

Day 44 Comforting the Persecuted

Matthew 5:10 (NLT) God blesses those who are persecuted for doing right, for the Kingdom of Heaven is theirs.

The power to live and build our lives the way that the Father expects of us is given to us when we are willing to obey the words of Jesus. This is not a self generated, pull myself up by the bootstraps and become what I need to become, kind of power. It is a power that comes through recognizing, relying and receiving Christ as our foundation. So our motivation is Christ, our measure is Christ, our model is Christ and our power is Christ. We do not build God's way with our own strength and ability. We build God's way through the constant leading and wisdom of the Holy Spirit. God enables us, not only to obey Him, but He also comforts us when we are going through suffering for His Name's sake. The whole world is subjected to some form of suffering; no one escapes it because it is a suffering that was brought on through sin entering the world. Bad things happen to righteous and unrighteous people. We are all subjected through sin and the end result is death. All the glory be to God who through Jesus has set us free from the power of sin so that we can live even if we die.

The suffering that Jesus refers to in the beatitudes is the suffering of persecution. Persecution because, by believing in Him and doing the right things, that might cause others to react in an aggressively negative way. The world cannot receive the comfort of God because they do not belong to the family of God. By refusing the Father, they willingly reject His comfort. We, however, can rely on and know that when we face suffering for Christ sake, we will receive God's comfort. Paul writes: ***"All praise to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is our merciful Father and the source of all comfort. 4 He comforts us in all our troubles so that we can comfort others. When they are troubled, we will be able to give them the same comfort God has given us. 5 For the more we suffer for Christ, the more God will shower us with his comfort through Christ. 6 Even when we are weighed down with troubles, it is for your comfort and salvation! For when we ourselves are comforted, we will certainly comfort you. Then you can patiently endure the same things we suffer. 7 We are confident that as you share in our sufferings, you will also share in the comfort God gives us."*** (2 Corinthians 1:3-7 NLT)

We receive comfort so we can give God's comfort to others. It is a beautiful picture of Christ's Body working together and sharing God's comfort with others who need it. When we function the way Jesus intends for us to function, it demonstrates the love and power of Christ. Your suffering has the potential of bringing comfort to others. It shows others, who are going through a difficult time of persecution, that God will never abandon them. It produces the patience to endure the suffering and the knowledge that God comforts all of His suffering children! As you are reading this, you have brothers and sisters all over the world that are suffering horrific things. They are being beaten, wrongly imprisoned, falsely accused. They have their houses and churches burnt down, their sons and daughters brutalized and even killed. The only reason they suffer is because they love Jesus and want to serve Him. Have you thought about them today? Have you prayed for them today?

We here in the United States of America do not know that kind of persecution because of our faith. We have some levels of personal persecution due to individuals that have a dislike or even a hatred towards Christ, or anyone who professes Jesus. We do have pressure to validate immoral lifestyles that we do not necessarily agree with and that brings with it some form of labeling and dismissing. Yet, it still does not compare with the suffering of the early church or the present church in a multitude of countries in the world. The good news is that, even if we face times of great trial, pressure or persecution, we can

fully rely on our faithful Father who will give us what we need when we need it. The suffering that Paul endured in the province of Asia was so great that He expected to die. ***“We think you ought to know, dear brothers and sisters, about the trouble we went through in the province of Asia. We were crushed and overwhelmed beyond our ability to endure, and we thought we would never live through it. 9 In fact, we expected to die. But as a result, we stopped relying on ourselves and learned to rely only on God, who raises the dead. 10 And he did rescue us from mortal danger, and he will rescue us again. We have placed our confidence in him, and he will continue to rescue us.” (2 Corinthians 1:8-10 NLT)***

Paul shows us what to do when we are faced with overwhelmingly difficult and soul-crushing circumstances beyond our own capacity to endure. The persecution that Paul faced caused him to rely completely on the Lord, and it gave him the confidence, not only in that moment, but also for the future. We can have confidence and comfort in knowing that our God will continue to rescue us, even if we face mortal danger. When we live our lives following God’s purpose for us, He will make sure we finish the work He called us to finish. Sometimes we might feel helpless when we hear about the suffering of others and the pain that they are having to endure, but we can help. How can we help our brothers and sisters who are suffering persecution? ***“And you are helping us by praying for us. Then many people will give thanks because God has graciously answered so many prayers for our safety.” (2 Corinthians 1:11 NLT)***

We can help by praying for God’s comforting presence for those who are in dire need of His divine protection. We pray like Jesus prayed for us; that they will not be taken out of this world, but that God would keep them from the evil one and the wicked actions of those against them. Prayer is not a last resort; it is a first response. For us who are blessed to live in countries where we are still free, even though some of our freedoms are threatened, for the most part, we are still free. We need to see ourselves as God’s agents of comfort to our persecuted brothers and sisters. We should be the first responders in prayer and intercession and carry them in our prayers before the Father.

Living righteously does not guarantee that we will not face persecution. Living righteously, in some instances, will actually guarantee persecution. Jesus calls our persecuted brothers and sisters blessed! A great reward awaits them. Jesus also said that if we give a cup of water to the least one of His servants we will not lose our reward. Would you pour your heart out before the Father for those in need of His comfort and rescue? Would you pray for God’s refreshing for them? Comforting the afflicted starts with our willingness to remember them and to pray for them.

How incredible would it be one day when we are at the Marriage Supper of the Lamb, and sitting with us at the table, are our persecuted brothers and sisters. How wonderful would it be when they tell their stories of deliverance and comfort through God’s grace and that they were refreshed in their difficulty because you poured water on the souls through your prayers? Will anybody be able to say that about you?

“We can say with confidence and a clear conscience that we have lived with a God-given holiness and sincerity in all our dealings. We have depended on God’s grace, not on our own human wisdom. That is how we have conducted ourselves before the world, and especially toward you.” (2 Corinthians 1:3-12 NLT)

Reflection and Prayer:

- Take a moment and pray through today’s list. (Source: [opendoorsusa.org](https://www.opendoorsusa.org))

5 - PAKISTAN: Pakistan is internationally known for its unfair blasphemy laws that often target Christians.

- **SOURCE OF PERSECUTION - Islamic oppression**
- **LEADER - Prime Minister Imran Khan**
- **TOTAL POPULATION - 208,362,000**
- **CHRISTIAN POPULATION - 4,052,000 (1.9%)**
- **MAIN RELIGION - Islam**

WHAT IS LIFE LIKE FOR CHRISTIANS IN PAKISTAN?

Christians in Pakistan face extreme persecution in every area of their lives, with converts from Islam facing the highest levels. However, all Christians are considered second-class citizens, inferior to Muslims. Often, they are given jobs perceived as low, dirty and dishonorable, and can even be victims of bonded labor. Increasingly, Christian girls are at risk of abduction and rape, often forced to marry their attackers and coerced into converting to Islam.

PRAYER POINTS:

- Pray for courage for Christians in Pakistan to speak about their faith, despite fears that their words will be used against them.
- Pray for protection over Pakistan's churches, especially around holidays such as Christmas and Easter, when terrorist attacks have happened in the past.
- Pray for protection for young Christian women and girls. Pray for those who have been abducted and forced to convert and marry, that God will comfort them and give them strength.

6 - ERITREA: Eritrea is known as the "North Korea of East Africa."

- **SOURCE OF PERSECUTION - Denominational protectionism (from other Christian denominations)**
- **LEADER - President Isaias Afwerki**
- **TOTAL POPULATION - 5,432,000**
- **CHRISTIAN POPULATION - 2,552,000 (47%)**
- **MAIN RELIGIONS - Islam and Christianity**

Shiden's story:

"Shiden" became a Christian in his late teens. He knew the risks of following Christ in Eritrea. Sure enough, several years after he began following Christ, he was caught at a secret worship service and arrested. He spent more than a decade in three different prisons—all part of Eritrea's notorious prison system. Shiden faced exposure to severe temperatures and a lack of basic sanitation. He was regularly taunted by others, told he could end his suffering by renouncing his faith in Jesus. Shiden refused—and for that, he endured regular, extended solitary confinement in a space like a coffin.

Once, he was briefly "released" into military service, but when spies found a few sections of the Bible on him, he was sent back to solitary confinement for another three months. Shiden was eventually sent home without any explanation. His family was delighted to have him back, but they quickly realized all was not well. After all the physical and emotional torture, Shiden was a broken man. 'I will serve the Lord until I die.' Shiden struggled to come to grips with the fact he had missed out on so much: education, career, marriage and fatherhood. His brother "John" and their mother feared Shiden might harm himself.

But though things feel overwhelming at times, John remains hopeful because of the progress he has seen in his brother. “God’s grace is limitless,” John says. “Although it has not been easy for him, Shiden has come so far. And these days, he often encourages me by reminding me of the story about the fathers of faith in Hebrews 11. He says, ‘I will serve the Lord until I die; I want to be a hero of the faith, too, and one day in the future claim the crown of righteousness.’”

The importance of prayer cannot be overstated. “The prayers of righteous people have availed much,” John says. “Please continue to pray for Shiden. I believe God will continue to help.”

WHAT IS LIFE LIKE FOR CHRISTIANS IN ERITREA?

Christians from non-traditional denominations face the harshest persecution in Eritrea, both from the government and from the Eritrean Orthodox Church (EOC—the only Christian denomination recognized by the government). Government forces monitor phone calls and conduct countless raids that target Christians and can lead to arrest and imprisonment without trial. Many Christians are held in the country’s intricate tunnel system of inhumane prisons. Their loved ones may not know where they are or even if they’re still alive.

PRAYER POINTS

- Pray that believers’ faith would grow, that their love would increase, and that their faith would be steadfast in affliction.
- Pray for wisdom and opportunities for Eritrean Christians and church leaders to engage their government on religious freedom.
- Pray for those suffering terrible conditions in prison, held because of their faith. Ask the Lord to show His grace to these families and provide for their spiritual and physical needs.

7 - YEMEN: Yemeni Christians can face the death penalty for leaving Islam to follow Jesus.

- **SOURCE OF PERSECUTION - Islamic oppression**
- **LEADER - President Abdrabbuh Mansour Hadi**
- **TOTAL POPULATION - 30,245,000**
- **CHRISTIAN POPULATION - A few thousand**
- **MAIN RELIGION - Islam**

WHAT IS LIFE LIKE FOR CHRISTIANS IN YEMEN?

In Yemen, Christians usually keep their faith secret. Leaving Islam is forbidden, and all Yemenis are considered Muslims by the state. It’s not just the authorities who persecute Christians. Islamic extremists and tribes may kill anyone who converts to Christianity. Christians are additionally vulnerable in the ongoing war, humanitarian crisis and now the COVID-19 pandemic, because emergency relief is mostly distributed through local Islamic leaders who often discriminate against anyone not considered to be a devout Muslim.

PRAYER POINTS:

- Pray for wisdom and safety for secret house churches as they support believers.
- The past year brought floods, locusts and COVID-19—in the midst of ongoing war. Pray that peace will come and that people can start rebuilding their lives.
- Pray for those taking great risks to provide seekers and new believers with discipleship support. Pray for their travel safety through conflict areas, and that God would use them to raise up new and gifted leaders.

8 - IRAN: Christians jailed for their faith in Iran are often sent to Evin Prison, known as the country's "torture factory."

- **SOURCE OF PERSECUTION** - Islamic oppression
- **LEADER** - Ayatollah Ali Khamenei
- **TOTAL POPULATION** - 83,587,000
- **CHRISTIAN POPULATION** - 800,000 (<1%)
- **MAIN RELIGION** - Islam

WHAT IS LIFE LIKE FOR CHRISTIANS IN IRAN?

The Iranian government sees the conversion of Muslims to Christianity as an attempt by Western countries to undermine the Islamic rule of Iran. Christians from a Muslim background are persecuted the most, primarily by the government. Secret churches are often raided, leading to arrests and long prison sentences for "crimes against national security." Domestically, some new Christians in nominal Muslim families find acceptance, but converts from stricter Muslim families face more persecution at home.

PRAYER POINTS:

- Pray for isolated believers. Many Christians don't know any other believers. They depend on online resources to learn more about God.
- Pray for Christians who are currently locked up in prison for their faith. The pandemic has only made prison conditions worse.
- Pray for those who advocate for the rights of Christians in Iran, both within and outside the country, that they would be listened to and that God would protect them.

PRAY ALSO FOR:

45 - MOZAMBIQUE - Christians face extreme violence in the northern part of the country. Christians have been forced to flee their homes. Islamic extremists have looted and destroyed many Christian places of worship, Christian schools and businesses owned by Christians. Christian aid workers have also been targeted. Because of this, it is difficult for Christians to gather—either inside or outside of churches—and it can be risky for believers to speak against persecution.

46 - MALAYSIA - In Malaysia, the government and religious groups monitor churches, and it is illegal to share the gospel with Malay Muslims. Converts from Islam to Christianity experience the most persecution, as every ethnic Malay is expected to be Muslim. These believers are often forced to hide their faith and meet in secret. If discovered, they could face divorce from their spouse, rejection from their family—or even risk being sent to a re-education camp.

47 - INDONESIA - In Indonesia, Christians who grew up in a Muslim home often experience persecution from their families. However, persecution intensity varies given the individual family and location. In many homes, families will verbally abuse their Christian family members and isolate them. Only a small percentage of converts face physical violence for their Christian faith. In certain hot spots, like West Java or Aceh, extremist Islamic groups are strong and heavily influence society and politics. If they catch Christians evangelizing, believers could run into problems.