

LIFEGROUPS

THE PERSECUTED CHURCH

“Jesus said unequivocally that “if they persecuted me, they will persecute you also” (John 15:20; 18-25; see also Mark 13:9). Persecution is to be expected for Christians, because to follow Jesus is counter-cultural and far beyond the realm of more private morality. Instead, following Jesus involves standing in faith against the powers of evil and darkness, and is a public act” --Christian Solidarity Worldwide

Read 2 Thessalonians 1:3-12

1. How do you think the Thessalonian church responded to Paul’s letter?
2. Read v4, why does Paul boast?
3. How do you think persecution causes your faith to grow / regress?
4. Why does God allow Christians to go through suffering?
5. How can God be “just” in the midst of persecution?
6. Imagine you were being persecuted, how would you feel and react?
7. How does the bible tell us to react?
8. How can we support others that are suffering?

A GUIDE TO PRAYING FOR PERSECUTED CHRISTIANS

Taken from www.releaseinternational.org/pray/

In many countries, Christians are harassed, discriminated against, slandered, unjustly accused, summarily arrested and sometimes imprisoned, beaten, exiled or killed. Violence comes both from governments and religious extremists. Your prayers can focus on four groups.

Individuals - Pray that they:

- remain strong in faith and trust despite physical and psychological abuse
- will be able to forgive those who persecute them or who fail to support them
- will experience and know love, joy and peace from God (Romans 8:28-39)
- will walk humbly in their identification with Christ’s sufferings
- will be fruitful witnesses to others
- will be able to balance standing up for their rights, yet responding in grace and love

Spouses - Pray that they:

- cope with the sense of loss and isolation
- cope with caring and providing for children alone
- remain full of faith and hope
- overcome any intimidation from police or other aggressors

Children - Pray that they:

- are protected from long term psychological/emotional harm and bitterness
- are protected from abduction or the “corrective teaching” some States try to impose
- might know and experience the love of God

Converts - Pray that they:

- receive help to grow spiritually
- are protected and provided for should their family or community turn against them
- will have the courage to lead others to know Christ

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Leaders Notes

These notes are here as guidelines or commentary notes to help the leader. Let the Word of God lead you and your lifegroup to HEAR God's prophetic message this week as you explore His Word together.

A little context about 2 Thessalonians 1:3-12

Paul's letter here was to strengthen the Thessalonians as the persecution of the Christians there had grown worse and was causing many to the point of despair.

Paul provided an incentive for the Thessalonians to persevere a little longer by describing the reward and retribution that God would be handing out to their persecutors in the coming judgement.

Suggested group task for the lifegroup:

If you have time, you can go online and download packs about persecuted Christians.

Some sites offer their details and you can get in touch with the individuals or groups who can contact them.

It is nice for someone suffering to receive a message of encouragement. Perhaps the lifegroup could team up to write an encouraging message and post it to them.

You may also wish to photocopy extra prayer guidelines for individual lifegroup members to get them to pray regularly for those that are persecuted.