

## Doctrine of Persecution

### Open Doors

#### Brother Andrew's Ministries

#### A Theology of Christian Persecution

“Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. 11 Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. 12 Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you” (Matt. 5:10-12).

For almost 60 years, Open Doors ministries have worked in the world's most oppressive countries, empowering Christians who are persecuted for their beliefs. These believers stand strong, despite the many obstacles that they face. What are some of the things that we can we learn from their faith?

There is something about hardship that allows us to know God deeply. When times get really tough, we discover more about who God, is and how He works. Christians who have endured persecution for their faith, know this well.

There are no easy answers for why God allows his followers to face suffering. However, the lives of persecuted Christians reveal that even when things look out of control, believers can rest secure, knowing that God is still in control. He is able to give courage, peace, and even joy, to stand strong through the storm. It is through these storms that believers discover God's love in new and powerful ways.

*Standing Strong Through The Storm* is the curriculum that Open Doors uses to help Christians stand strong in the face of persecution.

There are six theological, and biblical, lessons from this curriculum:

1. Sometimes you need to build yourself a cell.
  - Psalm 46:10 Be still, and know that I am God.

One Chinese church leader, who spent 23 years in prison, once said this to Christians who did not face persecution:

"I was pushed into a cell, but you have to push yourself into one. You have no time to know God. You need to build yourself a cell, so you can do for yourself what persecution did for me—simplify your life and know God."

It is vital that we spend time with God, to grow in Him, so we are prepared to stand strong in the face of persecution.

## 2. God keeps secrets

- *Isaiah 55:8 For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord. 9 For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.*

There have been countless stories of persecuted Christians who have died without seeing the fruits of their labor. However, God knows all that has been, and all that is to come. Our labor is not in vain, it is in His hands.

## 3. Weakness is a direct path to power.

- *2 Corinthians 12:10 Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong.*

An Egyptian Christian reflected on the way he was treated when he converted to Christ:

"In great suffering you discover a different Jesus than you do in normal life... Pain and suffering bring up to the surface all the weak points of your personality. In my weakest state, I had an incredible realization that Jesus loved me even right then."

True empowerment does not come from human means, but through Christ alone. It often takes being at our weakest point to realize this.

## 4. Overcoming is greater than deliverance.

- *Romans 12:21 Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good.*

Persecuted Christians, no matter what country they are from, do not ask us to pray that persecution would end, but rather ask us to pray that they stand strong through the persecution. They do not wish to be delivered from the persecution, but rather ask us to pray that they would be able to overcome the trials that they are facing in a way that is honoring to God.

## 5. Extreme hurt requires extreme forgiveness

- *Luke 23:34 Then said Jesus, Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do. And they parted his raiment, and cast lots.*

A Christian widow from Iran said:

"I only had hatred in my heart for my enemies who had murdered my husband. But one day a miracle happened. God taught me how I could love my enemies... I had been praying for this, even though on the deepest level I didn't want it to happen. Gradually, through a process of ups and downs, God answered this prayer."

The only way we can get through extreme hurt is by forgiving people as Christ did.

## 6. Prayer is the ultimate fellowship.

- *Hebrews 13:3 Remember them that are in bonds, as bound with them; and them which suffer adversity, as being yourselves also in the body.*

Many persecuted Christians often feel isolated and alone, since they are unable to fellowship with other believers. However, prayers from Christians half a world away have brought the same amount of encouragement that fellowship would have for these persecuted Christians. Prayer is vital—not only as a direct line to God, but as a way to encourage our persecuted brothers and sisters around the world.

1 Corinthians 12:26 tells us that we are one body—when one member suffers, we all suffer. When one member is lifted up, we all rejoice. Persecuted Christians, and Christians in the free world, are not two separate entities, but rather are one body.

The persecuted church needs the free church to support them, and most importantly to lift them up in prayer.

The church, in the free world, learns lessons from the persecuted that have stood strong in the face of persecution. Christ is the head of the body, and uses the church (both free and persecuted) in unique, and powerful, ways.