tolerant, simplistic, wise, compassionate Son of God. This is the cycle of faith seldom explored. The more we become like Christ, the more we are filled with virtue. The more we are filled with virtue, the more we become like Christ. The more we become like Christ, the more we embrace the cross. The more we embrace the cross, the more we become like Christ
- ② **Second**, the Bible mentions many virtues, but virtues are not scout medals that we earn by achieving. Virtues flow from God's character and are 'filled' in us through the work of the Holy Spirit. And the reality of filling up is first emptying out. We can only be filled with virtues if we are empty of ourselves. And this requires a process of self-denial, taking up our crosses and imitating Christ.
- ③ **Third**, a virtue is something that others see without you even noticing it. True virtues will always speak for itself. It comes from a deep desire to become less so that Christ can become greater.
- ④ **Fourth**, we are not automatically virtuous because we are "born again" or even if we are 'filled with the Holy Spirit'. This is only the start of the journey. In 2 Peter 1:5 Peter encourages spirit filled believers to make every **EFFORT** to **ADD** to their faith, virtues that will ultimately lead to love. **EFFORT** and **ADD** are the two key words here. It will require intentional effort. It happens by change, not by chance.
- ⑤ **Fifth**, when we pursue virtues, we need to see them as building blocks, one providing a stepping stone for the next to follow. When Peter encouraged believers to ADD virtues, he had a system in place that helped believers to grow step by step. We need to start at the very beginning and then add virtue by virtue until we are drenched in love, the greatest of all virtues.
- ⑥ **Six**, John Piper once proclaimed that his ultimate ambition in life is to make God look good. Make this your ambition as well. Adding virtues is not about a list that we need to complete, it is about becoming like Christ- In Bethlehem, in Gethsemane and on Golgotha. The more people see us the more they need to fall in love with Christ. When we face persecution, this should be our aspiration as well.
- ⑦ **Seventh**, if a virtue is only evident in good times, it is no virtue at all. Virtues are character traits that are intended to be visible inside and outside the church, in times of prosperity and times of persecution. Only when salt is scattered does it provide flavour.



DISCUSSION GROUPS

What virtues am I currently displaying in my community?

What virtues do I need to add to reflect Christ when I face persecution?



FORESIGHT

LIVING THE LIFE OF CHRIST

LIST OF VITUES TO PURSUE

- | | |
|--|--|
| ☐ Anguish | ☐ Kindness |
| ☐ Beauty | ☐ Knowledge |
| ☐ Belief | ☐ Love |
| ☐ Caring | ☐ Loyalty |
| ☐ Charity | ☐ Meekness |
| ☐ Cheerfulness | ☐ Mercy |
| ☐ Compassion | ☐ Optimism |
| ☐ Consideration | ☐ Passion |
| ☐ Contentment | ☐ Patience |
| ☐ Courage | ☐ Politeness |
| ☐ Courtesy | ☐ Purity |
| ☐ Delight | ☐ Quietness |
| ☐ Devotion | ☐ Reliability |
| ☐ Discernment | ☐ Respect |
| ☐ Encouragement | ☐ Reverence |
| ☐ Enthusiasm | ☐ Self-Control |
| ☐ Flexibility | ☐ Serenity |
| ☐ Foresight | ☐ Servanthood |
| ☐ Forgiveness | ☐ Simplicity |
| ☐ Friendliness | ☐ Sincerity |
| ☐ Generosity | ☐ Stillness |
| ☐ Gentleness | ☐ Sweetness |
| ☐ Godliness | ☐ Tenderness |
| ☐ Goodness | ☐ Thankfulness |
| ☐ Graciousness | ☐ Thoughtfulness |
| ☐ Gratitude | ☐ Tolerance |
| ☐ Helpfulness | ☐ Transparency |
| ☐ Honour | ☐ Trust |
| ☐ Humility | ☐ Unpretentiousness |
| ☐ Integrity | ☐ Wisdom |
| ☐ Joy | ☐ Zeal |

Spend some time going through these virtues and mark them with a



If you feel you have grown in the virtue or with an



If you still need to grow



FORESIGHT

SEEING THE SUFFERINGS OF CHRIST

Step three in preparing for persecution comes through Biblical discipleship.

When **Christ** first called His disciples He simply said, “Follow Me.” These humble fishermen responded by leaving their careers, their possessions, and even their families to follow Him (**Matthew 4:18-22**).

They became followers. But they only really became disciples after they witnessed the cross.

The disciples understood the definition of discipleship, they were under no illusion. Discipleship, in the words of their Master, meant (Matthew 16:24) that they needed to deny themselves, their needs, their preferences and their security. It also meant that they needed to take up their crosses and die to themselves. They understood the calling to follow Jesus would lead them through the cross, not only to the cross. But it was all theory. The moment they witnessed the cross, the puzzle came together and they were presented with a the visual picture of practical discipleship.

In **Luke 5:1-11** we read how the first disciples “forsook all” as they began this new journey with Jesus. The word “forsake” literally means that they turned their back on their former lives. But this followship was still only a choice of possessions and careers. It did not imply a choice on their future lives. It was like making a commitment to complete a course and finish an assignment. By agreeing to follow Jesus they consented to be His students or His learners. They recognized Him as a teacher and a leader, and they made this commitment to be His followers.

It’s interesting to note that the first directive that Jesus ever said to Peter, was “follow Me” (**Matthew 4:19**), and the last thing that Jesus said to Peter was also, “follow Me” (**John 21:22**). Although these two callings seem identical in the English language, they are actually quite different. Christ used two distinct phrases intentionally and Peter certainly understood the profound distinction between them.

Christ’s first command, “Follow Me” (**Matthew 4:19**) was very persuasive. Peter, and the other fishermen, understood what He meant. The Lord was formally and powerfully directing Peter and the others to become His students. By leaving their past behind, these four disciples were making a commitment to learn from Jesus. They recognized Him as a teacher and were willing to dedicate themselves to becoming His official pupils. In a sense, Christ was saying, “I want you to learn from Me.”

However, the Lord’s last directive to Peter came after Jesus was crucified, resurrected and after He appeared to all the disciples. This was a different Jesus now calling a group of people who had a new understanding of the One they followed. This call seemed like more of a request or a plea. Jesus has just finished an important conversation with Peter, where Christ had asked him three times if he loved Him (**John 21:15-19**). Jesus asked this of Peter, listen to this, to indicate the kind of death by which Peter would glorify God (19). Then Jesus said to him “Follow Me” - not as a pupil anymore but as a partaker in the cross of redemption. From follower to disciple. From living for Christ to dying for Christ – and the one moment of transition happened as they witnessed the cross.

These two commands clearly articulate what it means to be a disciple of Christ. His followers were expected to learn from Him. He wanted them to be students, to be eager pupils who desired to soak in everything He could possibly teach them. But He also wanted them to follow His example. Christ wanted his disciples to be motivated by their love for Him to follow His pattern and to model themselves after Him: Word – Virtue – Cross.

In our preparation we need to understand and fully embrace the cross set before us. Behold the cross in freedom and you will be ready to carry your cross in persecution!



FORESIGHT

TOUCHING THE WOUNDS OF CHRIST

Step four in preparing for persecution comes by touching the wounds of Jesus



Something happened between John 20 where the disciples met in fear behind locked doors and Acts 2 where they go into the streets to boldly proclaim the Gospel of Christ. Yes, they were baptised by the Holy Spirit and started witnessing. This we understand. But receiving the Holy Spirit did not transform them from fearful followers to bold disciples – it transformed them from bold **disciples** to bold **apostles**. So, at what moment were they transformed from **fearful** disciples to **bold** disciples - from meeting together in fear to meeting together with expectations? When did the **John20 disciples** become **Acts2 disciples**? What moment prepared them for martyrdom and persecution?

The answer is in the Bible – it was the very moment they saw and touched the wounds of Jesus (*John 20:20 After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord.) They were transformed from fear to joy in a matter of seconds. They touched the marks of the cross and they were transformed. Here is how it happened:*

We read in John 20:21 that Jesus commissioned them with these words: “*As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.*” and with that he breathed on them and said, “Receive the Holy Spirit.

The Latin word **spirare** means to breath or to blow. **Inspirare** means to breathe on or to blow in. This is where the English word “inspiration” had it’s origin from. Jesus revealed His wounds and then He “*inspired*” them and they were transformed.

Before the transformation the disciples were actually a pathetic group of people. Most of us would have slotted in quite comfortably.

- Peter was short tempered. Chopping of the ear of a soldier
- James was a racist. Calling Gods fire on the Samaritans
- Judas was corrupt. Yep, he often took some money that didn’t belong to him
- John was self indulgent. Asking to sit on the right hand of God

but most of all they were all a fearful bunch of followers. No, they were not ready for persecution. No they were not brave and fearless.

That was until the saw the wounds, they were filled with joy and they were breathed upon and inspired. Acts 2:14 amplifies the authority and confidence that became part of who the disciples were transformed into. “Then Peter **stood up** with the Eleven, **raised** his voice and **addressed** the crowd: “Fellow Jews and all of you who live in Jerusalem, **let me explain** this to you; **listen carefully** to what I say.” What confidence! What conviction! What boldness

How do we do this 2,000 years after Jesus displayed His wounds to His followers? By touching the wounds of those who carry the cross today



FORESIGHT

TOUCHING THE WOUNDS OF CHRIST

How do we touch the wounds of Jesus 2,000 years after the cross? By touching the wounds of those who carry the cross today. In order to achieve this we need to expose ourselves intentionally to be informed.

Scripture is clear that we need to “taste and see” that the Lord is good. Not only hear and listen but tangibly feel and smell the sweetness of Christ. Exposure in the life of a disciple is not an option but a life-sustaining necessity. The only way to prepare for future persecution is to be inspired when we touch the wounds of modern-day cross-bearers. The tragedy is that most Christians can only talk about things they have heard about or, in modern times, read about on the internet.

When we create expectations without providing the relevant exposure, we create a ‘tasteless generation’ where internet stories and YouTube video clips become the norm and ‘experienced Christianity’ becomes ‘extinct Christianity’.

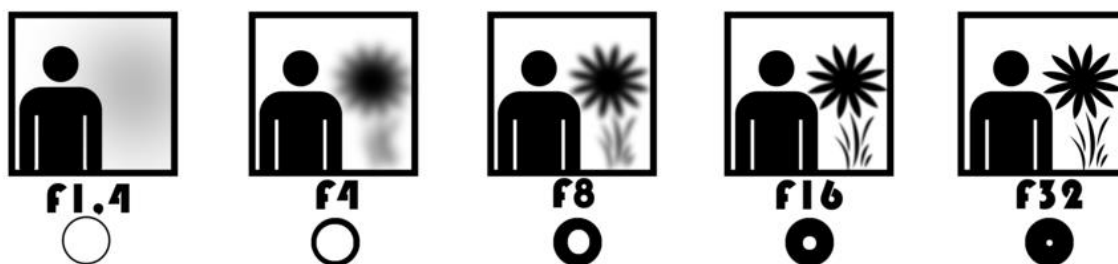
We run the risk of making the wounds of Christ a theology and theory without ever touching it and feeling the victory of the cross.

There is a great analogy between becoming a bold disciple and taking a photograph. One of the most important elements in developing both is the balance in EXPOSURE.

Exposure, from a photographic perspective, loosely refers to the amount of light that is let into the sensor on your camera which will eventually create the picture. The more light you let in, the brighter the resulting picture. Conversely, the less light you let in, the darker the picture.

This applies perfectly to becoming a bold disciple. The more exposure, the more ‘light’ is let in, the bigger the possibility of developing a brighter preparedness for persecution. Equally, the risk exists that less exposure will lead to a less developed follower.

Expose yourself to modern-day martyrs. Read about them and make a point to spend time with those who carry the wounds of Christ.





FORESIGHT

RECEIVING THE POWER OF THE HOLY SPRIT

Finally, we need to be transformed by the empowerment of the Holy Spirit. This is where bold disciples are transformed into bold apostles. This is where a group of believers received the power to endure the persecution, opposition and ultimately martyrdom that they were prepared for. Those who followed, witnessed the cross and touched the wounds, now became witness of what they saw

The Holy Spirit is the source of power and strength in times of persecution. Without Him no Christian can stand. Christians who have experienced persecution testify to the absolute necessity of being filled with the Holy Spirit.

But what we often neglect to perceive is that the disciples were first filled with the Holy Spirit and then they endured hardship. God does not leave us to ourselves in the presence of persecution, He prepares us beforehand. This is an important principle to pursue: Don't wait for persecution to come and then seek the Spirit of God. Ask today, and ask every day!

But it is equally important to note that the Holy Spirit was not poured out when the disciples first followed the Lord. They had to listen to His words, live the life He lead, embrace the cross, and touch His wounds. The Holy spirit is not there to make us feel good about ourselves as followers of Jesus. He exists for the Glory of God, being revealed through His Church displaying the cross of redemption. Those who transform from followers to disciples to apostles will receive the power to be witnesses in and through persecution

The HOW TO USE Manual

Dennis Bratcher writes that *"Pentecost represents God's gracious, enabling presence actively at work among His people, calling and enabling them to live out in dynamic ways the witness of being His people."* We need to be aware that the Holy Spirit comes with 'directions' relating to its purpose and intention – a kind of 'how-to-use' manual.

In one of His last conversations before His ascension, Jesus told His disciples that *"you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be My witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth"* ([Acts 1:8](#)). Each of the six words adds significance to the meaning of what we can expect:

AND	There is a comma, not a full stop. The "receiving" part is not the fulfilment. There is an 'AND' which implies that there is also a "to be continued..." We need to embrace the Holy Spirit with the knowledge that there is more to come – both in joy and also in suffering
YOU	This is a plural "you", intended for any and every one who follows Christ and seek to be an apostle
WILL	This signifies something non-optional. It is something you will not be able not to do. It should be like putting a flame next to gas. It WILL explode. If you seek the Holy Spirit but do not intend to be a witness your pursuit will be futile
BE	Not 'talk about it', 'preach about it' or 'discuss it', but 'BE IT'. Be it in life and BE it in death
MY	It's not about you! It is about God, His Glory and His purposes. He is the soul (and the sole focus) of Pentecost. We are not to testify about ourselves.
WITNESSES	Not accusers nor judges nor defenders – but witnesses by life, by words, by actions and by attitudes, and ultimately by death

Remember that the Word of God without the Spirit of God will leave you wise but weak. The Spirit of God without the Word of God will leave you fearless but foolish.



CONCLUSION

THE PERSECUTED CHURCH

This book would not have been possible were it not for the lessons of faithfulness and endurance of the Persecuted Church. While we still enjoy freedom, we need to use every opportunity to strengthen those who suffer and pray for our fellow brothers and sisters who share the cross of Christ.

The Church was formed as a community of like-minded people to serve God, to serve one another and to serve the community. A group of believers is a body of people who are friends with God and friends with each other. We are called to be a family. Herein lies a responsibility but also the greatest blessing.

The blessing lies in the fact that we have more family members than we realise. When we one day face the fiery trials of persecution, there will always be someone somewhere who will be willing and able to lend a hand and pray for us. Once we embark on the journey of faith, we will never be truly alone even though we might be isolated.

The responsibility has to do with the calling we have to act like a family. We are to take care of one another in a way that that is embodied by “the people of the mat” (Mark 2:1-5).

A well-known story in the Bible is about the gang of roof crashers who placed their paralysed friend on a mat, defied all decency, destroyed the roof of a stranger’s house, interrupted a good sermon and presented themselves in a very unfashionable manner to the Lord. When the Jesus **SAW** their faith, He told the paralytic that his sins were forgiven and he was healed. What an awe-inspiring act of selfless love and commitment! It tells the story of friends – friends who cared enough to believe the impossible.

These four friends in Mark 2 **ACTED** on their commitment to their friend. It was not their sympathy that made an impression on Christ, nor was it their prayers or intercession. It was the **ACT OF GETTING UP** and doing something! When the lame man was lowered through the roof, we read that Jesus **SAW** their faith and the paralytic was healed. The friends had nothing to ask for themselves – their desire was to see to the needs of the friend. It is not what Jesus heard that moved Him to heal, it was what He **SAW**. It was not pleas or prayers, but simply a hole in the roof, four sweaty faces and the commitment of those who cared more about the well-being of a friend than their own status, their own reputation or their own safety.

This is probably the single biggest need in the world today: not our sympathy as people of God but our empathy, not our fortunes but our friendship, not our presents but our presence. We are called together as an **‘oikos’**, a household and a family, not only to receive friendship but to **BE** friends

We have no option but to stand in the gap for the ‘parts of the body’ that are experiencing pain (1 Corinthians 12:26). This should not have to be a command, an option or a request – it should be natural.

Mike Burnard

1 Corinthians 12:26-27 *“If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honoured, every part rejoices with it. Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.”*



DIA-logos



"Whenever I pray, I have the Bible on one side and the New York Times on the other"

Billy Graham

Matthew 15:10:

Jesus called the crowd to Him and said, "Listen and understand..."

Have you considered how the WAR IN Gaza will impact Christianity in the Middle East or how a proxy war between Iran, its allies and the West will influence the region. How about the Taliban's control of Afghanistan, the worsening climate crisis, Russia's invasion of Ukraine, and China's assertion of dominance in the South China Sea. How will these events affect world missions? Have you included these factors in your church's mission strategy?

Will the Church be REACTIVE or PROACTIVE in her approach?

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