A crown of thorns is positioned on the left side of the image, set against a dark red, textured background. The thorns are dark and sharp, with some highlights. The overall mood is somber and reflective.

THE DAY OF THE CHRISTIAN MARTYR

June 29, 2019

Resource Pack

RELEASE INTERNATIONAL
**voice**
of Persecuted Christians

“Greater love has no one than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends. You are my friends, if you do what I command... The time is coming when anyone who kills you will think they are offering a service to God. They will do such things because they have not known the Father or me. I have told you this, so that when their time comes, you will remember that I warned you about them.” (John 15:13,14; John 16:2-4, NIV)

Saturday June 29 2019 is the day many churches have remembered the martyrdoms of the Apostles Peter and Paul.

On this day, or later in the year, we invite you and your church to be inspired by Christian martyrs of modern times and moved to prayer, praise and greater devotion.

This brochure offers a selection of readings, sermon notes, hymns and prayers you might find useful. There is also a sample pack of prayer cards, and a Powerpoint presentation you can download from our website, www.releaseinternational.org

A few ideas to inspire your creativity

- Include a ‘Did you know?’ item in your church bulletin or newsletter quoting some figures about the martyrdom of Christians, or reprint one of the prayers in this pack.
- Hold a special Martyrs’ Day service in your church using the readings, sermon notes, hymns, prayers and other resources in this pack, and the Powerpoint presentation you can download from www.releaseinternational.org
- Consider using some of the readings, hymns and prayers in your regular service on June 30, or later in the year.
- Hold a Martyrs’ Day meeting in your home, home group, prayer group or midweek meeting. Give out prayer cards so people can continue to remember the families of Christian martyrs in prayer.
- Make a collection for the families of Christian martyrs

If you need more copies of this brochure, the poster or the prayer cards, call our Supporter Relations Team on 01689 823491, or email info@releaseinternational.org, and we’ll gladly send them to you, free of charge.

Readings

Romans 8:35 – 39 ESV

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? As it is written,

“For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered.”

No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

2 Corinthians 4:7-11 ESV

But we have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us. We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies. For we who live are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh.

Matthew 10:16-33 ESV

“Behold, I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves, so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves. Beware of men, for they will deliver you over to courts and flog you in their synagogues, and you will be dragged before governors and kings for my sake, to bear witness before them and the Gentiles. When they deliver you over, do not be anxious how you are to speak or what you are to say, for what you are to say will be given to you in that hour. For it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you. Brother will deliver brother over to death, and the father his child, and children will rise against parents and have them put to death, and you will be hated by all for my name's sake. But the one who endures to the end will be saved. When they persecute you in one town, flee to the next, for truly, I say to you, you will not have gone through all the towns of Israel before the Son of Man comes.

“A disciple is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his master. It is enough for the disciple to be like his teacher, and the servant like his master. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebul, how much more will they malign those of his household. So have no fear of them, for nothing is covered that will not be revealed, or hidden that will not be known. What I tell you in the dark, say in the light, and what you hear whispered, proclaim on the housetops. And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell. Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? And not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. But even the hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not, therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows. So everyone who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven, but whoever denies me before men, I also will deny before my Father who is in heaven.”

2 Timothy 4:1-9 ESV

I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom: preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching. For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths. As for you, always be sober-minded, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry. For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved his appearing.

Matthew 28: 19,20 ESV

“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

Sermon Notes

"I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith." (2 Timothy 4:6,7 ESV).

In probably his final letter, the Apostle Paul contemplates his martyrdom. Paul's heart is still for the gospel, and he urges Timothy to preach, teach and defend it. But he knew the cost, and encourages Timothy to be prepared to suffer for its sake. What can we learn about persecution and martyrdom from the Apostle Paul?

1. Paul had a theological understanding of persecution

Paul saw his sufferings in relation to Christ and the gospel. Paul says he had been persecuted *for the Cross* (Galatians 5:11). He says that suffering goes hand-in-hand with being a "servant of Christ" (2 Corinthians 11:23-27). Writing from a prison cell he describes himself as a "prisoner for the Lord" (Ephesians 4:1) and "an ambassador in chains" (Ephesians 6:20).

Paul talks not just about suffering *for* Christ but suffering *with* Christ (Romans 8:17). He writes: "I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions..." (Colossians 1:24 ESV). Paul is not saying that by being persecuted we share in, or add to, the atoning aspect of Christ's suffering. Rather, his language illustrates his understanding of the Christian's spiritual union with Christ. Paul frequently referred to Christians as being "in Christ", and to the Church as "the Body of Christ". In persecution Christians experience the world's ongoing hostility to Christ himself. This truth was driven home to Paul at his own conversion. "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting *me*?" said the risen Lord.

2. Paul encouraged a godly response to persecution

How did Paul encourage Christians to respond to suffering for Christ?

First, **he urged them to persevere**, as the temptation to give up in the face of suffering is obvious. Paul applauds, for example, the Thessalonians' "steadfastness and faith" in and through the persecutions they were enduring (2 Thessalonians 1:4). On other occasions he exhorts his readers to be "patient in tribulation" (Romans 12:11) and to know God's comfort as they "patiently endure" (2 Corinthians 1:6). We persevere by the grace of God.

Paul then calls on Christians **to be gracious and forgiving toward those who persecute them**. "Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them," (Romans 12:14) he writes, echoing the teaching of Jesus himself (see Matthew 5:44).

3. Paul was pastoral toward those who suffered persecution

What do we learn about how to respond to the persecution of Christians today?

Towards the end of his first missionary journey we read of Paul and Barnabas: "When they had preached the gospel to that city and had made many disciples, they returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch, *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" (Acts 14:21,22).

"Strengthening" and "encouraging" are words we often read in connection with the ministry of

the Apostle Paul. And for Paul, praying for them was fundamental to this (see Acts 14:23).

A biblical *understanding* of persecution prompts a biblical *response* to persecution. Our desire today should be to see persecuted Christians strengthened and encouraged to persevere.

There is one final point to note from the life of the Apostle Paul.

4. Paul magnified the gospel – not his persecution

It is always tempting to venerate those who suffer persecution – particularly those who are martyred. But Paul never sought persecution. Nor did he suggest it was something that raised the sufferer to a level above ‘normal’ Christians.

On a number of occasions we read of Christians removing Paul from situations that were becoming dangerous (e.g., Acts 9:23-25; 9:29,30; 17:1-10; 17:13,14). We also read of Paul deciding to leave a place when he became aware of a threat (Acts 14:5,6). Paul does not lead us to believe it was wrong to flee. Yet there

were many times when he *did* suffer arrests, beatings and imprisonment. And the day would come when he would pay the ultimate price.

How do we reconcile these things? For Paul the issue was always gospel witness. When Paul fled it was with a view to gospel proclamation elsewhere. He confessed: “*For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions and calamities*” (2 Corinthians 12:10 ESV). He declared that his imprisonment had served to further the proclamation of the gospel (Philippians 1:12-18). And he added: “...it has been *granted* to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake” (Philippians 1:29 ESV). We don’t easily consider persecution to be a gracious gift of God! But as Paul told his friends at Caesarea: “I am ready not only to be imprisoned but even to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus” (Acts 21:13).

So as we consider the issues of persecution and martyrdom, through the witness of the Apostle Paul, what response should it provoke from us?

Our Response

Is it our *desire*:

- to see persecuted Christians strengthened and encouraged in their discipleship?
- to see the gospel proclaimed – even in places of oppression and persecution?

If so, does this lead us:

- to pray for those who are persecuted, and for the families of martyrs?
- to give persecuted Christians the practical and spiritual tools they need to survive and thrive in the service of Christ?

The Apostle Paul passionately encouraged those who suffered for Christ. Remembering the suffering of Christians today, can we say: “***I will not abandon them*”?**

Hymns

You might want to sing some of or all the verses of these famous hymns.
The verses in bold are those we suggest for shortened versions.

How Long?

**As we bring our songs of love today
Do you hear a sound more glorious?
Like the mighty roar of ocean waves
Many witnesses surround us
It's a harmony of costly praise
From the lips of those who suffer
Of sighs and tears and martyrs' prayers
Until this age is over.**

How long, Lord, till you come?
How long till the earth
Is filled with your song?
How long until your justice
Shines like the sun?
How long, Lord, till you come?
How long till the earth
Is filled with your song?
How long, how long?

Lord, help us to live worthy of
Our sisters and our brothers
Who love you more than their own lives
Who worship as they suffer
To embrace the scandal of the cross
Not ashamed to tell your story
To count all earthly gain as loss
To know you and your glory

**How long, Lord, till you come?
How long till the earth
Is filled with your song?
How long until your justice
Shines like the sun?
How long, Lord, till you come?
How long till the whole world hears
And the work is done
Until at last we see you return?
How long, Lord till you come
How long till the earth
Is filled with your song?
How long, how long?
How long, how long?
How long, how long?**

Words and music: Graham Kendrick

From All thy Saints in Warfare

From all thy saints in warfare, for all thy saints at rest,
to thee, O blessed Jesus, all praises be addressed;
thou, Lord, didst win the battle, that they might conquerors be;
their crowns of living glory are lit with rays from thee.

Praise for the first of martyrs, who saw thee ready stand
to aid in midst of torments, to plead at God's right hand.
Share we with him, if summoned by death our Lord to own,
on earth the faithful witness, in heaven the martyr's crown.

Praise for the light from heaven, praise for the voice of awe,
praise for the glorious vision the persecutor saw.
Thee, Lord, for his conversion, we glorify today;
so lighten all our darkness with thy true Spirit's ray.

Praise for thy great apostle, the eager and the bold;
thrice falling, yet repentant, thrice charged to keep thy fold.
Lord, make thy pastors faithful to guard their flocks from ill,
and grant them dauntless courage, with humble, earnest will.

Apostles, prophets, martyrs, and all the sacred throng,
who wear the spotless raiment, who raise the ceaseless song,
for these, passed on before us, Saviour, we thee adore,
and, walking in their footsteps, would serve thee more and more.

Then praise we God the Father, and praise we God the Son,
and God the Holy Spirit, eternal Three in One;
till all the ransomed number fall down before the throne,
and honour, power, and glory, ascribe to God alone.

Words: Horatio, Lord Nelson (1758 - 1805)

For All The Saints

**For all the saints, who from their labours rest,
Who Thee by faith before the world confessed,
Thy Name, O Jesus, be forever blessed.
Alleluia, Alleluia!**

**Thou wast their Rock, their Fortress and their Might;
Thou, Lord, their Captain in the well fought fight;
Thou, in the darkness drear, their one true Light.
Alleluia, Alleluia!**

For the Apostles' glorious company,
Who bearing forth the Cross o'er land and sea,
Shook all the mighty world, we sing to Thee:
Alleluia, Alleluia!

**O may Thy soldiers, faithful, true and bold,
Fight as the saints who nobly fought of old,
And win with them the victor's crown of gold.
Alleluia, Alleluia!**

For the Evangelists, by whose blest word,
Like fourfold streams, the garden of the Lord,
Is fair and fruitful, be Thy Name adored.
Alleluia, Alleluia!

**For Martyrs, who with rapture-kindled eye,
Saw the bright crown descending from the sky,
And seeing, grasped it, Thee we glorify.
Alleluia, Alleluia!**

**O blest communion, fellowship divine!
We feebly struggle, they in glory shine;
Yet all are one in Thee, for all are Thine.
Alleluia, Alleluia!**

And when the strife is fierce, the warfare long,
Steals on the ear the distant triumph song,
And hearts are brave, again, and arms are strong.
Alleluia, Alleluia!

The golden evening brightens in the west;
Soon, soon to faithful warriors comes their rest;
Sweet is the calm of paradise the blessed.
Alleluia, Alleluia!

But lo! there breaks a yet more glorious day;
The saints triumphant rise in bright array;
The King of glory passes on His way.
Alleluia, Alleluia!

From earth's wide bounds, from ocean's farthest coast,
Through gates of pearl streams in the countless host,
Singing to Father, Son and Holy Ghost:
Alleluia, Alleluia!

**Words: Rt Rev William Walsham How (1823 - 1897)
Music: Ralph Vaughan Williams**

All Hail the Power of Jesu's Name

**All hail the power of Jesus' name!
Let angels prostrate fall.
Bring forth the royal diadem
and crown him Lord of all!**

**Crown him, you martyrs of our God,
who witnessed to his call;
exalt the one whose path you trod,
and crown him Lord of all.**

Descendants of his chosen race
you ransomed from the Fall,
hail him who saves you by his grace,
and crown him Lord of all.

Sinners, whose love cannot forget
the wormwood and the gall,
go spread your offering at his feet
and crown him Lord of all.

**Let every people, nation, tribe,
on this terrestrial ball,
to him all majesty ascribe
and crown him Lord of all.**

**O that in heaven with that great throng,
we at his feet may fall,
join in the everlasting song
and crown him Lord of all.**

Words: Edward Perronet (1726 - 1792) Music: Oliver Holden

Prayers

Invitation to prayer

Let us pray for our persecuted brothers and sisters around the world, pray for their oppressors, for nations that foster persecution, and for those who ignore it.

Let us read the Holy Scriptures, finding there the stories and witness of hope borne by those who lived through ordeals to the glory of God, and hear the promises of the gospel for all who are persecuted for righteousness' sake.

Called by the Holy Spirit to unity with Christians who are suffering, with prisoners of faith and the families of Christian martyrs, let us enter into their suffering, refusing to be silent, ready to reach out to them in any way we can.

Prayer of intercession

Almighty God, you have built your Church upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Jesus Christ himself as the chief cornerstone: so join us together in the unity of the Spirit, that we may be made a holy temple acceptable to you, through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.

Thanksgiving for the lives and sacrifices of Christian martyrs

Father God, thank you for our brothers and sisters, your precious children, who have been faithful to you even unto death.

*They are with you and their testimony to your faithfulness and salvation continues to resound in the world. Thank you for the eternal victory that our Lord Jesus has secured which gives their sacrifice purpose and meaning. **Amen.***

A Martyr's Prayer

Heavenly Father, I come into your most holy presence. You are the King of kings and Lord of lords, my Saviour, my everything. You died and rose again and will come again for your people.

You gave up everything for me because you love me. Today I surrender all that I am and commit myself to you for ever and ever. From this day my desire is to love you more than anything else in the world.

Please draw near to me and change my heart and help me in the midst of any storms to stand firm like my brothers and sisters around the world. I want to have a heart that is willing to put Jesus first.

Because of your unfailing love I want to never deny Jesus, even if it costs me my life. I will not fear anything or anybody for I know that you are close and will never leave me.

I will seek to glorify you even if I am ridiculed or persecuted.

I will pray for my brothers and sisters and remember them when I come before your throne in prayer.

I will pray that in your mercy and love you will give me a love for those who hurt your people.

I will love my enemies.

O God, fill me afresh with your Holy Spirit and make my heart as white as snow.

Thank you, Father, for loving me; thank you, Father, for caring for me.

Father, Son and Holy Spirit, in your mercy, hear my prayer.

Amen.

Prayers and praise for the families of Christian martyrs

Father God, we pray for the families of those who have been martyred for you - for the husbands and wives, sons and daughters, fathers and mothers, brothers and sisters. They also have paid a high cost. Our eyes look to you to comfort, protect and provide for them. You are their good Father.

*Please help them to forgive and pray for those who persecute them. As they remember the faithfulness of those they have lost bring them peace and assurance of your love. **Amen.***

A prayer of devotion from the Alternative Service Book

*Almighty God,
by whose grace and power your holy martyrs triumphed over suffering and were faithful unto death:
strengthen us with your grace,
that we may endure reproach and persecution and faithfully bear witness to the name of Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.
Amen.*

A responsory prayer

*Jesus said: 'Whoever wishes to be great among you must be your servant.'
Saviour, we hear your call.*

Help us to follow.

*Jesus said: 'Unless you change and become humble like little children, you can never enter the kingdom of heaven.'
Saviour, we hear your call.*

Help us to follow.

*Jesus said: 'Happy are the humble; they will receive what God has promised.'
Saviour, we hear your call.*

Help us to follow.

*Jesus said: 'Be merciful as your Father is merciful;
love your enemies and do good to them.'
Saviour, we hear your call.*

Help us to follow.

*Jesus said: 'Love one another, as I love you; there is no greater love than this, to lay down your life for your friends.'
Saviour, we hear your call.*

Help us to follow.

*Jesus said: 'Go to people everywhere and make them my disciples, and I will be with you always, to the end of time.'
Saviour, we hear your call.*

Help us to follow.

*God of mercy,
you know us and love us
and hear our prayer:
keep us in the eternal fellowship of Jesus Christ our Saviour.*

Amen.

Stories of modern-day Christian martyrs

Egypt: Attacks on Christians have claimed many lives

25 Coptic Christians, mostly women and children, were killed in the bombing of St Peter's Church in Cairo in December 2016. The following Easter around 50 Copts were killed in bomb blasts at churches in the city of Tanta, about 50 miles north of Cairo, and in Alexandria.

Seven Christians were killed and nine injured in an attack on a bus convoy in Minya, Upper Egypt, in November 2018. Armed Islamist terrorists opened fire on two buses as they were leaving Saint Samuel's monastery. The previous year a bus was attacked in the same area; 28 Christians lost their lives.

Indonesia: 14 Christians were martyred in three churches

A family with children launched suicide attacks on three churches in Surabaya city in May 2018, killing 14 people.

A woman is believed to have blown up herself and two daughters in an attack on one church. Within minutes, her husband had driven his car into another, while their teenage sons on a motorbike detonated a bomb outside a third. The youngest of the children was nine.

More than 40 were wounded in the three attacks, which were timed to coincide with Sunday services and occurred within ten minutes of one another. Islamic State later admitted responsibility.

Libya: 21 Coptic Christians martyred

In 2015 ISIS fighters beheaded 20 Egyptian Copts and one Ghanaian Christian on a beach in Libya. The Egyptians, 13 of whom came from al-Our, a rural town of 10,000 people south of Cairo, had been kidnapped after travelling to Libya to find work.

The Egyptians and their friend from Ghana who were brutally murdered, were not statesmen, religious leaders, activists or spokesmen; but ordinary men from Egyptian villages working to support their families.

Those who took their lives sought not only to victimise and disempower them, but to be triumphalist and instil fear in them and in the hearts and minds of all who witnessed this crime. What resulted however was a vision of honour, dignity and resilience demonstrated by these 21 men as they faced the final moments of their lives, with their heads raised, and their lips calmly, powerfully, and defiantly uttering their Faith. They indeed did "...not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul." (Matthew 10:28).

Nigeria: Gyang's family was brutally killed by Fulani herdsmen

In 2018 Gyang, a student at the University of Jos, saw a post on Facebook about how his village had come under attack from Fulani militants. Almost immediately he called home to speak to his father, Rev Adamu Gyang, but his father's phone was switched off.

Sensing something was wrong, he called his mother, but her phone was switched off too. A few minutes later he called a friend who told him that both his parents, his three younger siblings and his grandmother were dead.

Gyang could hardly breathe. He picked up his bag and got on a bus to his village as quickly as he could. Hours later, sitting on a half-burned bench in what used to be his family's living room, he heard from his friends how Fulani militants had arrived at the village one evening and killed 12 people, including his family.

Nigeria: Thousands of Christians have been murdered by Boko Haram

Thousands of Christians have been killed by the Islamist terrorist group Boko Haram and militant Fulani herdsmen in northern Nigeria in recent years. Release's partner said between January and June 2018 alone, 6,000 people were murdered.

In the same week in January 2015 that Islamist terrorists killed staff at the satirical magazine Charlie Hebdo and shoppers in Paris (17 deaths), 2,000 people were killed in Baga, Borno State.

The attacks in France attracted far greater media attention in the West.

In June 2018 more than 200 Christians were slaughtered in attacks on ten villages near the state capital of Jos in Plateau State by Fulani herdsmen armed with guns and machetes. In one community, Nghar, it was reported that every house was burnt down and more than 70 people killed.

North Korea: Unknown number of Christians have died in labour camps and prisons

In 2016, North Korean secret agents martyred Han Choong Yeol, a Korean Chinese pastor who lived in Chiangbai, a town on the Chinese side of the Sino-Korean border. Han Choong Yeol was active in helping North Korean refugees by giving them food, medicines, clothes and other goods they needed for survival back in North Korea.

On April 30, Han left his home just after noon and was supposed to return before 5pm. When he didn't come back, a large search was set up. Around 8pm his body was found, mutilated by stab and axe wounds. People who worked with Han described him as "extremely passionate for North Koreans". His ministry came with a price. He was 49 years old and is survived by his wife, a son and a daughter as well as the local Three Self-Church (600 members) he pastored.

Pakistan: Easter was a time of martyrdom

Easter is a particularly dangerous time for believers in Pakistan. In 2016, a suicide bomber targeted church-goers at a park in Lahore, killing more than 70. Most of the victims were women and children.

During Easter 2018 four members of the Masih family were killed in an attack by Islamist extremists in Quetta, Pakistan. The family had come together for Easter from different parts of Pakistan and were shot dead by terrorists deliberately targeting Christians in this province.

The Masih family had just got into a rickshaw in Quetta when two attackers opened fire, killing four of them instantly. Sidra, the 12-year-old daughter of one of those murdered, suffered bullet wounds – but survived.

Sri Lanka: Ramesh Raju lost his life to protect hundreds of believers on Easter Sunday 2019

He was a 42 years old husband and father, who died while stopping an Islamic militant with a backpack filled with explosives from entering Zion Evangelical Church on Easter morning. If the attacker had entered the church, there would have been many more casualties.

Ramesh was in the church's courtyard when he saw a man whom he didn't recognise carrying a large backpack. The man told him it contained a video camera as he had come to film the church service.

Sensing that something was wrong Ramesh told the man that he needed permission to film in the church. And he forced the man to leave.

Moments later the man detonated his bomb and 28 Christians including Ramesh and many children who were enjoying a snack after their Sunday school class were killed in the blast.

Ramesh's self-sacrificing action spared other families pain, and saved many other lives.

Sudan: Thousands of Christians killed by government forces

Since 1987 around 400,000 ethnic African Christians have been killed by the Sudanese government under the recently deposed General Omar al-Bashir and its ethnic Arab militia known as the 'Janjaweed'.

Tanzania: Mary Meshack's and Generosa Kachila's husbands were brutally murdered

In 2013, Mary's husband, a pastor and evangelist, was attending a night-time prayer meeting when a mob surrounded the church in Mwanza City. Although badly injured in the attack that followed, two members of the congregation survived. Mary's husband, however, died on the way to hospital.

Sometime later a machete-wielding mob attacked and killed Mathayo Kachila in the street. His widow, Generosa, has struggled to bring up their 11 children on her own.

Further information

Martyr: one who bears witness of the truth and suffers death for the cause of Christ (Acts 22:20; Revelation 2:13; 17:6). In this sense Stephen was the first martyr. The Greek word so rendered in all other cases is translated “witness”...

- In a court of justice (Matthew 18:16; 26:65; Acts 6:13; 7:58; Hebrews 10:28; 1 Timothy 5:19).
- As of one bearing testimony to the truth of what he has seen or known (Luke 24:48; Acts 1:8; Acts 1:22; Romans 1:9; 1 Thessalonians 2:5 1; Thessalonians 2:10; 1 John 1:2).

Some facts and figures about persecution and martyrdom of Christians in the world today

According to *World Watch List 2019*, an in-depth investigative report focusing on global Christian persecution 11 Christians die for their faith every day. This figure relates to those believers we know for a fact have been killed. But the real figure might be higher given that we don't know what is happening to Christians in some countries like North Korea or elsewhere where Christians can just disappear.

During the *World Watch List 2019* reporting period (01/11/17 - 31/10/18) for the top 50 countries where Christians are persecuted the most:

- 1,266 churches or Christian buildings were attacked.
- 2,625 Christians were detained without trial, arrested, sentenced and imprisoned.
- 4,136 Christians were killed for faith-related reasons. On average, that's 11 Christians killed every day for their faith.
- Countries where Christians are likely to experience the most severe persecution are: North Korea, Afghanistan, Somalia, Libya, Pakistan, Sudan, Eritrea, Yemen, Iran, India and Syria.

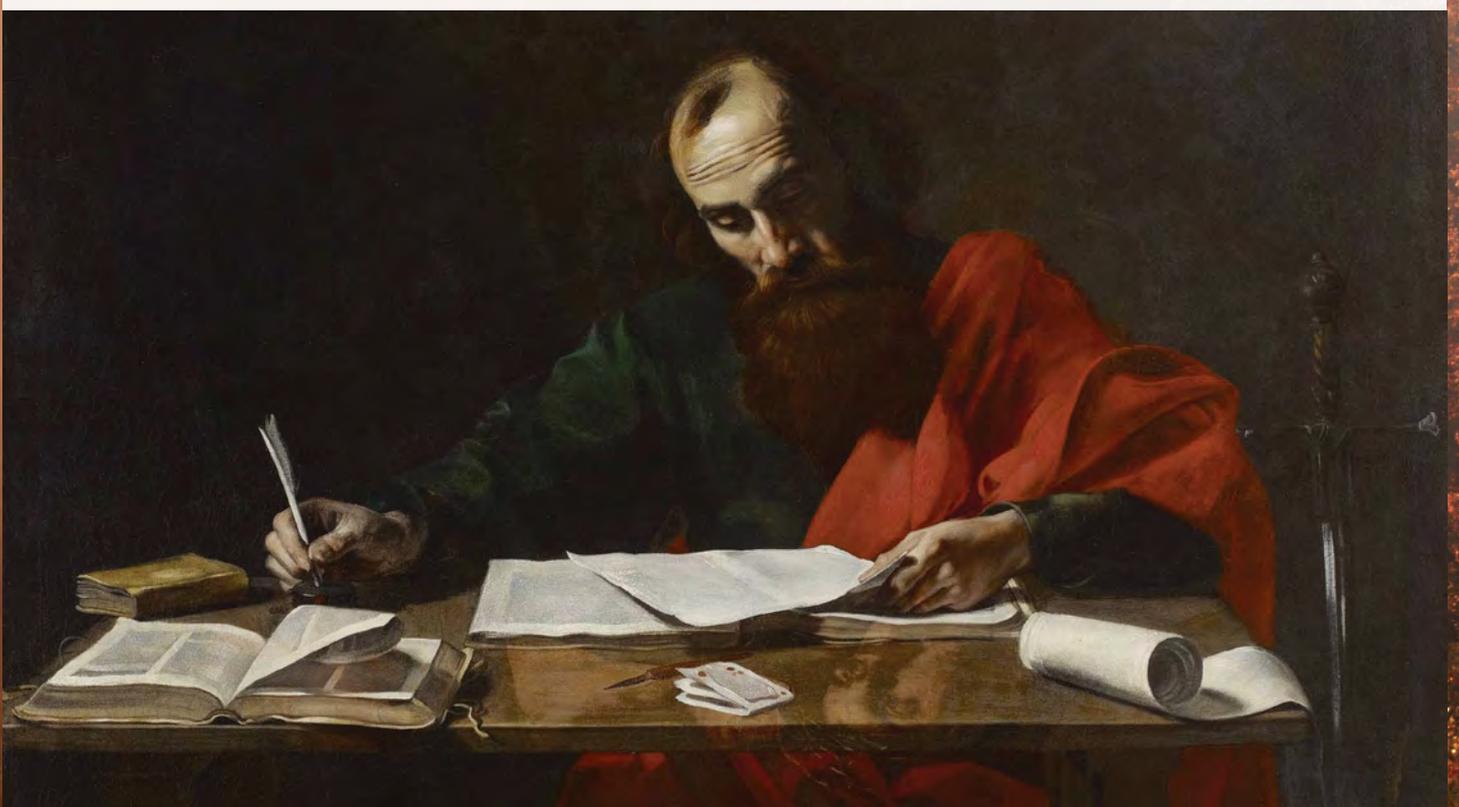
Extrapolating from *World Watch List's* figures, every month, on average:

- 333 Christians are killed.
- 104 are abducted.
- 180 Christian women are raped, sexually harassed or forced into marriage.
- 66 churches are attacked.
- 218 Christians are detained without trial and imprisoned.

The Life of the Apostle Paul

It is fascinating to piece together the life of the Apostle Paul from the evidence we have in the Book of Acts and Paul's own letters. While precision is difficult, the appearance of certain historical figures (for example, the proconsul Gallio in Acts 18) enables Bible historians to work backwards and forwards to estimate a timeline. The evidence of Paul's Pastoral letters (1 & 2 Timothy and Titus) suggests a period of renewed freedom beyond the end of Luke's account in Acts, before his final arrest and martyrdom.

- Born in Tarsus of Cilicia, a Jew with Roman citizenship (AD 5 – 10?)
- Educated in Jerusalem under Rabbi Gamaliel
- A witness of the stoning of Stephen, the first Christian martyr – Acts 7:58 – 8:3
- Conversion (AD 34?) – Acts 9:1-18
- Visit to Jerusalem, followed by 'silent years' in Syria and Cilicia – Acts 9:26-30
- **First missionary journey – Acts 13 – 14**
- Attended the Jerusalem Council – Acts 15
- **Second missionary journey – Acts 15:36 – 18:22**
- **Third missionary journey – Acts 18:23 – 21:16**
- Arrest in Jerusalem and imprisonment in Caesarea – Acts 21:27 – 26:32
- Sea journey to Rome followed by two-year house arrest – Acts 27 - 28
- Release and further travel before re-arrest?
- Martyrdom (AD 65 – 67?)



Taking it further

There is a huge blessing in realising that persecuted Christians are our brothers and sisters in Christ, and that together, we are all part of his Body. When we bring any comfort to them, we are bringing comfort and joy to Jesus himself, according to his teaching in Matthew 25:34-40 and his command for us to love one another. Here are a few ways of taking our care for persecuted Christians, and expressing our love for Jesus, one step further.

Keep informed

If you don't already receive our free quarterly magazine, please use the "I Will Not Abandon Them!" card to request it. It includes a 'Prayer Shield' insert with a single prayer point for each day.

You can also keep informed of the latest news and prayer needs by email: simply tick the relevant box. (You can unsubscribe from any of these at any time, should you so wish.)

Our YouTube channel offers our DVDs to view online. These are typically between at most 10 and 15 minutes long.



Pray

The one thing persecuted Christians invariably request, despite their often pressing needs for food, clothing, shelter and healing, is, above all, prayer. We will be delighted to keep you informed of prayer needs by email. You can also access our daily prayer points on our website.

Inspire

Many Christians are unaware of the widespread persecution of Christians around the world. You can help to raise awareness, prayer and support in these ways:

- With permission if needed, use a church noticeboard for our A4 or A3 posters
- Consider organising prayer for persecuted Christians. Whether as a focus of corporate prayers, home groups, or a dedicated prayer group, our booklet *Praying for Persecuted Christians* can help you. We are also happy to send you short DVDs about the situation in particular countries, or themes such as the forcible displacement of Christians.
- Volunteer as, or recruit, a Release church representative. Throughout the year, Release organises various activities your church may wish to engage with, such as petitions; letter-writing to or on behalf of prisoners of faith; fundraising walks or other activities; speaker tours by persecuted Christians; women's conferences; and supporter surveys. Your help in engaging people in activities such as these is invaluable and hugely appreciated.



Give

Your gifts enable us to bring practical support and encouragement to Christians around the world. Here are a few ways you can make an enormous difference to persecuted Christians:

- Please consider taking a collection for the families of Christian martyrs or persecuted Christians more generally during your Martyrs' Day service or any of your regular services.
- Please invite your church members to consider making a one-off gift to Release using the pew envelopes enclosed with this pack
- If people wish to make a regular gift to Release, which is enormously helpful, please invite them to use the reverse of the "I Will Not Abandon Them!" card. (If you would like more of these cards, please contact our Supporter Relations Team on 01689 823491 or info@releaseinternational.org)
- Invite the Government to support Release! If donors sign the Gift Aid form on the pew envelopes or regular giving forms, the Government sends Release a further 25%: so £25 for each basic £100 given.

**I WILL NOT
ABANDON
THEM!**

RELEASE INTERNATIONAL

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