

"Look to the LORD and his strength; seek his face always." - Ps. 105:4



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## Paths of Justice

### Encouraging Those Who Suffer

We seem to have a really tough time relating to what it is like to be persecuted. In our country, we do not experience this near as much as others. We hear many stories of painful and horrific persecution of Christians in countries such as North Korea, Iraq, Egypt and Afghanistan. As times become darker and we are faithful to our Lord Jesus, we will certainly endure persecution. We are promised this, so we shouldn't be surprised when it happens and that people will hate us because of our identity in Christ. In 2 Tim. 3:12 ESV it says, "all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted". 1 Jn. 3:13 says, "Do not be surprised, brothers, that the world hates you." In John 15:18, Jesus says that "If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you."

God uses this suffering in great ways to shine the light of Christ more and more to others in this dark world. Jesus said that "just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (Jn. 13:34b-35). It's very important that we demonstrate love for our brothers and sisters who are being

persecuted for their trust in Jesus Christ. We need to pray for them and encourage them to be a light for Christ and to be strong in the faith. Another way to help is to send more Bibles to these areas so that people can know the love of Christ and the power of the gospel that can bring new life to unbelievers through the power of the Holy Spirit.

In this country, we've been sheltered from the persecution that our brothers and sisters face worldwide. But when one part of the body suffers, the whole body suffers. Heb. 13:3 says to "Remember those who are in prison, as though in prison with them, and those who are mistreated, since you also are in the body." We have the freedom and opportunity to intervene on behalf of those who are suffering through prayer, encouragement, and communication with the leaders of our country and theirs. We are the body of Christ and what one part of the body feels affects the other parts of the body. 1 Cor. 12:24-26 says, "But God has put the body together, giving greater honor to the parts that lacked it, so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it." What does that say if we ignore our brothers throughout the world who are now suffering? Let us consider how we can help those in need and give support to them to share the gospel of Jesus' life, death and resurrection for sinners through faith in Him and the hope we have. – Jeff Reker

### Seek Justice for Persecuted Believers

Thanksgiving has just passed and we are now contemplating the Christmas season. We are always ready for a holiday even if there is debate about what the holiday is called. We as a Christian fellowship have a lot in common in the way we celebrate Christmas. We celebrate the miraculous birth of Jesus and the fulfillment of prophecy. We also celebrate family: our nuclear family, our extended family and our church family. Lastly, we

find that this time of year is when we are more likely to be in the mood to give. We give to our family members to celebrate Jesus but also give to those who are less fortunate like the Angel Tree children. Maybe this time of year, like Easter, we identify a little more as Christians. Many people around the world are celebrating Christmas. However, not every country goes all out with lights surrounding the roofs of their homes and a yard full of (over)

Definition of injustice:  
Injustice occurs when someone with greater power deprives someone with lesser power of freedom, dignity, treasure, or livelihood.

"Remember those who are in prison, as though in prison with them, and those who are mistreated, since you also are in the body."  
– Heb. 13:3

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plastic characters. In some countries, just being a Christian can cause a great deal of difficulty in a person's life. Eric Metaxas, in his article "International Day of Prayer for the Persecuted Church," states that more Christians are persecuted today than ever before.<sup>1</sup>

Open Doors publishes their "World Watchlist",<sup>2</sup> an annual review of Christian persecution. They list the 50 countries where there is the most extreme Christian persecution. As you might expect, the top three countries where admitting to follow Jesus is dangerous are North Korea, Somalia and Afghanistan. The list is rounded out with Bahrain, Oman and Columbia as 48, 49 and 50.

When I consider the persecuted church, there are two things that just amaze me. First, I don't understand why Christians are persecuted except for the fact that Jesus said that he was persecuted and his followers would also be. This seems like a great injustice since a true Christian who tries to follow God's Word, loving people, caring for life and being a good citizen under the government would be ideal. To take his or her life or opportunity to earn a living is unjust. I also am amazed at the remarkable attitude of the persecuted Christians.

Open Doors identified what they call 8 Engines of Persecution and explained why being a Christian is dangerous. **Islamic Extremism; Religious Nationalism; Ethnic Antagonism; Secular Intolerance; Communist and Post-Communist Oppression; Denominational Protectionism, Organized Corruption and Crime; Dictatorial Paranoids** (see Open Doors World Watchlist 2017 for definitions).

I wonder how I would hold up under persecution. What we see from those in foreign nations is amazing. We witnessed 21 Coptic Christians being beheaded by ISIS on the shore of the Mediterranean Sea because they would not renounce Jesus. For Christians in Syria and other Middle East nations, the message is clear: get out! Go someplace safe! But a couple who work with Voice of the Martyrs report that many Christians are choosing to STAY and serve the Lord and witness for Christ. These bold brothers and sisters are standing in the fire of war and persecution, and they are finding—just as Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego did—that God is standing with them. Their desire is to share the Word with the Muslims. They pray for their attackers and for churches in other oppressive countries. Where is the justice for these Christians? "For you rule the peoples with equity and guide the nations of the earth" (Psalm 67:4).

When martyrdom is ignored by powerful nations, it increases. If persecution succeeds in diminishing the spread of God's Word in one country, it will give others more reason for oppression and the church is one body, not a body in each nation. Persecution is the satanic work that is described in Revelation (Rev 2:9).

What can we do? Pray for these Christians, send Bibles through Open Doors or Voice of the Martyrs, and write letters to governments on behalf of the believers. We must stand together.

<sup>1</sup> BreakPoint: International Day of Prayer for the Persecuted Church: Wake up, Speak out, Pray, Eric Metaxas & Stan Guthrie, 11/1/17.

<sup>2</sup> World Watch List, Open Doors, [www.opendoorsusa.org/christian-persecution/world-watch-list/](http://www.opendoorsusa.org/christian-persecution/world-watch-list/).

### **Opportunities / Activities**

- Go to <https://www.opendoorsusa.org/take-action/volunteer/> and <https://www.persecution.com/public/getinvolved.aspx/> to help our brothers and sisters who are being persecuted in other countries.
- We have given the money we collected with the baby bottles for the Pregnancy Decision Health Centers and will let you know the total soon. Please continue to pray for them and those they are serving.
- December 3 is our Angel Tree Christmas Party from 2:00 to 4:00 PM. Please join us to get to know those who join us from our community and follow up with them. Go to <http://tinyurl.com/AngelTreeResources> for more information, training, and ideas about how you can help.
- Could you get more involved with righting injustice? Come to our Justice Team meetings where prayer happens, plans are made, and investigations continue.
- Check with Tom Castor (tcbus7@att.net) or Doug Dunsmoor (dwdunsmoor@hotmail.com) for more information about these and more opportunities.