

Assembly – Persecution – myfishbites.com

Christian Persecution

While the world carries on and fights for the rights of many, it seems that Christian persecution is either being forgotten or intentionally ignored. This assembly is just a small way of helping to redress that balance.

Once Everyone Is In The Room

Depending on the situation / the group / how well you know people, do something like the following (or think up your own scenarios!!):

1. Ask anyone with blue eyes to stand up (or choose an eye colour, dependent on your group). Say that they are to remain standing until they are asked to sit.
2. Say that anyone with earrings is not allowed to speak for the remainder of the assembly. If they speak, they will be taken outside and punished.

Or say words to the effect of, 'Imagine that you arrive at school. You are taken to one side and the beaten round the head and shouted out by a group of staff and students. You are told that your family have been removed from their house and that you are now homeless. You are given a mark and told that you are not allowed to speak to anyone that day. Your food is removed and all of your valuables are taken from you. You will never get them back. You are told that if you complain, you will be beaten and you may not see your family again.'

This is the kind of reality for many people in the world today, just because of their faith.

Persecution

What is persecution? Google dictionary defines persecution as this:

"Hostility and ill-treatment, especially because of race or political or religious beliefs; oppression."

Who are the most persecuted group of people are in the world?

It is Christians and this persecution started right back to the time of Jesus and has continued since then. The persecution comes across the globe in many countries from many backgrounds and for a variety of reasons. 80% of all acts of religious persecution worldwide are against Christians. This comes from extremists, from governments, from other tribes and from people in power.

The persecution comes in a number of forms: people unable to get or keep a job; rejection by family and friends; torture; imprisonment; forced labour; false charges like

'blasphemy'; churches and homes burned to the ground; and in thousands of cases each year, Christians are murdered and put to death.

Over time (and mostly hundreds of years ago), there were acts of persecution by Christians, which Christians have apologised for and which were against the nature of Christianity – and often included many Christians being killed by those using it for means of power.

The former chief rabbi Jonathan Sacks told the House of Lords recently that the suffering of Middle East Christians is *"one of the crimes against humanity of our time"*. He compared it with Jewish pogroms in Europe and said he was *"appalled at the lack of protest it has evoked"*.

In February 2016, the European Parliament declared that ISIS had committed genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity. On the 27th January 2016 the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe also recognized this genocide. And in March 2016, the US Secretary of State declared that ISIS were committing genocide against Christians.

More than 7,000 Christians were killed in 2015 because of their faith – "almost 3,000 more than the previous year," said the CEO of Open Doors USA. The worst places are the Middle East, Africa, and Central Asia. The numbers are expected to increase in 2016. Yet for the most part, the world remains silent. Despite this persecution, Christians have forgiven people time after time, choosing love and life over hate and death. As just one example, a man who lost his wife, lost his arm and had his phone stolen by Islamists in Africa, publicly forgave the attackers and phoned them on his stolen mobile phone to tell them he forgave them!

While this is happening, there are also some amazing things happening, including Christians and Muslims coming together to fight extremism. It has also been reported that the biggest threat against Islamic State (ISIS) is the number of people becoming Christians!

Real Life Stories

Hayat - When eighteen year old Hayat Hussein called out to Jesus in her sleep, her strict Muslim father responded by tying her up in ropes and threatening to kill her. Hayat has now been on the run for months. Conversion to Christianity within Hayat's tribe would inevitably be life threatening.

SOURCE (checked Jan 19): <http://www.opendoorsyouth.org/the-problem/>

Afiniki, from Nigeria, is sixteen years old. She wants to become a doctor. As with most Sunday's she would head to church, she especially loves to sing. But this Sunday, Afiniki's life changed forever. That day, a suicide bomber crashed his car into a barricade at the front of her church, setting off explosives that killed at least 24 people and wounded 125 others.

"That morning, we went into the church to attend Sunday school. I was asked to take care of my friend's baby brother for a while... The next thing I knew, I was lying on the floor. I was scared and completely shocked...

I started to shout: 'Jesus, Jesus!' I looked down and saw my hand was wounded. I looked at the baby boy in my arms. He had died. We were attacked because we as Christians are serving the Living God. When I think about the bomb blast, I keep feeling sad. Sometimes, I am glad because God saved my life. Maybe He thought that it was not time for me to die."

SOURCE (checked Jan 19): <http://www.opendoorsyouth.org/the-problem/afinikis-story/>

Jong-Cheol was 11 when he escaped from North Korea into China. He was a 'kotjebi' – a North Korean word meaning 'wandering swallow' – slang for street children. Jong-Cheol became a Christian in China. Unfortunately he was caught by the police and sent back to North Korea, where he was interrogated and beaten. He didn't survive. In North Korea there are up to 400,000 secret Christians, 70,000 of whom could be imprisoned in a labour camp simply for following Jesus.

SOURCE: (checked Jan 19): <http://www.opendoorsyouth.org/the-problem/jong-cheols-story/>

Video - Blackout For Syria - by Open Doors

Direct video link (checked Jan 19) – <https://youtu.be/5aM5I6fN18I>

Note that this video is aimed at Christian young people and includes the invitation to pray for Syrian Christians as our own family, so you will need to say that we can help in other ways – like practical action, awareness etc. But this does highlight the things that are happening in the world to Christians.

Your Voice

There is a famous quote that says, "All that is necessary for the triumph of evil is that good men do nothing."

In every area of life, where there is injustice and persecution, or wherever there is evil and we do nothing, then we become part of the problem. If we don't at least raise our voice, then the risk is that persecution will become more common and that more innocent people will be killed, simply because of their faith. In the 16th and 17th centuries, Christian people were persecuted, imprisoned and even killed in Britain because of religious persecution. Many left the UK to escape.

Don't be silent and let this hatred happen again. If you don't speak up, you could even be next.