

# idop

INTERNATIONAL DAY OF PRAYER  
FOR THE PERSECUTED CHURCH

Blessed are the Persecuted

**BIBLE STUDIES**

## **About the IDOP**

Today, more than 300 million Christians around the world live in places where they face persecution. This includes harassment, detention, legal restrictions, violence and even death for their faith in Jesus. The Bible tells us that we should pray for those who are mistreated as if we ourselves are mistreated (Heb. 13:3) and that if one member of the body suffers, we all suffer (1 Cor. 12:26). For more than two decades, the World Evangelical Alliance has organised the International Day of Prayer for the Persecuted Church (IDOP), as a global event that unites millions of Christians in prayer for the persecuted Church. Annually, the IDOP is observed on either the first or second Sunday of November, depending on your convenience and choice.

For more information visit: [www.idop.org](http://www.idop.org)

## The Blessing of Suffering

Dr Brian Winslade,

### 1 Peter 3:13-15:

*<sup>13</sup> Who is going to harm you if you are eager to do good? <sup>14</sup> But even if you should suffer for what is right, you are blessed. “Do not fear their threats; do not be frightened.” <sup>15</sup> But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect.*

The apostle Peter wrote his pastoral letters in the aftermath of the great fire that destroyed two-thirds of Rome. Emperor Nero needed a scape goat; Christians were a soft target. The relatively small religious movement at the time was catapulted into prominence as ripples of hatred and oppression spread. It was a perilous time to be a Christian. Peter and Paul would soon face execution, and there was a need for a wise pastoral word to help prepare the church for a fate that may come.

Jesus had predicted this would be the case. Whether he had in mind vicious waves of state-sanctioned persecution that would harass the church in its first few centuries, he was crystal clear on his predictions: “If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first . . .” (John 15). To be “Christian” is to be counter cultural. That, in and of itself, creates suspicion and intolerance. Jesus even predicted a day would come when someone would kill a Christian and in so doing believe they were “*offering a service to God*” (John 16:2). And yet, over the next three centuries, despite waves of foul persecution, more and more people were attracted to Christ.

Peter echoed the words of Jesus (in the eight Beatitude) suggesting those who suffer persecution for righteousness’ sake are “*blessed*.” How can that be? Those living in the relative security of religious tolerance, equate “persecution” with “blessing” is an oxymoron. The prevailing assumption is that all suffering is bad an antithetical to the way of God’s kingdom. True, this is a promise for the kingdom that is yet to come, but it was never presented as part of the deal before that time. Following Jesus is dangerous, risky, threatening. Yet those living with overt opposition testify to the special presence and empowering of the Holy Spirit as they endure threats and hostility. They know their testimony is working, as evil is exposed and rattled. And come what may, they prepare their answer to those who ask them for the mysterious hope that is within them.

Is it any wonder those who face opposition for their faith pray for persecution in those parts of the world where it is absent? The blessings they have received in the crucible of suffering is a joy they want others to experience too.

### ***Discussion questions:***

- When you hear the word “suffering” what experience comes most to mind?
- Romans 5:4 and James 1:2 speak of the value of suffering in terms of character development. How has suffering changed or affected you?
- What experience (little or large) have you had of Jesus prediction in John 15:18-21?
- How often does it happen that Christians get asked to explain their faith? Why is that the case?
- What does this passage motivate you to do differently this week?

## **Standing with the Persecuted**

*Dr Jay Matenga*

Immediately before the writer to the Hebrews launches into the great chapter about faith (Hebrews 11) they write, “We are the faithful ones, whose souls will be saved” (Hebrews 10:39 NLT). The faith chapter that follows provides supporting evidence for what the writer had just written, especially as regards patience while suffering psychological and physical pain because of a love for Christ (Hebrews 10:32-38). Sometimes readers were the suffering and sometimes they were the ones helping others through suffering. Either way, suffering was a constant companion, which required patient endurance (v35) with joy (v34) as a community of faith. How can this be? The writer says it is because of a “confident trust in the Lord” (Hebrews 10:35 NLT).

Patient endurance is not merely an act of our will or something we sustain through right thinking. It is the outworking of faith. But faith is not something we conjure up from within ourselves either. Faith is the by-product of relationship, a confident trust that grows from experience. The stronger our experiential relationship with God in Jesus Christ, the better prepared we will be to expect the Holy Spirit (see John 14:16) to strengthen us through trials and deliver us, however long that takes. Because that is what God does. Our God sustains and saves.

Our faith is based on the faithfulness of God. Faithfulness is a core aspect of God’s character, which is love (see Galatians 5:22-23 and compare with Deuteronomy 7:9). The Lord can be trusted because God is love and our new life in Christ enables us to experience that love in all its fullness. Our faith strengthens as we grow in our trust in God’s love. Going through all kinds of trials in the full knowledge of God’s love helps us to persevere and perseverance leads to maturity, which is a way of describing our great reward (compare Hebrews 10:35-36 with James 1:2-4). This is what we affirm, this is how we motivate one another, and this is how we ought to encourage one another as Jesus’ return comes closer (Hebrews 10:23-25).

Finally, we build faith in the Body of Christ by loving one another with the love of God through the power of the Holy Spirit. We can even do that for those physically distant from us who are suffering by remembering that we are one with them, remembering them before God (Hebrews 13:3), and praying the love of God over them (see Ephesians 3:14-19).

### ***Discussion questions:***

- How is your experiential relationship with God? What practical steps can you take to strengthen your confident trust in God’s love?
- In what ways can you help people’s faith by demonstrating the love of God to them? How might this be extended to those suffering under trial or persecution?
- How often do you remember those imprisoned or otherwise suffering because of their love for God? Remember them now before God in prayer, blessing them with Paul’s prayer of Ephesians 3:14-19. Commit to doing this regularly.

## The Way of Love Tehmina Arora

### 1 Peter 2:21-23

*<sup>21</sup>To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps. <sup>22</sup>“He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth.” <sup>23</sup>When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly New International Version*

Across the global, Christians are being targeted for their faith. According to 2021 World Watch List, every day 13 Christian are killed for their faith worldwide. Every day, 12 churches or Christian buildings are attacked. And every day, 12 Christians are unjustly arrested or imprisoned, and another 5 are abducted. The scale of the violence against Christians is staggering. Yet, as Christians we are called not to retaliate but rather to pray for and bless those who attack us.

It is not by any means an easy task. There may be times when fear for further retaliation causes us to remain quiet. It, however, takes great strength, courage, and trust in God to smile back at our attackers and offer to go another mile. And yet that is exactly what we see many Christians do over and over again. Smile and turn the other cheek.

Where does this strength come from in the face of such trial, God in His word has said that He will never leave us nor forsake us. The question is - do we believe him? He has promised to give us a hope and a future, do we believe him? But most importantly, he calls us to holy living – living in way that loves God and loves men and women created in the image of God, because that alone will bring real joy and contentment. Do we believe him?

These are questions are relevant to the persecuted church, but also to each of us. How are we to respond in the midst of suffering, what should our attitude be ? But there is also a connected question to this. How do we respond when we hear about the trials of the persecuted church? What is our responsibility – instead of turning the other cheek, are we turning our face away? Those of us who are not experiencing the same levels of physical persecution have a duty to care. It would be easy to cite security concerns, distance, and even the ability to make a real difference as valid reasons not to get involved. However, we can take solace from the women who gathered at the foot of the cross where Jesus was hanging. They could have advanced the same arguments that it is dangerous and besides what could they really do to help.

But they stood, nevertheless. It was a risky thing to be an associate of a man whom the Roman government had sentenced to die on a cross. They wanted to be with Jesus even it meant only to be with him as he died. They risked their reputation and their security so that He would not die alone.

On this International Day of the Persecuted Church, let us remember those brothers and sisters who are being targeted for their faith and ask God to impress upon our hearts how best we can be of service to them.

*Discussion questions:*

- Can we trust God in the face of intense suffering?
- How does the persecution of the church impact me?
- Can I be a neighbor to the persecuted church and if yes, then what practical steps can I take to show love and charity?

**All who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.**

*John Langlois*

On this International Day of Prayer for the Persecuted Church we remember those of our brothers and sisters around the world who are persecuted because of their faith in Christ. The Apostle Paul reminded the young pastor Timothy that “*all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted*” so that includes all of us. (2 Timothy 3:12)

Those words are particularly relevant in 2021. We often tend to think of persecution taking place in countries where (nominal) Christianity is not the majority religion. In the past few years, and increasingly in the past two years, there has been a global spiritual attack on those who seek to live according to what the Apostles taught and passed on to us through the scriptures.

As we remember those who are being imprisoned, tortured, and slaughtered by oppressive regimes for their faith in Christ, let us also remember those who are being persecuted in countries whose moral standards were formerly based on Christian teaching but no longer are, such as:

- ministers who are being forced out of the ministry because they do not believe in so-called same sex marriage,
- nurses, doctors, and other medical workers who do not believe in unrestricted abortion – the slaughter of baby girls and boys at any time up to birth,
- teachers who are sacked from their jobs because they do not believe in children being taught homosexual conduct as part of their school curriculum,
- psychiatrists and counsellors who are legally banned from advising those who come to them seeking help to shake off homosexual orientation,
- Christian students who are turned away from university because they refuse to believe that it is possible to change one’s gender (transgenderism) and
- pastors who are banned from holding church services because the authorities regard them as dangerous in breaking Covid lockdowns, while allowing casinos to operate as usual.

Across the world we, the Body of Christ, are all in this together in confronting “*evil people and impostors, who go on from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived*” (2 Timothy 3:13).

As we meet to pray on this special day, let us remember that we are the largest family on earth, hundreds of millions of brothers and sisters who are being persecuted, in so many different ways, just because we serve Jesus, with whom we shall share eternity in that Holy City where nothing unclean will ever enter, nor will anyone enter who does what is detestable or false, but only those who are written in the Lamb’s book of life.

While the Apostle John was suffering banishment on the island of Patmos he was given the wonderful Revelation of the last times. He encouraged the righteous *to still do right and the holy still to be holy, because Jesus would bring His reward with him. He would wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death would be no more, neither would there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things would pass away*” (Rev.21:4).

Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount “*Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you*” (Matthew 5).

That is literally true. Our reward will be spending eternity with Jesus in a Holy City where there is no sin. Jesus' last recorded words in the Bible are "*Surely I am coming soon*" to which the Apostle John added "*Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!*" (Rev 22:20) and ended with the following verse

*"The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all. Amen"* (Rev 22:21).

***Discussion questions:***

- What does the increasing persecution of Christians around the world tell us about:
  - God's purpose for His church
  - what the Bible tell us about the end times
  - God's hand in human history
  - Satan's hand in destroying the Church
  - Satan's hand in creating a new world order ("The Great Reset" of the World Economic Forum) and
  - If the global Covid 19 pandemic fits into that?

**Praying for the persecuted**  
*Prof Dr Janet Epp Buckingham*

**Rom. 15:30-33**

<sup>30</sup>I urge you, brothers and sisters, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, to join me in my struggle by praying to God for me. <sup>31</sup> Pray that I may be kept safe from the unbelievers in Judea and that the contribution I take to Jerusalem may be favorably received by the Lord's people there, <sup>32</sup> so that I may come to you with joy, by God's will, and in your company be refreshed. <sup>33</sup> The God of peace be with you all. Amen.

Paul is writing this letter to the Romans by way of introducing himself to them. He uses the opportunity to share his foundational beliefs that we are all fallen and in need of Christ. He establishes the unity of all believers in the reality of increasing diversity in the Church. In this passage, Paul is coming to the end of the letter. He indicates his wish to visit the Roman Christian community as part of a larger missionary visit to Spain. We know that this trip did not happen and instead, Paul was imprisoned and came to Rome as a prisoner.

The letter of Romans graphically depicts Paul's eagerness to join Christian brothers and sisters, be they in Rome, or Judea, or where he is writing the letter from. He calls on the common aspects of their faith for this unity: belief in the sacrifice in Jesus, reliance on the Holy Spirit and the power of prayer.

***Discussion questions:***

- It is clear that Paul is feeling pressure from many opponents. Who does Paul identify that oppose him?
- Paul identifies that there is a way that Christians in Rome can help him, even from afar. How can they help?
- Paul often has the theme of joy in his letters. What will bring Paul joy here?
- How does Paul expect that prayer will make a difference?
- Fellow Christians who are under pressure for their faith often ask for prayer above all else. From this passage, why do you think this is?
- When you have faced opposition or difficult times in your life, have you asked others to pray for you? How did God answer?
- What common, unifying characteristics of our Christian brothers and sisters most appeal to you in your prayer life?
- Paul is representative of Christians around the world who are under pressure for their faith. How can you pray in unity with these brothers and sisters to refresh them and bring them joy in the face of opposition?