



THE PRAYER CLOSET

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In *The New Yorker* magazine, Mark Danner tells the story of a young girl from El Mozote. This young girl is a Christian. Because she is a Christian, she is singled out for persecution by the authorities. She has been arrested and is at the mercy of the soldiers. The soldiers repeatedly rape her throughout the afternoon. The soldiers are amazed at this young girl. The other women they had raped had cried and screamed as if they had never known a man; this girl had sung hymns through the whole ordeal. This incites the soldiers to shoot her in the chest. Even after they had done this, this young girl continues to sing hymns. As she lay there, the blood flowing from her chest, she keeps singing about the Lord Jesus Christ. She is weaker than before, but still singing. The soldiers are stunned. They stand over her, watching her and pointing at her. Now they were tired of this game and shot her in the chest again. Yet, she still sings about the Lord Jesus Christ. The soldiers' wonder had now turned to fear. Finally, they took out their machetes and hacked through her neck. At last, the singing stopped.

This story is simply one among the thousands that are being reported from across the world. The persecution of Christians is one of the most gruesome, but most neglected stories of contemporary suffering in our world today. Millions of American Christians go to church, pray, and read their Bibles each week, totally unaware of the fact that Christians in other parts of the world suffer brutal torture, arrest, imprisonment, and even death because they follow the Lord Jesus Christ. Their homes and communities are looted and destroyed simply because they are Christians.

Few Americans know that Christians today are the most persecuted religious group in the world and that persecution is intensifying (Nina Shea, *Pulse*, Volume 32, No.3). Eleven countries continue to practice systematic persecution of Christians: China, Pakistan, Laos, North Korea, Vietnam, Cuba, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Egypt, Nigeria, and Uzbekistan. Although these countries contain a small sample of the Christians victimized throughout the world for their faith, they represent some of the worst, if not **the** worst, oppressors of Christianity in the world.

The examples of Christian persecution in the world is heartbreakingly plentiful. The list of actions against Christians reads like an alphabet of cruelty: amputation, bombing, crucifixion, displacement, flogging, kidnapping, murder, prison, rape, slavery, and torture. The brutal treatment of Christians across the world is mind-boggling. Yet, the evidence that this is happening mounts each day.

Some examples of Christian persecution across the world are:

-In Sudan, the Muslim government has made it a crime to convert to Christianity. Thousands of children have been snatched from Christian families and sold as slaves to buyers from Sudan, Libya, and other Islamic countries. Christian children are sold for ten to fifteen dollars as slaves. Thousands of Christian women have been raped; others have been sold as servants or to be a part of harems;

-In Pakistan, Christians have been driven from their villages by Muslim mobs, their possessions looted, their homes and churches destroyed. Christians are forbidden from sharing their faith. The nation has a blasphemy law that forbids anyone to speak against the prophet Mohammed. To do this is to face the death penalty;

HAVING TROUBLE WITH PRAYER?

As you read this newsletter, it is my hope and prayer that you are stirred and motivated to pray and spend time with God. The goal of this newsletter is to lead people into deeper fellowship with God by helping people to pray more effectively and consistently. Yet, it is necessary that I remind you of two basic truths concerning prayer.

First, the only people who can pray and have fellowship with God are those who have a personal relationship to God through Jesus Christ. The privilege of prayer belongs only to those who have surrendered their lives to Jesus Christ by faith and repentance. God becomes your Father only when you turn from your sin and to Christ in true faith (**Galatians 3:26**)! It is impossible to know God or pray to God unless you have turned from your sin and surrendered to the Lord Jesus Christ in true faith (**John 1:18; 5:37-38; 14-6, 10-11, 24**).

If you have never done this, your prayers are dead and useless. You must acknowledge your sin to God (**Exodus 20:1-20; Romans 3:9-20, 23**). You have failed to do what God commands and you have done what God forbids. Therefore, you are guilty, condemned, and headed to an eternity in hell. Yet, God has sent His son, Jesus Christ, to save sinners (**John 1:29; 3:16-19; Acts 4:12**). You must turn from your sinful, selfish lifestyle to Jesus Christ, trusting Him as your Savior and surrendering to Him as your Lord and Master (**Luke 13:1-3; Romans 10:9-10**). The problem in your prayer life may be that you have never come to know God in a personal relationship. It is only when you know God through Jesus Christ that you can truly pray and have fellowship with God.

Second, you must be pursuing a holy life to have a powerful prayer life. You may be thinking, "I know I am a Christian. Yet, my prayers seem so lifeless and dead." When teaching how to pray, the Lord Jesus declares to pray to your Father "who is in heaven." The Lord Jesus Christ is emphasizing the fact that your Father is a holy and sovereign God. Those who enter into His presence must be dealing with the sin in their lives. You cannot be complacent with wind and expect to have power in prayer. You cannot go for days without confessing personal sin and expect God to honor and answer your prayers.

The Bible says in Psalm 66:18, "**If I regard iniquity (sin) in my heart, the Lord will not hear.**" You cannot harbor or cherish sin in your life and at the same time expect to have power in prayer. **START READING PSALM 15 ON A DAILY BASIS!! BE DILIGENT TO CONFESS YOUR SINS DAILY!** Ask God to reveal your sin to you. Confess that sin and forsake it (**1 John 1:9**).

-In Iran, four prominent pastors were kidnapped and assassinated in the last few years. Many Christians have been arrested and tortured. Others have lost their homes, jobs, and businesses. Christian schools have been closed or taken over by the Muslims;

-In Vietnam, Christians are constantly in danger of being arrested and having their possessions confiscated by the government;

-In North Korea, Christians are forced to meet secretly in private homes. They have no access to Bibles or religious materials;

-In China, the government continues to seize church property and Bibles. There are more Christians in prison or under detention in China than any other country in the world. Christians are sent to labor camps for "re-education" in Communist beliefs;

-In the Comoro Islands, all public witness by Christians is forbidden and believers are not allowed to meet openly;

-In Iran, all open Christian witness is strictly forbidden. The government sends spies among believers in order to monitor the activities of Christian groups. Believers are also discriminated against in education, employment, and property ownership. In the last five years, several pastors have been murdered;

-In Egypt, Christians are treated as second-class citizens, being denied political representation and discriminated against in employment. The government uses an 1856 Ottoman Empire law to keep any church from being built, repaired, or even repainted without the permission of Egypt's president. Christians are also susceptible to attacks by Muslim extremists.

The brutal treatment of Christians across the world is shocking. Yet, there is something that is even more shocking than this. It is the silence of American Christians. It is the indifference of the American Christians to the suffering and persecution of her brothers and sisters across the world. Christians are being persecuted in record numbers while the church in America remains silent. **More Christians have died for their faith in this century alone than in the previous nineteen centuries combined.** Yet, American Christians are still silent and unconcerned about these brothers and sisters in the Lord Jesus Christ.

American Christians must take the lead in breaking the silence concerning Christian persecution. **IF WE WILL NOT SPEAK OUT, NO ONE WILL!!** We can no longer be silent to the condition of thousands of Christians around the world who are suffering and dying because of their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. We can no longer remain indifferent to the horrible and brutal treatment of Christians across the world. The time to act is now! We must passionately pray and work for an end to the suffering being inflicted on our brothers and sisters in Christ. American Christians have turned their back on their responsibility to deal with the persecution of Christians.

The American government has totally neglected the issue of Christian persecution across the world. The State Department knows that Christian persecution is going on in Communist and Islamic countries. But because of other foreign policy concerns and economic issues, they choose to look the other way. American political leaders have refused to acknowledge Christian persecution across the world. It is only recently that some in Washington have grudgingly acknowledged this persecution.

In early 1996, U.S. Ambassador Jim Sasser was never briefed by the State Department about the existence of, much less the persecution suffered by, the millions of house-church Christians in China.

Yet, he was well-versed in the persecution suffered by Tibetan Buddhists, student democracy activists, and other Chinese groups. When asked about the persecution of millions of Chinese Christians who attend underground house churches, Sasser responded, "What's a house church?" (Meeting of Ambassador Jim Sasser with human rights nongovernmental organizations, reported by Nina Shea of The Freedom House, January 24, 1996).

The United States has largely closed its doors to Christians fleeing for their lives from persecution. Christians who seek asylum in America from the threats and danger of their persecutors are repeatedly deported. They are refused asylum and help by the United States. They are returned to the very people who are seeking to destroy them. Reporter Michael Horowitz has stated, "Immigration lawyers tell me that it's easier for a camel to pass through a needle's eye than to get an asylum claim satisfied for a Christian who has escaped persecution."

It is time for American Christians to respond to the persecution of her brothers and sisters across the world. It is time for American Christians to demand that the government change its foreign policy and immigration laws concerning persecuted Christians. This is a crucial issue. It cannot be ignored or neglected. Persecution is evil. It is a sin on the part of the persecutors. This sin must be exposed and denounced by American Christians.

The Biblical Basis For Action Against Persecution

It is the Christian's responsibility and duty to speak out and act against the persecution of other Christians. To fail to speak out and act is a sin. The Bible reveals that the Christian has the responsibility, even duty, to speak and act when other Christians are persecuted and killed because of their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

When I talk with other believers, I am often amazed at the indifference that they have toward this subject. This may be your attitude. Yet, I want you to understand that your failure to speak out and act against the persecution of Christians is a sin before God. You will answer to God for your failure in this area. The Bible reveals numerous reasons why Christians are to speak out and take action against the persecution of Christians.

The first reason that you must speak out and act is because persecution is an attack on the Lord Jesus Christ and His gospel. When Jesus Christ confronted Saul of Tarsus, He said, "Saul, Saul, why are You persecuting Me?" Saul had been harassing and killing Christians. Yet, Jesus Christ declares that Saul had been attacking Him. The Lord Jesus Christ reveals that Saul had been attempting to destroy Him and His gospel. The church is the **BODY** of Christ. When Christian are attacked, it is really an attempt to destroy the Lord Jesus Christ and His message.

How can any Christian be indifferent when evil people are attempting to stamp out the Lord Jesus Christ and His gospel? How can someone profess to know and love Christ and then sit back when He is being blasphemed and His gospel is under attack? This is why persecution is such an evil and why it must be opposed. It is an attempt to attack Christ and His gospel. The persecutors are actually trying to get rid of Jesus Christ and His Word.

Another reason why you must speak out and act is because these Christians are your brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ. The Word of God states in **1 Corinthians 12:13**, "For by one Spirit we were all baptized **into one body**-where Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free-and have **all been made to drink into one Spirit.**" All believers make up the one family of God. It does not matter where believers are from-Mississippi, Texas, Russia, Iran, China, Sudan, Nigeria-all believers belong to the universal church, the body of Christ. Regardless of where a believer is located, that believer is connected to a family of believers all over the world.

GAINING DISCERNMENT WORKSHEET

This worksheet has been developed in order to help you think biblically about the decision or problem that you are facing. This means that you will be able to look at your decision or problem from the perspective of God's Word. As you seek to see how the Bible speaks to your decision or problem, ask the Holy Spirit to lead you in your study and to give you understanding. He is your divine Teacher and can guide you into the understanding of the Word along with its application. Set down on paper the pros and cons of the situation. Set down the reasons, the possibilities, and problems of one decision in contrast to another. As you examine the Scripture and these issues, you will often find your mind drawn in one direction or another. As time passes, you will begin to feel the weight of one course of action rather than the other. Ask God to confirm this by His peace (**Colossians 3:15**).

- (1) Does God give a direct command concerning this decision or problem?
Is there a specific command in the Word of God that shows you what to do?
In the Ten Commandments? In the Sermon on the Mount? Other teachings of Christ? In the letters of the New Testament?
- (2) Does God give a specific prohibition concerning this decision or problem?
In the Word of God, God often declares what is displeasing and unacceptable in His sight. In other words, does God forbid you to do this? Has God declared that this is not something that He wants you to do or to be a part of your life?
- (3) What principles can be found in the Word of God that speak to this problem or decision. The Bible gives principles that can help you in making decisions and facing problems. You need to search the Word to see if there are basic principles that will help you.
- (4) Are there specific examples in the Word that speak to your situation?
The Bible is a record of God's people and of their walk with Him. Many times these saints faced similar problems and decisions that you may be facing. An example of of this would be the life of David and the Psalms.

QUESTIONS TO ASK WHEN SEEKING GOD'S GUIDANCE?

- (1) **Is this scriptural?** *No action which is contrary to the Word of God is acceptable or legitimate for the child of God!*
- (2) **Will this strengthen my relationship to Jesus Christ and enable me to grow as a child of God?** *No action which leads you away from Jesus Christ and pursuing Him in a personal relationship is acceptable or legitimate for the Christian!*
- (3) **Will this consume my time, my energy, and my money so that nothing is left for God or family (1 Corinthians 6:12)?** *The Christian must not allow himself to be enslaved by anything that will not allow the freedom to serve God and build the family!*
- (4) **Can you take Christ there and look Him in the face without shame?** *Whenever a Christian pursues a course of action, he takes Christ with him.*
- (5) **Will this benefit others?** *A Christian must make decisions in light of helping and serving others.*
- (6) **Is this going to benefit my family? Will my family be drawn closer to God through this?** *Every decision that is made is going to affect others; this is especially true when it comes to one's family.*
- (7) **Is this going to glorify God?** *The Christian's top priority is to do what is going to bring the greatest glory to God.*
- (8) **Is this going to hinder or help my witness for Jesus Christ?** *A Christian is a witness; It can be a powerful witness or it can be a useless or harmful witness depending on the decisions that a Christian makes.*