

Persecuted Church

We hear about persecution but we aren't always able to appreciate its significance so here we have tried to include some ideas about how you can practically make people aware of the dangers and suffering that our brothers and sisters are going through for Jesus. It should make us be thankful for what we have, to pray harder for revival in our nations and to pray for these guys being persecuted, that through this the Gospel of Jesus would be proclaimed even more loudly!

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The Bible - Remember Your Christian Brothers & Sisters

[Hebrews 13.3 - Remember those in prison as if you were their fellow prisoners, and those who are mistreated as if you yourselves were suffering.](#)

Do you realise that when other Christians are persecuted, it is like you are being persecuted? Persecuted means things like - Christians denied their basic rights, tortured, put in prison for no reason, forced out of their homes, where churches are destroyed, where people are kidnapped, where girls are taken from their families and attacked, when Christians are forced out of an area or country and where Christians are killed.

The Bible - It is Jesus who they persecute

[Acts 9.3-6 - As Saul neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" "Who are you, Lord?" Saul asked. "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting," he replied. "Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do."](#)

When Christians are persecuted, you have to remember that it is not the individual that is being persecuted. It's actually Jesus (who is in us by the Holy Spirit) who is being persecuted. We see this is true with the story of Saul (who later became Paul, an amazing guy who spread the Gospel all over the place).

He was on his way to persecute and kill Christians but God stepped in and changed his whole life around to be the most important apostle in the Bible and probably in the whole of history. But Jesus speaks to him and doesn't say, "Why are you killing Christians?!" Instead, Jesus himself speaks to Paul and says, "I am Jesus, who you are persecuting".

So we learn that people who persecute Christians are not actually attacking the person. Instead they are attacking Jesus himself. It is the 'Jesus in you' that people hate and not you - although they don't realise this and when you're being persecuted it doesn't feel like this. But it's important to understand this

The Bible - They don't know what they're doing

Have you ever heard the chant at football games when fans shout at the ref and sing, "You don't know what you're doing..." ?!

[Acts 7.60 - "Lord, do not hold this sin against them."](#)

Stephen was stoned to death because of his faith in Jesus (they threw stones at him until he was dead). He was part of the group of early disciples of Jesus and a faithful and good man. In Acts 7, we find that Stephen was chosen to serve the people of the early church and to help the widows. He was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom. So he was a good man. But he was killed because of his faith.

[Acts 22.4-5, 20 - I persecuted this Way to the death, binding and delivering into prisons both men and women, as also the high priest bears me witness, and all the council of the elders, from whom I also received letters to the brethren, and went to Damascus to bring in chains even those who were there to Jerusalem to be punished... And when the blood of your martyr Stephen was shed, I stood there giving my approval and guarding the clothes of those who were killing him."](#)

This bit from Acts 22 is Paul talking about his life. We learn that when Stephen was killed, Paul was there watching it happen. He gave his approval and looked after the clothes of those who killed Stephen. So Paul was involved with the murder of Christians.

But God turned Paul's life around 180 degrees so he became a Christ-follower. I wonder if the way Stephen acted when he died was something that Paul remembered? Did Stephen's forgiveness have an impact on Paul? God definitely heard the cries of Stephen and his prayer to forgive his killers. Do you think other people prayed for Paul? Probably the early church prayed to God and asked God to show his love and goodness to Paul and God answered these prayers.

So today, our attitude is one of forgiveness and to pray for those who persecute Christians, as Jesus said in Matthew 5.44...

[Matthew 5.44 - But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you](#)

In Nigeria, one man who lost many members of his family to Islamic militants said that he forgave all of them. Across the world, Christians who have been persecuted pray for those who hate them. As we pray, we know that God hears us. It may be that you will see people like 'Saul' become people like 'Paul'. God can bring Jesus to Islamic extremists and change their hearts to live for him and for truth, just like he did for you and me and just like he did for Paul.

Resources

All the following sites produce excellent resources. Barnabas releases a magazine, resources and weekly email updates. Release have a poster of the persecuted church in the nations of the world, a magazine and do video updates. Open Doors do many of the same things too. Visit the websites, get resources and get praying.

Why? Because these are our family - our brothers and sisters and we must support them. Pray, take direct action and get involved. Today.

[Barnabas Fund](#)

[Release International](#)

[Open Doors](#)

(Links all checked April 2019)

Question - how would you react??

Get hold of a DVD or download – or find clips of churches in poorer or persecuted countries. Do a presentation to music or edit a video together / use clips. Use the above links to Barnabas / Release / Open Doors to get some materials.

Religion the Problem?

Sometimes people say that 'religion is the problem'. But religion is not the same as being a Christ-follower. Following Jesus is different - instead of following rules like religion, Jesus changes our hearts and we become more like Him. We don't deserve and we can't "earn" his love. And unlike some religions, we cannot and would not force anyone to become a Christian because it is always a personal decision that only that person can make. It is between them and God. Finally, God is alive and is good! He is not a piece of metal or wood and he only wants what is best for us!

The problem is any system that feels the need to control, dominate and force people to think and act in a certain way. God is not like that. But it's not exclusive to some religions - this happens across the nations in communist countries like China, North Korea and Vietnam which are not religious.

Ideas

1. Make a video (or an audio) recording of a pretend raid on a church in a country where people are persecuted for their faith.

Suggestions for noises on audio are around shrieks of fear, chairs being bundled over, shouting.

Suggestions for video are get a group of people in a room together and have people burst in and do the same as what you're trying to get over via the audio - of people breaking up a church meeting and arresting people. Chairs go flying, some people run out, some carry on praying, others are hit and shouted at, some people try to resist..

2. Have people in a cage in the corner of the church or the room 'imprisoned' - make a mock jail with bars.

3. Confiscate everyone's Bibles and put them away from them.

4. Separate males and females - different sides of the room.

5. Maybe have the room in darkness as people have to do this to symbolise people having to meet in the dark so as not to attract attention.

6. Have people come in pretending to be government enforcers against Christians or similar. Be very careful to play it down, not to wear masks, or shout too much to frighten people, especially in a mainstream service. I heard of a vicar who did something like this and armed police turned up!

7. Stories - the Christian fish symbol - where does it come from? It came from the early church you used it as a secret mark for their meetings. Today in the Arabic world and now across the globe, people have been using the Arabic 'Nun' (our letter 'N') to show support for persecuted Christians in the Middle East.

8. Story - of a military gunman who burst into a church in a persecuted country. He shouted 'everyone who's not a Christian get out of here'. Some people fled. It turned out he was secretly a Christian and knew the government had spies in churches and wanted to make sure he was with true believers.

How Can We Help Directly?

1. We can pray for people in persecuted countries by using the 'Three Ps' (as Canon Andrew White, Bishop of Baghdad in Iraq in 2014 says) - pray for Protection, Provision and Perseverance.
2. Talk to your local government representative. In the UK for example, you can write an email or letter to your local MP to encourage them to keep the issue a priority in Parliament - find your MP by going to <http://findyourmp.parliament.uk> ... Ask your MP / government official to press the government for your nation to actively take-in Christians and those who are persecuted (to come and live in your country).
3. There are petitions that you can sign to keep the issue of persecuted Christians at the forefront of thinking in government and the media.
4. Contact your local newspaper / online website and ask them to do an article on persecuted Christians. If you know someone from your church who is from a persecuted nation, see if they will do an interview with a local paper.
5. Do something in your church and community to raise awareness / raise money for persecuted Christians. Contact the media in your area and see if they will do an article / interview with you. The media love it when young people do positive things.
6. Are there ways that you can show God's love to any refugees or international students in your area? Can you do things to help and show God's love to local Muslim people in your city?
7. We should start praying the Bible against these kinds of evil in our world, believing that God hears us and will act.
8. Use social media to keep people informed. Maybe change your social media profile or forum profile to the Arabic letter 'Nun' that we talked about earlier. Share posts about persecution so people stay informed. Or keep sharing good stories about how Christians are forgiving attackers etc. It all shows how Christians have a 'different spirit'. We must forgive and show God's love. Like Stephen prayed, very often these people don't know what they're doing.

The 'Nun' Avatar



Bible Verses you can pray

Why not get into groups and take these prayers with you and pray them for a specific situation, nation, region, people group etc.

From Ephesians 6 / John 10.10 / Colossians 2.15... "Lord, we know that the battle is not against flesh and blood. The battle is against evil powers who want to kill, rob and destroy. Lord, we pray that you would move against these powers who you have already defeated when you rose again from the Cross. We ask that we would see these powers defeated in the natural world. Lord, we pray that those Christians who are persecuted would stand strong, would be bold and would be given great faith to keep on going. Lord, arm them with the hope of your saving power, with the belt of truth and with the shield of faith to guard them against the attacks of the devil. Amen."

From Isaiah 54.17... "No weapon forged against your people will prosper and and we declare you will silence every tongue that rises up against your persecuted church in accusation and judgement. This is their right because they are servants of the Lord, and we declare their vindication is from you, the Lord of Hosts."

From 1 Corinthians 15.57-58... "Thanks be to God! You give your persecuted church the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore we pray that our dear brothers and sisters would stand firm. Let nothing move them. We pray that they would give themselves fully to the work of the Lord, because what they do for you Lord is never wasted."

From Psalm 129.5-6, Psalm 68.1, Psalm 59.1-2, Psalm 60.2... "May all the demonic powers who hate your people, your church, be turned back in shame. May they be like grass on the roof, which withers before it can grow... May God arise and may his enemies be scattered; may his foes flee before him... Deliver your people from their enemies O God; protect them from those who rise up against them. Deliver your persecuted church from evildoers and save them from bloodthirsty men... Save your people with your right hand, that those you love may be delivered."

From Psalm 17.6-9... "We call on you, our God, for you will answer us; turn your ear to us and hear our prayer. Show the wonders of your great love, you who save by your right hand those who take refuge in you from their foes. Keep them as the apple of your eye; hide them in the shadow of your wings from the wicked who are out to destroy them, from their mortal enemies who surround them."

From 2 Chronicles 14.11, 2 Chronicles 20.6... "Lord, there is no one like you to help the powerless against the mighty. Help us, Lord our God, for we rely on you, and in your name we have come against this vast army. Lord, you are our God; do not let mere mortals prevail against you... 'Lord, the God of our ancestors, are you not the God who is in heaven? You rule over all the kingdoms of the nations. Power and might are in your hand, and no one can withstand you."