

INTERNATIONAL DAY OF

Prayer

FOR THE PERSECUTED CHURCH

IDOP GUIDE



OpenDoors



INTERNATIONAL DAY OF Prayer FOR THE PERSECUTED CHURCH

Thank you for your willingness to pray with persecuted Christians on the International Day of Prayer (IDOP). Prayer is the number one request of persecuted Christians, and they are asking us to join them in prayer for strength and perseverance so that, despite difficult trials, Christians will continue to shine for Jesus and share the gospel in the most dangerous places.

IDOP is a great opportunity to join them in prayer, and we hope these resources will help guide your church or small group through a meaningful time of learning and prayer. These resources are designed to:



Inform – Inform your church or group about what is happening to persecuted Christians today.



Educate – Educate your church or group on what the Bible says about persecution.



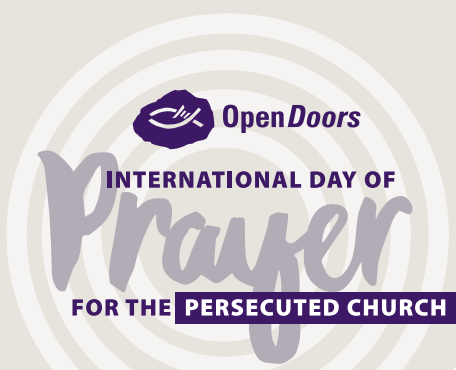
Engage – Engage our persecuted family through prayer and service.

If you have spoken with your pastor and your church plans to participate in IDOP Sunday, then **[Register Your Event today!](#)**

Thank you again for your willingness to pray with our persecuted brothers and sisters.

Open Doors USA





IDOP GUIDE CONTENTS

WHAT'S IN THIS GUIDE?

Additional Resources – We have created videos, PowerPoint presentations, information sheets and other resources to serve your church service or group. This section of the guide details each resource and how it can be used.

Church Service Planning Guide – Whether you have a few minutes or a full service for IDOP, this Church Service Planning Guide will give you ideas on how to structure your time.

Sample Sermon – A sample sermon has been provided to help you create a Biblical message about persecution, what the Bible says about persecution, and our response through prayer.

Sample Sermon 2 – A sermon by a church pastor has also been included to help you create your message.

Facts on Christian Persecution – Inform your congregation or group on what is happening to persecuted Christians around the world today. These facts on Christian persecution can be used in your service or sermon, and are included in the PowerPoint document.

Scripture about Persecution – Educate your congregation or group on what the Bible says about persecution, and grow in your faith and understanding. Sample verses discussing persecution can be used in your service or sermon, and are included in the PowerPoint document.

Biblical Lessons – Educate your congregation using these prepared short biblical lessons with quotes and stories from persecuted Christians. These are included in the PowerPoint document.

Prayer Points – Engage your congregation or group in prayer using these prayer points. Prayer points are included in the PowerPoint document.

Respond – Invite your congregation or small group to respond in ways that support the persecuted church.

Next Steps – Engage your congregation or group further through the Ripple Effect. The Ripple Effect is a 6-part series with videos, study guide material, interactive elements and more, which is perfect for a Sunday school class, Bible study group or home group. Register Your Event to receive additional resources to engage with the persecuted church and gain access to exclusive content.

Ripple Effect – Do you have a passion for the persecuted church? Have you ever wanted to teach others about it but didn't know where to begin? Look no further than the new Ripple Effect!



ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

WHAT OTHER RESOURCES ARE PROVIDED?

We have created the following resources in addition to this IDOP Guide to help your service.



Teaser Video – This is an IDOP trailer video for use on social media and promotions. Consider showing this a week or two before IDOP in your church service, sharing on your church social media sites or posting to your website. If you spend 5 minutes or less on IDOP during your service, this is the video to show during your service.



Syria Video – This is the main video to show during your IDOP service or gathering. It highlights the struggles and persecution of Christians in Syria as they ask us to join them in prayer. It helps to inform your congregation or group so they better understand the realities that Christians face every day in difficult countries.



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ADDITIONAL RESOURCES



IDOP PowerPoint – This PowerPoint has an IDOP title slide, facts about persecution, Bible verses on persecution, slides for your sermon notes, prayer points and engagement opportunities. Please feel free to use or modify it to fit your service.



Prayer Partner – Persecuted Christians seek our prayer year-round. These handouts are a way to receive prayer requests to know how and what to pray all year. IDOP Sunday is a great opportunity to introduce your congregation or group to praying for persecuted Christians, but continued prayer makes a significant difference and leads to spiritual growth and discipleship. Consider placing these in the seats of your congregation to encourage sign-ups and collecting during the service, or encourage people to visit a table to sign-up to receive prayer requests. You may also sign up online by visiting odusa.org/pray.

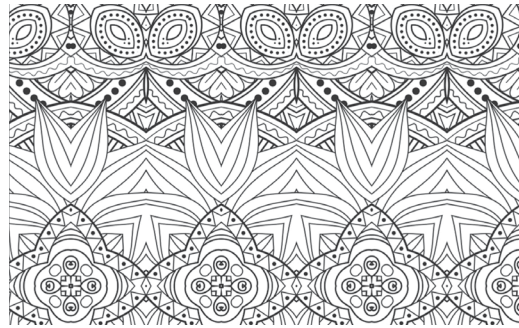
These handouts may be printed and shared with your congregation, or received by mail by registering your event.

Register Your Event today!



Open Doors

About Open Doors – This flyer provides more information about Open Doors and the work the ministry has done for over 60 years supporting persecuted Christians.

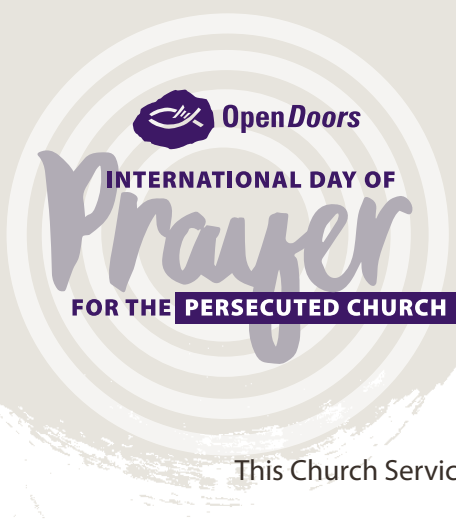


Coloring Sheets – These coloring sheets may be printed and used in children's classes to let them participate in IDOP activities.



Ripple Effect – **The Ripple Effect** is a six-part series offering videos, study guide materials, online interactive elements, wristbands, prayer lanterns and more.

The Ripple Effect is ideal for a Sunday School class, evening study or Bible study group. It is the next step to take after IDOP Sunday to go deeper in understanding and faith. Resources are free online, so any group can participate at no cost, or physical materials and guides can be purchased and shipped to you at cost.



CHURCH SERVICE PLANNING GUIDE

This Church Service Planning Guide will give you ideas on how to structure your service.

5 MINUTES OR LESS

- Open with PowerPoint Title Slide (on screen)
- Show Teaser Video (1 minute)
- Pray through Prayer Points (3 minutes)
- Encourage people to pray year-round by filling out a Prayer Partner handout in their seat or at a table or by visiting odusa.org/pray (1 minute)

10 MINUTES OR LESS

- Open with the PowerPoint Title Slide (on screen)
- Show Syria Video (4 minutes)
- Share a few Facts on Persecution (1-2 minutes)
- Share a few Bible verses on persecution or biblical lessons (1-2 minutes)
- Pray through Prayer Points (2-3 minutes)
- Encourage people to pray year-round by filling out a Prayer Partner handout in their seat or at a table or by visiting odusa.org/pray (1 minute)
- Consider collecting an offering to help provide Bibles to persecuted Christians

FULL SERVICE

- Open with PowerPoint Title Slide
- Show Syria Video (4 minutes)
- Preach a sermon or teach on persecution:
 - Use the Sample Sermon for ideas on your sermon or teaching
 - Inform – Use Facts on Persecution in the preaching and teaching
 - Educate – Use Bible verses and Biblical Lessons to share how God uses persecution for His Kingdom
 - Engage – Plan a time for prayer response and use the Prayer Points to direct prayer and call your congregation to engage their persecuted family
- Encourage people to pray year-round by filling out a Prayer Partner handout in their seat or at a table or by visiting odusa.org/pray
- Consider collecting an offering to help provide Bibles to persecuted Christian

SAMPLE SERMON

WHAT SHOULD BE INCLUDED WHEN PREACHING A SERMON ON PERSECUTION?

Inform - Stories are of the utmost importance. People connect with people, so select stories that will connect with your audience. Help them see we truly are brothers and sisters.

Educate - Expose people to the breadth and depth of persecution. Also show the Biblical basis for persecution and share God's passion for his persecuted children.

Engage – Invite them to serve their brothers and sisters in some way that is appropriate for your congregation. Prayer is always a perfect way to connect.

SAMPLE SERMONS

This is a sample sermon on persecution that you may incorporate into your service. Feel free to use this sermon in its entirety or just the parts beneficial to your service.

Abdul tensed as he heard the angry voices nearing his home in Central Asia. Suddenly, a group of young Muslims crashed through his door and began threatening him. "If you don't renounce Christ, you'll regret it!" they shouted. But Abdul refused. "I might be kicked out of the village, I could be beaten, but Jesus went through it all. If my Lord faced persecution, who am I not to expect the same treatment?" he said.

"Lily!" The young girl turned as she heard her mother call. "I want to talk with you about what will happen to your dad and me," Ava said searching her daughter's face for understanding. Although Lily was still in primary school, Ava knew she need to begin preparing her daughter for what lay ahead.

"The day will come when they ring our doorbell and take mom and dad away to prison," Ava explained. "When they come, don't worry. The Bible tells us it is normal to be persecuted as believers. They will take us to prison, ask us some questions, and hit us. Then we will come back."

It took several years, but the day did come. On a winter morning while Lily was at school, authorities rang Ava's doorbell and hauled her and her husband off to prison.



SAMPLE SERMON

For millions of Christians around the world, these stories reflect their everyday reality. They live with the constant threat of persecution for their faith – the threat of intimidation, isolation, beatings, imprisonment and even death – and they choose to follow Jesus anyway.

It's a humbling thought, knowing that our brothers and sisters in Christ are willing to suffer for their faith. It's also a foreign concept to many of us. Persecution? That sounds so extreme. Does that stuff really happen anymore? The short answer is "yes" – to millions of believer all over the world.

According to the Pew Research Center, 75 percent of the world's population lives in areas with severe religious restrictions – many of whom are Christians. The United States Department of State has identified 60 different countries where Christians face persecution from their neighbors or from their government – simply because they believe in Jesus Christ.

Daily life for these Christians is a struggle. The hostility they experience as a result of their faith can take many forms. Some suffer verbal harassment and discrimination at work or school. Others endure more extreme persecution, including imprisonment, torture, rape and even death.

With over 250 million Christians facing persecution on a regular basis, it can be hard to wrap your mind around the realities of their suffering. Every month...

- 322 Christian are killed for their faith.
- 214 churches and Christian properties are destroyed.
- 772 acts of violence are committed against Christians.

Eye opening, right? Christian persecution is more prevalent today than at any other time in the modern era – and it's getting worse. Every year, Open Doors releases its World Watch List, a ranking of the top 50 countries where Christians face the most severe persecution for their faith. In the last few years, not only had Christian persecution increased, but it has also expanded into areas where it was not present before. (Visit www.opendoorsusa.org/WWL to download a World Watch List map and report to print and hand out.)

According to the World Watch List, persecution is growing most rapidly in the Middle East, Africa and Central Asia. Christians in these regions face an astonishing lack of religious freedom. For example, in Iran, ethnic Persians are by definition Muslim. To be an ethnic Persian who is also a Christian is a crime punishable by death. Saudi Arabia is home to the world's oldest church, but today, public Christian worship is forbidden. In Nigeria, 5 churches are attacked every week. And yet our brothers and sisters continue to lift high the name of Jesus, counting the cost and deeming it worth it to suffer for the cause of Christ.

As we open our eyes to persecution, it's easy to focus only on the shocking events that we see on the news, but that's not the most prevalent form of persecution. It's the outside pressure



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SAMPLE SERMON

Christians face as a result of their faith that is far more pervasive and deep rooted. We can think of this distinction as “smash” vs “squeeze.” Smash persecution might include churches being torched, Christians being beaten or family members being attacked. Squeeze persecution could mean losing your job because you believe in Jesus or your children being harassed at school for their faith. It could include all of your family, friends and your entire community ostracizing you because of your beliefs. Squeeze persecution is often quieter, but can be powerfully damaging to those under its pressure.

Although persecution around the world is on the rise, persecution itself is not new. As long as there have been Christians, there has been persecution. In fact, Jesus told His followers to expect it, saying “If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also,” (John 15:20, NIV) and “In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world,” (John 16:33, NIV).

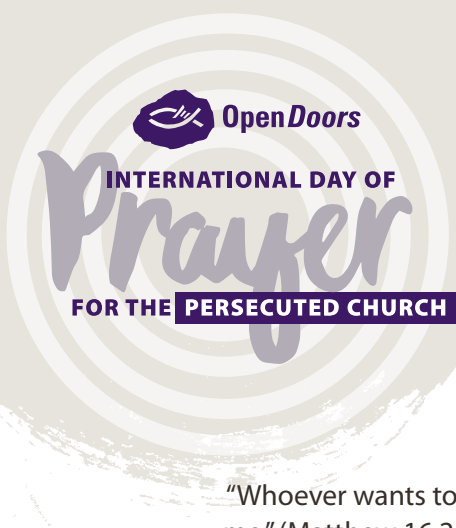
And it’s easy to hear about Christian persecution and feel afraid. But that shouldn’t be our response. Scripture says, “for God did not give us a spirit of fear,” (2 Timothy 1:7, NLT). Rather, hearing about our brothers and sisters in Christ who are suffering should motivate us. Even though much of the persecuted church is half a world away, hearing their stories can change the way we live here in the U.S. Seeing those who are suffering take an all-in stance to following Jesus can bolster our own faith as we follow Him.

Realizing that millions of believers count themselves blessed to be found worthy to suffer for the cause of Christ might make us take risks we wouldn’t have before. Maybe it’s stepping out in faith and sharing about Jesus with your neighbors. Perhaps it’s choosing to reflect the joy of the Lord in the midst of challenging circumstances. Whatever the situation, God can use these powerful stories about our brothers and sisters to draw us closer to Him and help us shine His light in your own community.

And we have so much to learn from our persecuted brothers and sisters.

Helen Berhane was arrested for sharing her faith in her home country of Eritrea. She spent almost three years in prison, much of this time in a metal shipping container. Because she would not deny her faith or stop sharing her faith, she was beaten so severely she could not walk. After her release, she wrote this in her memoirs, “Sometimes I cannot believe that this is my life – these four metal walls, all of us corralled like cattle, the pain, the hunger, the fear. All because of my belief in a God who is risen, who charges me to share my faith with these who do not yet know Him. A God who I am forbidden to worship. I think back to a questions I have been asked many times over my months in prison: ‘Is your faith worth this, Helen?’ As the guards continue their rounds, I whisper the answer: ‘Yes.’”

Helen understood what Jesus told his disciples...



SAMPLE SERMON

“Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.” (Matthew 16:24)

It’s humbling to think of Jesus’ words in the context of persecuted Christians. All they have to do is remain silent about their faith or simply deny Christ to avoid punishment or suffering – and yet, daily, they choose to deny themselves instead. How much more should we be proclaiming Christ with the freedoms we have?

But let’s be honest, there’s still a lot of disconnect for many of us. We think, “that person is in prison halfway around the world – what could I possibly do to help?” Or, perhaps if we’re a little more honest, we might think, “Why should I care?”

When we struggle with how to respond to Christian persecution, we need look no further than the pages of Scripture to discover how God feels about it. The Bible makes it clear that God sees believers as one Body, one church. “For just as the body is one and hand many members, and all the members of the body though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body – Jews or Greeks, slaves or free,” (1 Corinthians 12:12 – 13a).

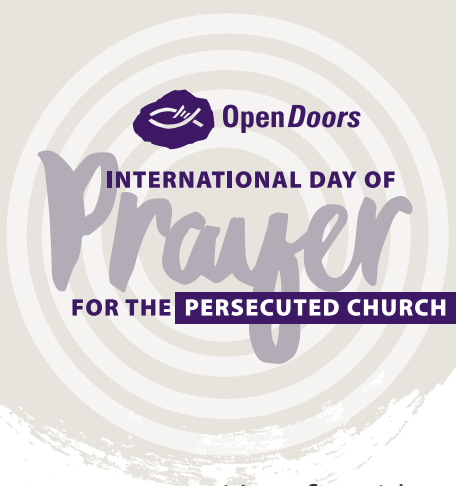
God designed the church to work together in unique and powerful ways. Those who are persecuted need the free church to stand with them – to pray for and support them. The free church desperately needs the persecuted church as well. We need to see and learn from those who have stood strong in the midst of suffering, who have counted the cost and deemed Jesus more than worth whatever they lose.

Paul says it this way in 1 Corinthians 12:26, “If one member suffers, all suffer together.” Let that sink in for a moment. If one members suffers, all the members suffer. When your fellow believers are suffering, you – as a member of the same body – suffer with them. You share their grief, mourning the loss of their freedom, their family, their job – whatever the situation might be. You grieve and you pray.

So how do we “suffer” with them? How can we help them? The story of a son who lost his father, will give us some insight.

“As a pastor’s son growing up in Iran, I got used to the fact that sometimes my dad would be gone for a day or two for interrogation,” Andre said. “But then on that dreadful day in January ‘94, my father left the house and never came back.” His father’s death allowed Andre to see the Body of Christ in a new light. “It meant a lot to me that someone I didn’t know from another country was praying for me and was caring for me. . . .I have learned we are one big family in Christ – and I think that was the number one thing that gave us courage and helped us heal.”

Do you know what the number one request from persecuted Christians is?



SAMPLE SERMON

It's not financial support or Christian materials. It's prayer. The persecuted church understand the power of prayer, and they desperately need us to stand with them in this way. So many persecuted Christians feel isolated and alone, especially since they are often unable to fellowship with other believers. But prayers from Christians living half a world away bring incredible encouragement to them. Not only are they grateful to know their requests are being brought before the Lord, but they also are strengthened by fellowship they feel with believers who are praying with them.

We are going to pray together in a few minutes for our brothers and sisters, but praying for them doesn't have to be a one-time thing or end today. Please consider signing up to receive Open Doors' prayer alert email. This includes weekly prayer information to help you continue to pray for them. If you want more information about other ways to help our persecuted brothers and sisters, visit opendoorsusa.org for ways to pray, volunteer, support and learn more about our family members who are enduring persecution.

Let's pray together for our brothers and sisters.

PRAY

Lord, I am humbled to learn about the millions of Christians who are facing intimidation, discrimination, beatings, imprisonment and even death for their faith. They know where they stand and they are all in, fully committed to following you. Help me not to turn a blind eye to their suffering. I pray you would strengthen them and give them the grace they need to endure this persecution. Jesus, You said in Your Word, "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you," (Matthew 5:44), so I pray for those who are persecuting my brothers and sisters in Christ. Put an end to their hostility – to their hatred. Let them come to a saving faith in you. Amen.

TIPS

- Feel free to insert different stories of persecuted Christians that you think might be more relevant to your audience. You can find more stories at <https://www.opendoorsusa.org/christian-persecution/stories/>
- If you prefer, use videos instead. There are lots of videos at the following link <https://www.opendoorsusa.org/videos/> or on the **Open Doors YouTube channel**.
- In addition to a general prayer, you can also set up a prayer stations for more interaction. Here's a link to prayer station ideas. <https://www.opendoorsusa.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/Prayer-Station-Ideas.pdf>
- You can also set up letter writing stations to put what they've learned into action by writing letters to persecuted Christians. Visit <http://live.opendoorsusa.org/idop/> and Register Your Event to receive an Event Kit with Letters of Encouragement that your church can write to encourage persecuted Christians.
- Print copies of the World Watch List and make them available <https://www.opendoorsusa.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/2017-World-Watch-List-Map.pdf>



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SAMPLE SERMON 2

PERSECUTION: WHY, WHAT IT MEANS, AND HOW TO HANDLE IT

Pastor Dennis Rasper, Pastor, Real Life Christian Church, Washington, Michigan

Let's begin with prayer.

A young man in his late teens didn't have a particular girlfriend. He got together with a group, both guys and girls. They enjoyed being with each other and "hanging out" together. Late one afternoon they decided to go to a movie. This young man - Chad was his name - had talked about this movie at home with his family and knew it was inappropriate for Christians. So he said "I think I'll pass." He wouldn't go. His "friends" said some not too nice things to him, even made fun of his faith and his principles. So they went to the movie; he went home. On the way to the movie, a young lady, also a Christian in her late teens, was thinking, "he's right. I don't want to go to that movie either." When they got to the movie, she called her dad, and he came and got her. Chad and this girl got together, began to date. Now they're very much in love and engaged to be married. They did what they did to honor God by living out the principles they believed in. And their friends "talked." It wasn't the same.

That's persecution in a smaller way, with a good ending. Two believers in Jesus Christ meet each other and fall in love. We say "that's God." But persecution for many is much more difficult and life threatening.

Here's the Miriam Webster Dictionary definition of persecution "the act of persecuting especially those who differ in religion or outlook." Chad and his girlfriend experienced that on a smaller level. Their heart was to honor the Name of Jesus Christ. In 2 Timothy 3 the Apostle Paul is recalling the way his enemies persecuted him for the sake of the Gospel. In v 12 he tells Timothy, the young pastor he was training "Indeed all who desire to live a godly life will be persecuted . . ." "Live your faith to honor the Lord Jesus Christ, and you can expect persecution. Again, live your faith for the Lord's sake and you can expect persecution in one form or another.

Jesus taught some very counter culture "stuff" called the "Beatitudes" in His Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5. And the people accepted His teaching because He "taught with authority." (Matthew 7: 28-29) He said "Blessed are those who are poor in spirit," "Blessed are those who mourn . . ." "Blessed are the meek . . ." And then He said "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness sake. For theirs IS THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN." "Blessed are you when others revile 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." (Matthew 5: 1-11)

People will persecute believers because they hate Jesus Christ. Think about that. When people persecute one committed to Jesus Christ, they're persecuting Jesus Himself. Remember Saul's conversion in Acts 9, Saul who became the great Apostle Paul? Saul was



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SAMPLE SERMON 2

on the road to Damascus, which is in current day Syria that we're talking about today, to haul Christ followers out of their homes and persecute them in one way or another. The Lord appeared to him in a blinding light. And He said (Acts 9: 4) . . . "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?" Saul said "Who are you Lord?" He was changing inside. Then Jesus said "I am Jesus whom you are persecuting." When they show hate for God's people, God's Word tells us that you in a sense are representing Him because they're persecuting Him. That's just like Saul before God changed him. Read 2 Corinthians 5: 16 Paul writes "I once regarded Jesus according to the flesh," meaning - he hated Him.

So why do people who - again, in some form - persecute Christians hate Jesus? First of all, most people like to believe they're "good" people. And when you even suggest they're not "good" enough to qualify for heaven, they're offended. They take it as you saying they're not a "good" person. And that gets them angry at the core. And when you make it clear that Jesus was perfect in our place and that we need His "goodness" or "righteousness" to get to heaven, they direct their hate toward Him.

Many of us know Ephesians 2: 8-9. God tells us through Paul that we're saved by Grace through faith. Not of ourselves. Salvation is His gift to us, not because of works, "so no one can boast." If we could offer God one good work that could possibly save us, we could boast, right? God's Word says "so that no one may boast." God gets all the Glory for giving us eternal life as His Gift to anyone who gives up his pride and receives His gift because of Jesus Christ. So they hate Him. His perfect righteousness attacks their pride.

Another reason they hate Jesus is because they've been taught a false religion - and believed it. And when you live and speak Acts 4: 12 "there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved," of course they'll react with hate toward they're Only Hope.

I've read stories in different magazines about people smuggling Bibles with that wonderful message into countries where those Bibles are forbidden. And these people who smuggle them lay their lives on the line to get that message into as many hands as possible. But they do it because God's Word really is Truth. Jesus Christ really is the ONLY way to heaven and the ONLY hope for lost mankind. That's why people risk their lives.

I saw on the Open Doors World Watch List Christians in a North Korean prison worshipping in the prison outhouse, sometimes faking having to use it just to pray and sing a hymn softly with another believer. We love our families.

I saw and heard on the same watch list a man telling his story of what it's like to be displaced from his family because of his commitment to Jesus Christ.

I teach the Bible in the county jail where I live. A young man - Muhammed was his name

SAMPLE SERMON 2

- received Jesus Christ. He wasn't going to tell his family once he got out. After a couple months of hearing God's Word, he knew he couldn't hide it. He planned to tell his family and he knew he would be disowned, alienated from brothers and sisters, from mom and dad of course, grandparents, uncles, aunts, cousins and from lifelong friends. Once he understood who he was in Christ and the true life Jesus Christ had given him, he was ready to do that.

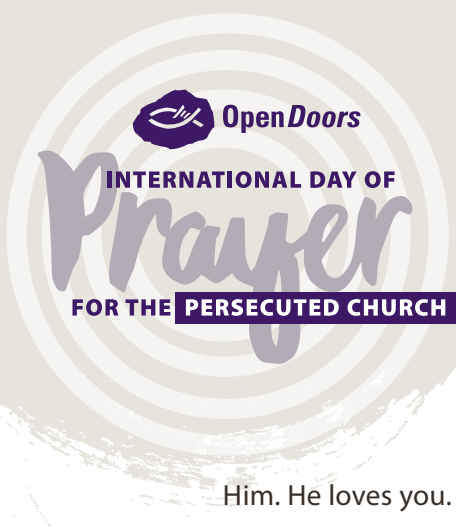
A Christian man went to Somalia to minister to Christians. He couldn't believe what he saw - land mines, Christian people shot in cold blood for the sake of Jesus Christ.

More stories from all over the world rip at your heart. It goes back to Matthew 6 "Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you on My account. Rejoice and be glad because your reward is great in heaven?" Jesus the Son of God, your Only Hope said that. God Himself Who came from heaven to earth as a Man to live among us and save us said that!

Let's think about what you have as a believer in Jesus Christ, what WE have as believers. We have joy. So what's joy? Most of you know this. Joy has nothing to do with the circumstances of your life. Joy is internal and it's born of a relationship with Jesus Christ Himself. Just think, you're in relationship with Jesus the Man, true, but with the One True God! Relationship! He knows you. He sees you right where you are. He feels what you feel. That's why He lived as a man in the flesh. He knows, feels and loves you personally. He has your hand, your heart and your life! Take this into your heart.

Jesus said in John 10:14 "I am the Good Shepherd and I know, know, know my sheep and my own know Me." You know Him. When we're in relationship with the Living God we can come confidently to God in prayer. That's Hebrews 4: 16 "Let us draw near to the throne of Grace with confidence that we may receive Mercy and find Grace in time of need." That's our privilege. We go to the Only God, the One True God Who knows us, loves us, wraps His arms of Love around us and He hears and answer us! He spoke all creation into being and He hears and answers us. God tells us through the Prophet Isaiah "Come everyone who thirsts. Come to the waters. Come with no money. Eat, drink wine and milk without money, without price!" (Isaiah 55: 1)

We bring our prayers before God and what do we have? Philippians 4: 6 - God's peace! Listen to what God says through Paul "Don't be anxious . . ." God actually tells us not to be anxious. In this world. "Don't be anxious about anything - anything. But everything- everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving make your requests to God." And then what? Then . . . "the peace of God that passes all understanding will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus." The rest of the world won't understand your peace in persecution. Your life is threatened, you won't back down. Why? Because the peace of God invades you. All your fears, all your "what if's" fade into oblivion. Because the peace of God passes all human understanding. It's GOD'S peace because you have a relationship with



SAMPLE SERMON 2

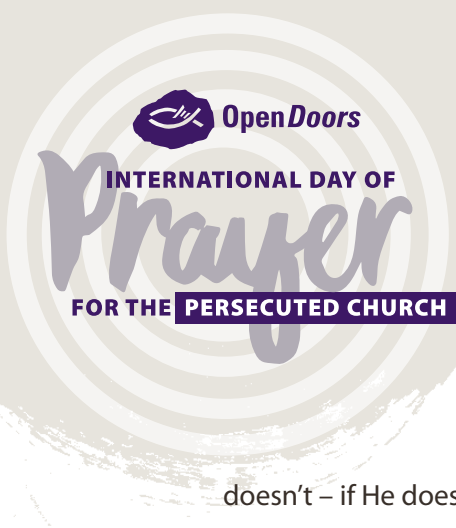
Him. He loves you.

Here's what else you have as a Christian. Your life has meaning and purpose.

Solomon says in the Book of Ecclesiastes that life can seem like an endless cycle. Weather happens and repeats itself. Life happens and repeats itself. Read Ecclesiastes Chapter 1. That's not us; that's not Christians. Every detail of life fits in with God's Purpose. Grab this Word of God and let it sink from your mind to your heart - Ephesians 1: 1. In this Word of God Paul tells us that "God works all things according to the plan of His Will." Again. He works all things according to the counsel or plan of His Will." Know what that means? There is no meaningless suffering. There is no meaningless suffering. There is no meaningless suffering. God ordains everything to fit in with His purpose and ultimately give Himself Glory. For the believer in Jesus Christ, nothing that we do, nothing that we experience, nothing that we suffer is meaningless because it's part of God's purpose. It will give Him Glory . . . and that's the purpose of life, isn't it? "Whether we eat or drink or whatsoever we do, do it all to the Glory of God."

When we believe and live what we believe, every detail of life has meaning and purpose. Having all this and more, we don't compromise what we believe, no matter what it costs. To compromise is to know what's right and not do it just to please somebody else even though you know it's wrong. It's to deny or suppress the Truth in you for your own advantage. A lot of Christians live in an environment hostile to the name of Christ. I think of what happened South of Cairo, Egypt. A number of Coptic Christians were on a bus taking a special trip to a monastery. Masked men in uniform board the bus and shoot 26 people in cold blood including children. Why? The attackers hate Jesus and all who believe in Him and follow Him. That's reality for a lot of Christians.

Please remember three committed men. They were Daniel's close friends. In 586 B.C. the Babylonian armies ravaged Jerusalem and the land of the Jews and deported most of the people back to Babylon. The King and his advisors put Daniel and his friends Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego into positions of leadership in Babylon. Some of you know the story. The King, Nebuchadnezzar, had a statue of an idol or maybe even of himself, built. He commanded all Babylon to worship that image. Daniel was gone from Babylon temporarily. His three friends - devoted to worshipping only the One True God - said "No. We won't worship your idol." The King gave them this ultimatum "Worship my golden idol or die a horrible death in a furnace of fire." The King said (Daniel 3: 15) "Who is the god who will deliver you out of my hands?" That's arrogance. Now please get this - These three men who loved the One True God told this powerful King Nebuchadnezzar "Our God Whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace and He will deliver us out of your hand, O King. But if not be it known to you, O King, we will not serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up." They let God be God! "We believe He will deliver us, but if He



SAMPLE SERMON 2

doesn't – if He doesn't – we will still trust, worship and adore Him.”

You know the rest of the story. The Angel of the Lord appeared with them in the furnace and protected them. And this pagan King finally did believe in their God, the Only True God Who made heaven and earth. Their willingness to die and not compromise so impressed this King Nebuchadnezzar, he finally received their God as His God and even praised Him. (Daniel 4: 37)

These men, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego knew and believed they had everything in their God, they were willing to die for what they knew and believed. Let that inspire you if you face danger, even the possibility of loss of life. Like the three men in the furnace we have the Absolute Promise of God and the certain hope of resurrection from the dead and life with Him forever.

We have Biblical hope. However, “hope” for most people means “maybe,” or “possibly.” A young lady says “I hope he gives me an engagement ring soon.” She meant – he may or he may not. Nothing certain. Somebody may say “I hope I get this job or I hope somebody brings me some food.” There’s no certainty there. But God has promised, God Who can’t lie, God Who is Faithful to His Promise. “And this is testimony, that God gave us eternal life and this life is in His Son.” 1John 5:11. Listen to this promise from God in 1Corinthians 1: 8-9. Believe this: “God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ will sustain you to the end, guiltless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. GOD IS FAITHFUL Who called you into fellowship with His Son Jesus Christ our Lord.” OR Acts 16:31 “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and YOU WILL BE SAVED.

Paul, God’s inspired Apostle, writes in Ephesians 1: 13 “The Holy Spirit in you is the Guarantee of our eternal life, our inheritance.” Our resurrection depends on Jesus Resurrection. In 1 Corinthians 15 Paul mocks death and says “Oh death where is your sting (I’m not afraid of you), O grave where in your victory! BUT THANKS BE TO GOD WHO GIVES US THE VICTORY THROUGH OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST!” (Verse 55) Our hope is absolutely certain. Death has no power over us. Jesus Christ has won for us the victory and “nothing in all creation can ever separate from the Love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord, not death, not life, no demonic power, height, depth, past or present circumstances, nothing can or will ever separate us from His Great Love?”

You can stand strong against all persecution because in heaven “God Himself will be with them and He will be their God.” (Revelation 21: 3) Just think, our God Who put our sins in Jesus, our Lord Jesus Who took that ugly package of our sin and died with it - He will be our God forever and ever! “AND He will wipe every tear from their eyes and death shall be no more (Amen!) neither shall there be crying or pain anymore for these former things will be gone forever!” (Revelation 21:4)



INTERNATIONAL DAY OF
Prayer
FOR THE PERSECUTED CHURCH

SAMPLE SERMON 2

Please remember, there are other believers suffering the same things you are. They have the same anguish, fears and everything that goes with persecution. Tell each other "Our God will sustain us. What we have in Jesus Christ is worth the suffering, even death. Stay strong! Please, please encourage one another.

And forgive your persecutors. That's as much like Jesus Christ as any Christian can get.

I heard this story - a true story about a Christian mom and dad whose 21 year old daughter died in an auto accident, hit broadside by a drunk young man. They were broken, hurt, and torn apart inside. But... they decided to forgive. They went to the young man in jail, actually talked with him and forgave him. He was so moved, he sought the Lord Jesus Christ and gave his heart to Him. Today he has become like the son they never had.

Only God the Holy Spirit can work that in us as we look to the Cross where Jesus said, hanging on a Cross in agony, "Father Forgive them. They don't know what they're doing." The Roman soldiers who nailed him to that Cross expected Him to curse them like everybody else they crucified. But no "Father Forgive them . . ." Forgive your persecutors. Your forgiving them may have the same powerful effect - and it may not, but it is so like Jesus Christ and honors Him. "Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you on My account. Rejoice and be glad for your reward is great in heaven for so they persecuted the prophets before you."



INTERNATIONAL DAY OF

Prayer

FOR THE PERSECUTED CHURCH

FACTS ON PERSECUTION

WHAT IS PERSECUTION?

Christian persecution is the systematic mistreatment of an individual or group of individuals because of their Christian faith. It can come in the form of physical abuse, torture, rape, mutilation, destruction of property, imprisonment and murder. It can also come in the form of cultural and societal discrimination, family excommunication, loss of job and income, loss of family and friends, inability to marry, prevention of education and many other forms.



CHRISTIANS ARE THE MOST PERSECUTED GROUP IN THE WORLD.

EVERY MONTH, **322** CHRISTIANS ARE KILLED FOR THEIR FAITH IN JESUS.



200 MILLION CHRISTIANS ARE FACING PERSECUTION ON A REGULAR BASIS.

EVERY MONTH, **214** CHRISTIAN CHURCHES AND PROPERTIES ARE DESTROYED.



PRAYER IS THE **#1** REQUEST FROM PERSECUTED CHRISTIANS.

IN AMERICA, MORE THAN **52 MILLION** ATTEND CHURCH ON A WEEKLY BASIS. WE CAN MAKE AN IMPACT THROUGH OUR PRAYERS, SERVICE AND GIVING.

[The World Watch List](#) (WWL) ranks the top 50 countries where Christian persecution is the most severe. See the top 50 countries and learn more facts and details about them at the Open Doors website.



Open Doors

INTERNATIONAL DAY OF

Prayer

FOR THE PERSECUTED CHURCH

SCRIPTURE

Psalm 82:3 Defend the weak and the fatherless; uphold the cause of the poor and the oppressed.

1 Corinthians 12:12-13 Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ. For we were all baptized by one Spirit so as to form one body—whether Jews or Gentiles, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink.

Philippians 1:21 For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.

Matthew 5:44 But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you

Psalm 46:10 He says, “Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth.”

1 Thessalonians 5:11 Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing.

Matthew 16:24 Then Jesus said to his disciples, “Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.”

John 15:20 Remember what I told you: ‘A servant is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also. If they obeyed my teaching, they will obey yours also.

John 16:33 I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.”

Matthew 5:10-12 Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. “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.”

Romans 5:3-4 Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope.

Philippians 1:12-14 Now I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that what has happened to me has actually served to advance the gospel. As a result, it has become clear throughout the whole palace guard and to everyone else that I am in chains for Christ. And because of my chains, most of the brothers and sisters have become confident in the Lord and dare all the more to proclaim the gospel without fear.



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FOR THE PERSECUTED CHURCH

BIBLICAL LESSONS

Sometimes you need to build yourself a cell

Be still, and know that I am God—Psalms 46:10

One Chinese church leader, who spent 23 years in prison, once said this to Christians who did not face persecution:

"I was pushed into a cell, but you have to push yourself into one. You have no time to know God. You need to build yourself a cell, so you can do for yourself what persecution did for me—simplify your life and know God."

It is vital that we spend time with God, to grow in Him, so we are prepared to stand strong in the face of persecution.

Weakness is a direct path to power

That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong—2 Corinthians 12:10

An Egyptian Christian reflected on the way he was treated when he converted to Christ:

"In great suffering, you discover a different Jesus than you do in normal life... Pain and suffering bring up to the surface all the weak points of your personality. In my weakest state, I had an incredible realization that Jesus loved me even right then."

True empowerment does not come from human means, but through Christ alone. It often takes being at our weakest point to realize this.

Extreme hurt requires extreme forgiveness

And Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." And they cast lots to divide his garments—Luke 23:34

A Christian widow from Iran said:

"I only had hatred in my heart for my enemies who had murdered my husband. But one day, a miracle happened. God taught me how I could love my enemies... I had been praying for this, even though on the deepest level, I didn't want it to happen. Gradually, through a process of ups and downs, God answered this prayer."

The only way we can get through extreme hurt is by forgiving people as Christ did.



INTERNATIONAL DAY OF
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PRAYER POINTS



Pray that Christians would continue to shine for Jesus and share their testimony to their persecutors with boldness.



Pray for Christians that have decided to remain in Syria for the strength to endure difficult circumstances.



Pray that the churches in the United States would grow in awareness and support of persecuted Christians.

REVELATION 3:2 WAKE UP! STRENGTHEN WHAT REMAINS AND IS ABOUT TO DIE, FOR I HAVE FOUND YOUR DEEDS UNFINISHED IN THE SIGHT OF MY GOD.



INTERNATIONAL DAY OF

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RESPOND

PROVIDE BIBLES TO CHRISTIANS SEEKING GOD'S WORD



Today, around the world, there are over 100 million Christians who are persecuted because of their faith in Jesus Christ. In their suffering they are asking us for support. The two things they plead for are our prayers and God's Word.

For persecuted Christians, prayer provides the spiritual protection they need as they stand against the forces of spiritual darkness. That is why we have days of prayer, and why we invite people to become Prayer Partners and pray throughout the year.

The Bible and biblical teachings are their source of strength... the bedrock of their faith... and the light of God's truth amidst great spiritual darkness. In fact, one persecuted brother simply said: "It is life!"

We encourage you to collect an offering to provide Bibles for Christians in closed or restricted countries. These Bibles advance God's Kingdom where faith costs the most, and help fulfill the Great Commission in Matthew 28.

Many Christians do not own their own Bible, and for every \$5 given Open Doors will provide a Bible to a persecuted Christian.

Please mail donations to:

Open Doors USA
PO Box 1595
Merrifield, VA 22116-1595

We are grateful for your heart of compassion and concern for those being persecuted for their faith.



INTERNATIONAL DAY OF
Prayer
FOR THE PERSECUTED CHURCH

NEXT STEPS

REGISTER FOR YOUR EVENT

If you have decided to participate in the International Day of Prayer for the Persecuted Church (IDOP), then you need to make sure you have your pastor or church leader's approval. Once you've received approval and know that your church plans to participate in IDOP, the next step is to **Register Your Event**.

Register Your Event to receive additional resources to engage with the persecuted church and gain access to exclusive content. When you register your event, we will send you an Event Kit that includes:

- **Letters of Encouragement** – We will provide an easy way for members of your church to write letters of encouragement to persecuted Christians in Syria. Have children draw a picture, members write a letter, prayer, or scripture, and we'll deliver it to Christians in Syria for you.
- **Exclusive Content** – We will provide you with specific prayer requests for Syria, stories about Christian pastors in Syria, and more exclusive content.
- **Much More** – Visit our website to see additional resources provided when you Register Your Event



REGISTER TODAY

THE RIPPLE EFFECT

Because understanding persecution strengthens your faith.

Do you have a passion for the persecuted church? Have you ever wanted to teach others about it but didn't know where to begin? Look no further than the new Ripple Effect!

The Ripple Effect provides 6 sessions targeted at teaching believers about Christian persecution so they can grow deeper in their faith.

This series will draw your group closer to persecuted Christians, and to the One whose name they're persecuted for.

To order your kit, visit RippleEffectSeries.com

Use the code "IDOP17" and receive 5 free wristbands with your order



Included are:

- 'How to Host' guide
- Event signs
- Handouts
- Take home resources
- Prayers and sermons
- PowerPoint slides
- Event videos



Open Doors

Serving persecuted Christians worldwide