



# THE DAY OF THE CHRISTIAN MARTYR

29th June

**Worship Resource Pack**

***'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)

### **June 29 is the day many churches remember the martyrdoms of the Apostles Peter and Paul.**

On this day, or later in the year, we invite you and your church to be encouraged and strengthened 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](http://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](http://www.releaseinternational.org)
- Consider using some of the readings, hymns and prayers in your regular service in June, 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](mailto: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?***’

# Songs

You might want to sing some of or all the verses of these famous songs.

## 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

## Ten Thousand Reasons

*Bless the Lord, O my soul, O my soul  
Worship His holy name  
Sing like never before, O my soul  
I'll worship Your holy name  
The sun comes up, it's a new day dawning  
It's time to sing your song again  
Whatever may pass and whatever lies before me  
Let me be singing when the evening comes  
Bless the Lord, O my soul, O my soul  
Worship His holy name  
Sing like never before, O my soul  
I'll worship Your holy name  
You're rich in love and You're slow to anger  
Your name is great and Your heart is kind  
For all Your goodness, I will keep on singing  
Ten thousand reasons for my heart to find  
Bless the Lord, O my soul, O my soul  
Worship His holy name  
Sing like never before, O my soul  
I'll worship Your holy name  
And on that day when my strength is failing  
The end draws near and my time has come  
Still, my soul will sing Your praise unending  
Ten thousand years and then forevermore  
Forevermore  
Bless the Lord, O my soul, O my soul  
Worship His holy name  
Sing like never before, O my soul  
I'll worship Your holy name  
Bless the Lord, O my soul, O my soul  
Worship His holy name  
Sing like never before, O my soul  
I'll worship Your holy name  
I'll worship Your holy name  
Lord, I'll worship Your holy name  
Sing like never before, O my soul  
I'll worship Your holy name  
Jesus, I will, worship Your holy name  
Worship Your holy name*

Words: Matt Redman, Jonas Myrin

## Martyr's Song

*Sing, O son of Zion*

*Shout, O child of mine*

*Rejoice with all your heart and soul and mind.*

I've been waiting

To dance with you in fields full of colours you've never seen

And I've been waiting

To show you beauty you never dreamed that's always been in you

And I've been waiting

To see you tremble as you're embraced by a world saturated with my love

And I've been waiting for the day when at last I get to say

'My child, you are finally home'

*Sing, O son of Zion*

*Shout, O child mine of*

*Rejoice with all your heart and soul and mind*

*For you are finally home*

I've been waiting

To watch you realize what all your longing was for

And I've been waiting

To show you the thread of grace that ran through all your pain

And I've been waiting

To let you drink the water of which your greatest joy on earth was just a taste

And I've been waiting for the day when at last I get to say

'My child, you are finally home'

*Sing, O son of Zion*

*Shout, O child of mine*

*Rejoice with all your heart and soul and mind*

*Sing, O daughter of Zion*

*Cry out, O child of mine*

*Dance with all the strength that you can find*

*For you are finally home*

Every tear you cried dried in the palm of my hand

Every lonely hour was by my side

And every loved one lost, every river crossed

Every moment, every hour was pointing to this day

I've been longing for this day...

And I've been waiting to dance with you in fields full of colours

You've never seen

And I've been waiting to show you beauty you never dreamed

That's always been in you

And I've been waiting to see you tremble as you're embraced

By a world saturated with my love

And I've been waiting for the day when at last I get to say

'My child, you are finally home'

*Sing, O son of Zion*

*Shout, O child of mine*

*Rejoice with all your heart and soul and mind*

*Sing, O daughter of Zion*

*Cry out, O child of mine*

*Dance with all the strength that you can find*

*For you are finally home*

*Sing, O son of Zion*

*Shout, O child of mine*

*Rejoice with all your heart and soul and*

*Sing, O daughter of Zion*

*Cry out, O child of mine*

*Dance with all the strength that you can find*

*For you are finally home*

*For you are finally home*

*You are my child*

*You are finally home*

*For you are finally home*

**Words: Todd Agnew**

## 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.***

## Prayer for the Heart of a Martyr

*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.***

# Modern-day martyrs



## **NIGERIA:** Thousands of Christians murdered

Violent attacks by Boko Haram terrorists and militant Fulani herdsmen on Christian villagers in northern and central states of Nigeria have left thousands dead over recent years. Release's partner says that between January and June 2018 alone, 6,000 people were murdered.

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 were killed.

## **EGYPT:** Attacks on Christians claim many lives

In Egypt, attacks on Christians are sporadic but deadly. 25 Coptic Christians, mostly women and children, were killed in the bombing of St Peter's Church in Cairo in December 2016. Over Easter 2017 around 50 were killed in bomb blasts at churches in the cities of Tanta and Alexandria. In November 2018 seven were killed and nine were injured in an attack on a bus convoy in Minya, Upper Egypt. 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 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 Christians martyred

In 2015 ISIS fighters beheaded 20 Egyptian Copts and one Ghanaian Christian on a beach in Libya. The Egyptians had been kidnapped after travelling to Libya to find work. The Egyptians and their friend from Ghana 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 to instil fear in the hearts and minds of all who witnessed the video of this crime. Instead, the dignity and resilience of these men as they faced the final moments of their lives inspired Christians in Egypt and around the world.



## **NORTH KOREA: Untold numbers die in labour camps**

North Korea runs 14 concentration camps with a total population of around 250,000. It is estimated that 50,000-70,000 of them are Christians. Conditions are brutal. Prisoners die of disease, starvation, and mistreatment. Some are subjected to fatal treatment or executed.

Around 3,000 North Koreans flee the country each year and trek through China and its neighbouring countries to reach South Korea. Those who are helped by our partner tell of the intense repression of Christians, and how once people or even whole families are sent to the concentration camps, they rarely return.



## **PAKISTAN: Easter martyrs**

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 were women and children.

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

The family had just got into a rickshaw 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 loses his life protecting believers**

Ramesh, a 42-year-old husband and father, died stopping an Islamic militant from entering Zion Evangelical Church on Easter morning. If the attacker had gained admission to the church, there would have been very 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 said it contained a video camera as he had come to film the service.

Sensing that something was wrong Ramesh told him that he needed permission to film, and forced him to leave. Moments later the man detonated his bomb and 28 Christians including Ramesh and children who were enjoying a snack after their Sunday school class were killed.

## **TANZANIA: Mary Meshack's and Generosa Kachila's husbands 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 eleven 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).

*'Not all of us are called to die a martyr's death, but all of us are called to have the same spirit of self-sacrifice and love to the very end as these martyrs had.'* Richard Wurmbbrand

## 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 known for a fact to have been killed. But the real figure might be higher given that we do not know what is happening to Christians in some countries such as North Korea where believers can just disappear.

During the *World Watch List 2020* reporting period (November 1, 2018 to October 31, 2019) 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, Nigeria, 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.)

Our YouTube channel offers our videos to view online. These are typically between 10 to 15 minutes running time.

## 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, *Praying for Persecuted Christians* is a booklet that 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](mailto: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  
  
**voice**  
of Persecuted Christians

[www.releaseinternational.org/martyrs](http://www.releaseinternational.org/martyrs)

01689 823491

[info@releaseinternational.org](mailto:info@releaseinternational.org)

PO Box 54, Orpington BR5 4RT

Charity Reg No 280577 (SC040456)



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