

Responding to the challenge of *Tortured for Christ*

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Release International's CEO Paul Robinson said of the *Tortured for Christ* film: "I found it to be harrowing, deeply moving and inspiring, all at the same time. It reveals to us the cost of following Jesus Christ and reminds us what Christians in other parts of the world are suffering as they seek to live fully for Jesus today."

What was your response to the film? In a leaflet that you received after watching we invited you to consider a number of questions about the film. We also suggested three Bible passages that help us shape our response to persecution today.

2 Thessalonians 3:1-5

As the content of his two letters to the Thessalonians shows, the Apostle Paul was writing to Christians who had been suffering for their faith in Christ.

And yet Paul encourages them to have gospel priorities in their prayers!

"Finally, brothers, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may speed ahead and be honoured, as happened among you" (verse 1; ESV). The sense of his words would be: "pray that the gospel will *run!*" Paul wants them to share his desire that, above all else, the gospel will go forth – and be received.

Do we have that same priority? One of the challenging themes, surely, to come from the *Tortured for Christ* film was the overwhelming passion that Richard Wurmbrand and other persecuted Christians had to proclaim the gospel of Christ – whatever the cost.

At the same time, Paul requests prayer to be "delivered from wicked and evil men" (verse 2). Paul was *prepared* to suffer for Christ and the gospel – but he was no masochist! We can, and should, pray for persecuted Christians today. Above all, we should pray for God's sustaining grace in their lives, even in their suffering. This seems to be the gist of Paul's comment: "But the Lord is faithful. He will establish you and guard you against the evil one" (verse 3). These Thessalonians had suffered and were still suffering, but the Lord could sustain them in and through that.

Release International's free quarterly magazine includes lots of resources to help you pray; in particular our *Prayer Shield* insert, which gives you someone to pray for each day. Will you take up the challenge to PRAY for persecuted Christians?

Acts 14:19-23

These verses come towards the end of Paul's first missionary journey. During that ground-breaking journey Paul had seen people won for Christ. He had also experienced opposition. In Iconium opponents had tried to stone him (see 14:1-6); in Lystra they had succeeded and left him for dead (14:19)!

And yet after a fruitful time in the city of Derbe, Paul and Barnabas *deliberately* choose to re-trace their steps: yes, to go back to the very places where their lives had been threatened! Why? Luke

tells us they did so “strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying that through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God” (verse 22).

Paul put something before his own comfort and ease: the discipling, teaching and encouraging of Christians who were now, in all likelihood, facing opposition themselves.

Persecuted Christians today need that same strengthening, teaching and encouraging. Many of the projects Release International supports, through our in-country partners, seek to do precisely what the Apostle Paul was doing in Acts 14. Inevitably, that work must be paid for. Could you, or your church, support that vital work by GIVING?

Hebrews 13:1-3

Hebrews is an “exhortation” (see 13:22) to persevere – particularly in the face of opposition.

In chapter 10 the writer reminds his readers that in the past they had been willing to face opposition themselves *and* had deliberately expressed a willingness to stand alongside others who were suffering (see 10:32-34). He urges them to continue in this manner of faithful living for Christ.

They are to “run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus” (12:1,2). A fundamental part of doing that will be to demonstrate one of the key qualities of the Christian life: a love for our fellow believers (13:1).

One concrete way of expressing that brotherly love is to “Remember those who are in prison, as though in prison with them, and those who are mistreated...” (verse 3).

Praying for, giving to, and supporting persecuted Christians: these are not things we can easily do once and then forget about! We are to *go on* expressing the love that should characterise Christian believers. We, too, are to persevere.

Release International’s ministry is one that we describe as being from, to and within the Body of Christ. Our vision is to see Christians understand persecution biblically, and to respond, prayerfully and practically. This is what it means to REMEMBER our persecuted brothers and sisters. Will you join us in doing so?