

Remembering Our Persecuted Brothers and Sisters in Christ

Today marks the International Day of Prayer for the Persecuted Church, a time when believers worldwide unite to remember and pray for Christians facing persecution for their faith. While we enjoy religious freedom in America, millions of our brothers and sisters in Christ around the world face imprisonment, torture, and even death simply for following Jesus.

The Reality of Christian Persecution Today

The statistics are staggering. Since the death of Jesus Christ 2,000 years ago, an estimated 70 million Christians have been martyred for their faith. Today, more than 380 million Christians globally—that's one in seven believers—are facing persecution. To put this in perspective, it would be equal to one incident of persecution every second for 11.8 years straight.

What Does Persecution Look Like?

In countries like North Korea, owning a Bible can send you to a labor camp. In Nigeria, 18,000 churches have been burned since 2009, and 50,000 Christians have been killed. These aren't just statistics—they're our family members in the body of Christ.

Consider Pastor Li Dixien in China, who was arrested 13 times in six months for preaching to his congregation of only 100 people. During one imprisonment, he was forced to assemble 4,000 Christmas lights daily in 17-hour shifts, facing beatings if he didn't meet the quota. Yet he declared, "I will preach the gospel until I die. Christ was the first to suffer, we just follow him."

Why Should We Remember and Pray for Persecuted Christians?

Because of Their Affliction

Hebrews 13:3 instructs us to "remember the prisoners as if chained with them, those who are mistreated, since you yourselves are in the body also." The word "remember" here means to constantly recall to mind—not a passing thought, but a persistent awareness of their suffering.

These believers are labeled as prisoners, confined to cells, bound with chains that cause pain, and mistreated through beatings and shame. All of this happens simply because they hold to the truth that Jesus rose again and have placed their faith in His sacrifice for their sins.

Because of Our Connection to Them

We are spiritually connected to persecuted believers. As 1 Corinthians 12:26 states, "If one member suffers, all the members suffer with it." Just as your whole body reacts when you hit your thumb with a hammer, the entire body of Christ should respond when any part suffers.

Unfortunately, many American Christians suffer from what could be called "spiritual myopia"—we only see our immediate circumstances and "first world problems." We complain about coffee orders, seating arrangements, or program preferences while our brothers and sisters face life-threatening persecution for their faith.

Because Scripture Commands and Models It

The Bible gives us clear examples of praying for persecuted believers. In Acts 12, when Peter was imprisoned and facing execution, "constant prayer was offered to God for him by the church." This wasn't casual prayer—it was fervent, persistent intercession.

Their prayers brought Peter rest in his turmoil, accompanied his miraculous release, and resulted in rejoicing when he was freed. We may never know this side of heaven how our prayers impact persecuted believers, but we can be certain that when we pray, God moves.

What Should We Pray For?

1. Deliverance and Protection

It's not wrong to pray for God to deliver believers from suffering circumstances. Paul repeatedly asked churches to pray for his deliverance from prison and wicked men (2 Thessalonians 3:1-2, Philippians 1:19).

2. Open Doors for the Gospel

Even from prison, Paul asked for prayer that "God would open to us a door for the word" (Colossians 4:3). Chinese pastor Zhang Ruoliang spent over a quarter of his life in prison but saw over 5,000 people hear the gospel there. When released, he said he was almost glad earlier release attempts failed because "there would have been no church in that prison today."

3. Boldness to Speak

Suffering can make people hesitant to speak out. We should pray for the Holy Spirit to give persecuted believers boldness to continue sharing the gospel despite the consequences (Acts 4:29, Ephesians 6:19-20).

4. Salvation of Their Persecutors

Jesus commanded us to "love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you" (Matthew 5:44). A Nigerian pastor whose son was murdered by Boko Haram said, "I have forgiven them because they do not have Christ."

5. Endurance and Eternal Perspective

We should pray that persecuted believers keep their eyes fixed on Jesus and the glory to come. Romans 8:18 reminds us that "the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us."

6. Physical Health and Comfort

Persecution causes real physical, emotional, and psychological pain. We pray for God's comfort and healing in their suffering (2 Corinthians 1:3-4).

7. Their Families' Needs

When a breadwinner is imprisoned, families face financial hardship. Children often face persecution at school simply for being from a Christian family. We must pray for God to meet these practical and emotional needs.

The Bigger Picture

Interestingly, the persecuted church prays for America—that we wouldn't become like the church of Laodicea, which was self-sufficient and in need of nothing but had left Jesus out. They pray we wouldn't become self-focused but would remain Jesus-focused and continue sharing the gospel.

As Tertullian said in the second century, "Kill us, torture us, condemn us, grind us to dust. The more you mow us down, the more we grow. For the seed of the church is the blood of the Christians." Satan may kill the body, but he cannot touch the soul, and God's word continues to prevail.

Life Application

This week, commit to regularly praying for persecuted Christians worldwide. Set aside time daily to intercede for their deliverance, boldness, and endurance. But also examine your own heart—are you living with an eternal perspective, or are you caught up in "first world problems"?

Consider supporting organizations like Voice of the Martyrs that minister to persecuted believers. Most importantly, let their example challenge you to live boldly for Christ in your own context, using the religious freedom you have to share the gospel without fear.

Ask yourself: If faced with persecution, would I have the same unwavering commitment to Christ as these believers? Am I living with the same eternal perspective that helps them endure suffering? How can I use my freedom to advance God's kingdom while I have the opportunity?

Remember, we serve a God who has already won the victory. As Revelation 12:11 declares, "And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, and they did not love their lives to the death." May we live as overcomers, holding fast to Jesus until He returns.