

HOW TO PRAY FOR PERSECUTED BELIEVERS

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Published in “Diaspora Study” www.GlobalMissiology.org April 2011

Followers of Jesus Christ will suffer persecution. This is a basic but often forgotten fact of Christian discipleship. Jesus used the word “*when*” (not “*if*”) as he prepared His disciples for coming persecution:

“Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you” (Matthew 5.11-12).

“Remember the words I spoke to you: ‘No servant is greater than his master.’ If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also” (John 15.20).

Early Christian leaders taught this same truth from their master. Paul reminded Christians that, “...everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted” (2 Timothy 3.12) and, “...when we are persecuted, we endure it” (1 Corinthians 4.12). Peter reminded suffering believers that, “...Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps” (1 Peter 2.21).

Millions of contemporary believers in Jesus Christ are currently “following his steps” as they endure persecution. According to scripture, as our family they belong to us and we belong to them. Therefore, we must pray for those suffering persecution.

How shall we pray for the suffering in our global church family? The basic prayer guidelines that follow, along with Bible studies, sermons, and resources, are available in a free online ebook resource at www.Globalbeliever.com (see pages 214-215). Here are some practical ways that you, and those you mobilize and gather for prayer, can effectively pray for persecuted believers around the world.

1. Pray *Sensitively* - Hebrews 13.3 teaches us to, “Remember those in prison as if you were their fellow prisoners, and those who are mistreated as if you yourselves were suffering.” Here, in no uncertain terms, God is reminding us to sensitively put ourselves in the place of others. With Christian compassion and empathy, we are to identify with our brothers and sisters in persecution as if we were there with them, enduring the same hardships together.
2. Pray *Scripturally* – As we follow key word searches throughout the Bible, using words like “persecution,” “suffering,” “tribulation,” multiple stories and incidents of individuals and the collective people of God in their suffering will begin to emerge. These were real people suffering real persecution. Their stories, filled with their

responses to suffering, form a pattern for our personal prayer time and also for group Bible studies and intercessory prayer.

For example, some intercessors pray through the Psalms, using the models of David's prayers as he cries out for refuge, rescue, deliverance, and preservation. Here are just a few of his cries for help:

“Deliver me, O my God, from the hand of the wicked, from the grasp of evil and cruel men” (71.4)

“Be not far from me, O God; come quickly, O my God, to help me” (71.12)

“Listen to my cry, for I am in desperate need; rescue me from those who pursue me, for they are too strong for me. Set me free from my prison, that I may praise your name” (142. 6-7)

“O Lord, hear my prayer, listen to my cry for mercy; in your faithfulness and righteousness come to my relief” (143.3).

We can pray and plead those same phrases – and hundreds like them in scripture - on behalf of our suffering family around the world. In scripture, God gives us words, thoughts, models, directions in our intercessory praying on behalf of our family in trouble. An elderly Methodist lay preacher named “Uncle Am” always had assurance his prayers would be answered. A young preacher asked for his secret. “Young man,” he said, “learn to plead the promises of God.”

Praying *scripturally* includes not only praying for the *persecuted* but also praying for the *persecutor*. The origin of this radical practice is none other than our Lord Jesus Christ who commanded, “Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you...”(Matthew 5.44). Paul echoed the Master's words when he instructed believers (many of them slaves) living under the harsh rule of the Roman empire, “Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse” (Romans 12.14).

Paul's own testimony was that he “was once a blasphemer, and a persecutor and a violent man...” (1Timothy 1.13). He was present at the martyrdom of Stephen (Acts 7.58 – 8.1) and some scholars think he was in charge of the stoning. The last prayer of the first martyr of the early church was cried with a loud voice, “Lord, do not hold this sin against them” (Acts 7.60). One can only imagine how Stephen's prayer haunted Paul and how intercessory prayer among the persecuted church in Palestine eventually led to his conversion on the road to Damascus.

In “A Prayer for the Persecuted Church,” found at www.globaldayofprayer.com, there is this sample prayer for persecutors, “We bring before You those who through ignorance, blindness, demonic interference and sin have set themselves against Your Church and yet are merely sinners in need of the Saviour. Lord our deliverer, convict them of sin and deliver them from evil.”

3. Pray *Spontaneously* – One of the joys of the Spirit-filled life is to be “on call” for the Lord, ready to pray as God places a burden upon us. Even if we don’t always know why we are praying, we are to be available for intercession, “...praying always in the Holy Spirit” (Jude 20). Pastor Jack Hayford recalls, “One man I know was given the name of a province in China, which he had never heard of. He had to find it on the map to verify it existed, yet the Holy Spirit had whispered it to his heart while he prayed” (as told in Grant McClung, *Azusa Street and Beyond: 100 Years of Commentary on the Global Pentecostal/Charismatic Movement*, Bridge-Logos Publishers 2006, p.269). The Holy Spirit of God is an indwelling intercessor (Romans 8.26-27) and knows how to lead us in prayer. When we sincerely make ourselves available to plead with God on behalf of persecuted believers, the Holy Spirit will take us seriously and spontaneously lead us praying for the persecuted.
4. Pray *Sensibly* – Research, technology, and publishing of information abounds in our time. The individual or prayer group that is serious about praying for the persecuted has a wide variety of helps and resources, most of them through internet websites. Some of our favorites are www.operationworld.org, www.persecutedchurch.org, www.secretbelievers.org, and www.opendoors.org. At these and many other sites, one finds country and people group updates, detailed reports and analysis, Bible study and teaching information, and links to many other groups who offer ways to get involved.
5. Pray *Systematically* - Praying systematically means staying faithful to pray for persecuted believers on a regular basis, with consistency. In light of spiritual conflict and the “day of evil” (Ephesians 6.13), we are urged to, “...pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints” (Ephesians 6.18). Most prayer resources and ministries provide a daily prayer calendar, with a systematic listing of nations and persecuted peoples. Many offer up-to-date online briefings and email notices with reported incidents of persecution. These kinds of resources help us stay systematic in our praying.
6. Pray *Strategically* – The renowned evangelist D. L. Moody claimed that, “Every work of God can be traced to some kneeling form.” Prayer is not only a means to a strategy, it *is* God’s strategy. When we pray, God acts. When we pray, God leads us to strategic action, activism, solidarity with the persecuted and involvement with ministries and groups that work to end suffering, injustice, and the abuse of human rights.

After the Day of Pentecost, it did not take long for the active evangelism from the early church to be resisted with persecution. After being arrested, threatened, and released, Peter and John reported to the prayer group waiting for them and then they all, “...raised their voices together in prayer to God” (Acts 4.23-24). They prayed for boldness in the face of threats and that God would stretch out his hand to heal and perform miraculous signs and wonders. The meeting place was shaken, they were all

filled with the Holy Spirit, and spoke the word of God boldly (Acts 4.29-31). God is waiting upon that kind of fervent, passionate, intense intercession on behalf of His suffering people. Together, with millions of our global church family, let us “raise our voices together in prayer to God” on behalf of persecuted believers!

Grant and Janice McClung mobilize and train for missional involvement and intercession through www.MissionsResourceGroup.org and as international missionary educators with Church of God World Missions.