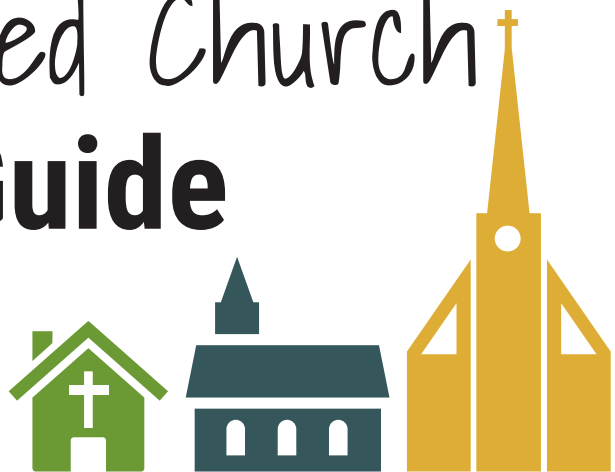


The Persecuted Church

Prayer Guide



THE ISSUE

Christian persecution is defined by Open Doors as “any hostility experienced as a result of one’s identification as a Christian.” This can range from verbal harassment and discriminatory attitudes to severe hostility such as beatings, physical torture, confinement, forced marriage to unbelievers, isolation, rape, slavery, discrimination in education and employment, and even death.¹

Sadly, persecution often comes from the family of a new believer. In many nations and in some religions, having a family member convert to Christianity is a cause of intense shame. The family may ridicule, disown, or even kill the new believer. Many young or new Christians buckle under this pressure and renounce their faith.

In many places, persecution comes from the community. Often encouraged by the government, community members rise up to do all they can to convince the new believer to renounce their faith. Companies may refuse to hire Christians, or neighbors may not buy goods from a Christian seller. Believers’ homes or crops are sometimes burned. The community might isolate the Christians, refusing to interact with them. Rumors may be started that the believers are bringing evil spirits to the community.

Another form of persecution comes from political or religious groups who are trying to eradicate all Christians. In countries like Iraq and Turkey, Christians have been forced to flee or renounce their faith, or risk losing their lives. Those who flee often end up spending years in refugee camps, where they are not able to provide for themselves or reestablish their lives. As Christians flee, the Christian witness left in those nations falls away. For instance, less than half a million Christians remain in Iraq, since many have already left after being targeted by extremists for more than a decade.

Persecution is real—it’s painful and scary. It affects all believers, not just church leaders or evangelists. It typically makes it more difficult for people to convert, as the cost is high. It causes those who aren’t strong in their faith to fall away and can be a huge discouragement to church leaders. It’s hard for them to watch their congregations suffer and people leave. Many times it causes God’s people to live in fear.

Yet we must not forget that God has promised to work all things together for the good of those who love Him. God does not abandon anyone as they suffer. He remains there with His bride in every circumstance. Time and again, we hear the testimony that, in the midst of persecution, people experienced miracles of protection, inner peace, and God’s tangible presence. No one wishes for suffering, but those who have experienced it often say it was the time when they were most aware of God.

ROOT CAUSES:

The roots of persecution are complex. Many assume that Christians are persecuted primarily because they are evangelizing. In fact, Christians are often persecuted for social, economic, and political reasons. Christianity can be seen as:

- **A threat to other religious ideologies** – A common reason for persecution has been the belief held by other religious groups that Christianity is a movement which poses a threat to the dominance of their own ideologies. In Niger, for example, more than 98 percent of the population follows Islam, and hostility arises more from an extremist Islamic society than from the government.²
- **A threat to a government's desire for absolute control** – The violence and discrimination experienced by the church may also originate from an authoritarian government's desire to maintain absolute control. For instance, in communist nations, authoritarian governments seek to control all religious thought and expression as part of a comprehensive plan to control all aspects of political and civic life. Similarly, Christianity's emergence in nations such as those in the Middle East or Northern Africa appears counter-cultural to the status quo of the nation. Some governments regard Christians as enemies of the state because they hold religious beliefs that may challenge loyalty to the ruling authorities.
- **Western Imperialism** – In some nations, Christianity is viewed as a form of Western imperialism. Often these nations identify Western nations as "Christian." Therefore, where the West is hated and seen as a threat, so is Christian faith. For example, World Watch Monitor reported that Hindu fundamentalists in India want to criminalize Christian presence and social work as a conversion conspiracy by Western powers. Any organization that is Christian is seen as Western and becomes a target for elimination. Skepticism and paranoia run rampant when anti-Western sentiment is attached to the Church.³
- **A threat to economic stability** – One of the lesser-known reasons for Christian persecution is the financial threat some think they might pose to their communities. At times, Christian doctrine threatens certain trades or practices (opium production and use of witchcraft, for example). In parts of Africa, witch doctors use their influence to stop the opening of new churches. Sometimes when believers band together and share businesses or resources, others may feel that they pose a threat to their own financial well-being. Christians might also have property that other groups want to confiscate. The dominant religious group may simply seize land, houses, or other resources if they want them. It is also not uncommon for them to accuse the Christians of some wrongdoing in order to ruin their businesses or confiscate their possessions.

STATISTICS

According to 2018 estimates, 215 million Christians face persecution on a regular basis. Each month, 255 Christians are killed for their faith, and more than 500 acts of violence are committed against believers and churches.¹ There are more than 65 nations where Christians are persecuted.

For 14 consecutive years, North Korea has been ranked as the most persecuted nation in the world due to heavy regulation by the communist governmental regime. If discovered, Christians face imprisonment in labor camps, torture, or death.⁴

During the twentieth century, the number of Christians in the Middle East was already declining. One hundred years ago, Christians made up 14 percent of the population; today, it is estimated to range from 3.5–7 percent (7.5 million to 15 million individuals), with the largest numbers living in Egypt, Syria, and Lebanon.^{5,6} As of October 2018, Christians are opposed by Islamic extremists in 33 of the 50 worst nations for persecution.⁷

HOW TO PRAY

- **Pray for persecuted Christians** to feel God's presence in the midst of their situation. Pray for those who feel isolated and alone. Pray for them to be able to show the love of God to their enemies and persecutors. Pray for strength to persevere in their faith and profess Jesus as Lord. Pray for peace that passes understanding and for perfect love to drive out all fear.
- **Pray that the global church** would perceive the suffering of their persecuted brothers and sisters and unite as one body. Ask that the church would understand what it means to bear one another's burdens in the face of persecution.
- **Pray for protection** of families and communities that are under persecution. Pray for wisdom in how to provide refuge and safety especially for the more vulnerable family members (children, pregnant mothers, the sick, or elderly).
- **Pray that, at a societal level, Christians** would demonstrate God's love in ways that overcome the fears that other religions and political groups have of them. Pray for favor with governments and majority religions. Pray for governments to establish and uphold religious freedom in their nations.
- **Pray for those who are persecuting Christians**, that God would reveal His love and forgiveness to them. Pray that they would come to know the one true God. Pray for God to work in their emotions and hearts; for them to turn away from their prejudices, fears, and anger; and for them to respect all human life.
- **Pray for godly authority structures** to be put in place in families, governments, and religious systems. Pray for God to reveal to them His original design of authority built on love rather than on fear-based control. Pray for love to replace fear in authority structures.

Times to intensify prayer for the persecuted church

International Day of the Persecuted Church (First Sunday of November)

Christmas Season

Easter Season

SCRIPTURES

Encouragement for the Persecuted

- Job 13: 15
- Matthew 5:10-12
- Mark 13:13
- Luke 6:22-23
- Romans 8:35-37
- I Corinthians 12:26-27
- 2 Corinthians 4:8-12
- Hebrews 12:1-3
- 1 Peter 3:14-17, 4:12-19
- Revelation 2:10

Teaching on Persecution

- Matthew 5:44
- John 15:18-25
- Romans 12:17-21
- 1 Corinthians 4:12
- 2 Timothy 3:12
- Hebrews 13:3

Stories of Persecution

- Acts 5:17-21
- 2 Corinthians 12:10
- Philippians 1:12-14
- I Thessalonians 3:4
- Revelation 7:13-17

RESOURCES TO HELP IN EXPLAINING THE ISSUE

Blog including personal experience and stories:

<http://reconciledworld.org/prayer-persecution/>

Info and statistics by Open Doors USA:

<https://www.opendoorsusa.org/christian-persecution/>

Interactive map with Top 50 most persecuted nations:

<https://www.opendoorsusa.org/christian-persecution/world-watch-list/>

Prayer tools for the persecuted church:

<http://rippleeffectseries.com/>

Videos for specific countries:

<https://www.opendoorsusa.org/christian-persecution/world-watch-list/>

Other Articles:

<http://www.nytimes.com/2015/07/26/magazine/is-this-the-end-of-christianity-in-the-middle-east.html>

<http://www.haaretz.com/middle-east-news/1.668174>

<http://www.christiantoday.com/article/christians.in.middle.east.facing.worst.persecution.as.population.drops.sharply/60044.htm>

<http://edition.cnn.com/2016/01/17/world/christian-persecution-2015/>

<http://www.pewforum.org/2012/09/20/rising-tide-of-restrictions-on-religion-findings/>



SOURCES

- 1 Open Doors, "What is Christian Persecution?" <https://www.opendoorsusa.org/christian-persecution/>
- 2 Open Doors, "Why Persecution Occurs" <https://www.opendoorsusa.org/christian-persecution/why-persecution-occurs/>
- 3 Ignitum Today, 7 Reasons Christianity is the Most Persecuted Religion in the World <http://www.ignitumtoday.com/2014/08/10/7-reasons-christianity-persecuted-religion-world/>
- 4 Open Doors, "North Korea" <https://www.opendoorsusa.org/christian-persecution/world-watch-list/north-korea/>
- 5 New York Times, "Is This the End of Christianity in the Middle East?" <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/07/26/magazine/is-this-the-end-of-christianity-in-the-middle-east.html>
- 6 Newsweek, "What the U.S. Can Do to Help Christians in the Middle East" <http://europe.newsweek.com/what-us-can-do-help-christians-middle-east-319643?rm=eu>
- 7 Open Doors, "World Watch List" <https://www.opendoorsusa.org/christian-persecution/world-watch-list/>