



THE PERSECUTED CHURCH

Preparing the New Generation Church for Perilous Times

ABSTRACT

*Yes, and all who desire to live
godly in Christ Jesus will suffer
persecution. 2 Timothy 3:12*

Michael Gross & Samuel Isong

This work is dedicated to a new generation of leaders and believers raised up and anointed by God to fulfill the book of Acts in the power of the Holy Spirit and to the spiritual fathers and mothers called by God to nurture and equip them for multiplying the harvest through strategic prayer, power evangelism, Spirit filled discipleship and church planting aligned with God's word.

All Scripture quotations, unless otherwise noted, are taken from the New King James Version (NKJV) of the Bible.

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Preface

Dr. Samuel Isong and I have been praying for over two years about writing a training manual built around equipping this generation in the midst of growing persecution of Christians around the world. Well before a new and violent wave of persecution struck South Nigeria, we had the burden of the Word and the Spirit for the persecuted church. The Lord pressed upon our hearts to equip the remnant mission church to get ready. It is a challenging objective for this emerging young generation church with things so rapidly changing around them and the world. Are you mission ready? What will you do? How will you respond when things like this begin or have already begun in your region?

- *Suddenly, early this morning the worst started. Joint forces now house to house shooting, a lot of casualties as I speak. All roads blocked, no going out, no hiding place.*
- *Two nights ago, they came to attack us in the Church premises but as we prayed and the children shouting the blood of Jesus, the Lord drove them away. It was so traumatic on children.*

The above firsthand accounts of recent persecution in Southern Nigeria are prime examples for why this generation needs to get ready with a mission focus. These are dark days in many regards, but we have the good news. Jesus is alive! Christians need to look up during persecution and then apply end time strategies to reach others for Christ. How can we help this generation to do this in the face of threatening pandemics, antichristian bias, and severe persecution? We must examine more closely how Jesus and the Early Church ministered in most difficult times. What did they do? What biblical strategies stand out? Can we effectively duplicate these strategies today? Can the same revival fire spread in this season of global persecution as then? Many other questions come to mind.

Too many young leaders and churches are sitting when heaven is calling for action. Many churches are just trying to return to their normal services and building projects as before. Do any of us actually believe this is what the Spirit is saying to the churches! We believe God wants to use us to change this. 5-Fold Global is working together with partners from persecuted regions to pull together by the Spirit sound biblical teaching sessions, calling for immediate action to cause God's word to spread and multiply in the face of persecution. We are convinced we must be even bolder and more courageous in the power of the Holy Spirit to preach and teach the truth about the hour in which we live. We know we must also continually lead this generation to the Holy Spirit. It is the last hour according to God's word. It is not a time to fall away. You must be ready to stand for Jesus, to proclaim His name, and to rejoice in persecution. To this end, we offer this training manual to equip the saints to endure persecution imitating our Lord Jesus Christ and to boldly minister in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Dr. Michael D. Gross
Dr. Samuel J. Isong

Teaching Session 1: A Biblical Perspective of Persecution

Michael D. Gross

What is Persecution

The generation in which we live is no different than the generation in which Jesus walked on earth in the context of the spiritual condition of mankind. Jesus understood His generation. But do we, the people of God, **a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people** (1Pet. 2:9). Do we truly understand the generation, the time in which we live? This opening and foundational teaching session in our series will introduce you to an understanding from God's word of persecution and why you can expect it and must endure it in your life as a believer and follower of Jesus Christ.

First, let us lay a foundation of understanding of how Jesus views the times in which we live. Jesus referred to **this generation** in the following ways:

1. Evil and adulterous because it seeks after a sign.

Matt. 12:39 But He answered and said to them, "An evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign, and no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. (Also Matt. 16:4; Mark 8:12; Luke 11:29)

2. A fickle wavering generation that plays around with the message and ministry of Jesus.

Matt. 11:16-17 "But to what shall I liken this generation? It is like children sitting in the marketplaces and calling to their companions, ¹⁷ and saying: "We played the flute for you, And you did not dance; We mourned to you, And you did not lament."

3. An unrepentant generation because they do not repent at the preaching of the truth.

Matt. 12:41-42 The men of Nineveh will rise up in the judgment with this generation and condemn it, because they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and indeed a greater than Jonah *is* here. ⁴² The queen of the South will rise up in the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and indeed a greater than Solomon *is* here.

4. A wicked generation infested with evil spirits.

Matt. 12:45 Then he goes and takes with him seven other spirits more wicked than himself, and they enter and dwell there; and the last *state* of that man is worse than the first. So shall it also be with this wicked generation."

5. A faithless and perverse generation because of unbelief in the authority and power of Jesus Christ.

Matt. 17:17 Then Jesus answered and said, "O faithless and perverse generation, how long shall I be with you? How long shall I bear with you? Bring him here to Me." (Mark 9:19; Luke 9:41)

6. An adulterous and sinful generation because it is ashamed of the words of Christ.

Mark 8:38 For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him the Son of Man also will be ashamed when He comes in the glory of His Father with the holy angels.”

7. A generation that persecutes and rejects Jesus Christ and those He sends to them.

Luke 11:50-51 that the blood of all the prophets which was shed from the foundation of the world may be required of this generation, ⁵¹ from the blood of Abel to the blood of Zechariah who perished between the altar and the temple. Yes, I say to you, it shall be required of this generation.

Luke 17:25 But first He must suffer many things and be rejected by this generation.

Matt. 23:34 Therefore, indeed, I send you prophets, wise men, and scribes: *some* of them you will kill and crucify, and *some* of them you will scourge in your synagogues and persecute from city to city. (Matt. 23:37)

8. A terminal generation of the end times.

Matt. 23:36 Assuredly, I say to you, all these things will come upon this generation.

Matt. 24:34 Assuredly, I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away till all these things take place. (Mark 13:30)

9. A generation where the sons of the world are wiser than the sons of light.

Luke 16:8 So the master commended the unjust steward because he had dealt shrewdly. For the sons of this world are more shrewd in their generation than the sons of light.

Let me ask you this? Is there anything in these descriptions by Jesus that do not apply to this present age? In fact, these things are intensifying and accelerating in our generation because we live in the end times. The Early Church had this same perspective of their generation. Here are just a few examples:

- **Acts 2:40** And with many other words he testified and exhorted them, saying, “Be saved from this perverse generation.”
- **Phil. 2:15** ...that you may become blameless and harmless, children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world.
- **Heb. 3:10** Therefore I was angry with that generation, And said, “They always go astray in their heart, And they have not known My ways.’

These generational characteristics are evident in the context of great persecution against those who proclaim Christ. Is God also angry at this generation? Is He angry at churches and spiritual leaders who fail to preach repentance for the remission of sins and the word of truth to the nations? This is why the new generation church today

needs a biblical perspective of persecution and a biblical understanding of the time in which we live. So, let's begin with the basics.

The Bible uses a number of Hebrew and Greek words to describe persecution and the things associated with it. The primary Hebrew word for persecution is *radaph* and has the notion of a hostile pursuit. The primary Greek word is *dioko* or *diogmos* with the same idea of pursuit in order to do harm. But you also have *thlipsis*, *thilbo*, and *pathema* which identify the anguish, affliction, and suffering involved with persecution. The following chart will help us to better understand and define persecution from a biblical perspective:

Hebrew/Greek Word Meaning	Biblical Example(s)
רדף <i>radaph</i> , <i>raw-daf'</i> ; a primitive root; to run after (usually with hostile intent; figuratively (of time) gone by):—chase, put to flight, follow (after, on), hunt, (be under) persecute(-ion, -or), pursue(-r).	Psa. 31:15 My times <i>are</i> in Your hand; Deliver me from the hand of my enemies, And from those who persecute me. Psa. 119:86 All Your commandments <i>are</i> faithful; They persecute me wrongfully; Help me!
צרה <i>tsarah</i> , <i>tsaw-raw'</i> ; feminine of 6862; tightness (i.e. figuratively, trouble); transitively, a female rival:—adversary, adversity, affliction, anguish, distress, tribulation, trouble.	Psa. 3:1 LORD, how they have increased who trouble me! Many <i>are</i> they who rise up against me. Psa. 34:17 <i>The righteous</i> cry out, and the LORD hears, And delivers them out of all their troubles .
διώκω <i>dioko</i> , <i>dee-o'-ko</i> ; a prolonged (and causative) form of a primary verb δίω dio (to flee; compare the base of 1169 and 1249); to pursue (literally or figuratively); by implication, to persecute: — ensue, follow (after), given to, (suffer) persecute(-ion), press forward.	John 15:20 Remember the word that I said to you, “A servant is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you. If they kept My word, they will keep yours also. Acts 26:11 And I punished them often in every synagogue and compelled <i>them</i> to blaspheme; and being exceedingly enraged against them, I persecuted <i>them</i> even to foreign cities.
θλίψις <i>thlipsis</i> , <i>thlip'-sis</i> ; from 2346; pressure (literally or figuratively): — afflicted(-tion), anguish, burdened, persecution, tribulation, trouble.	Matt. 24:9 “Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and kill you, and you will be hated by all nations for My name’s sake. Rom. 5:3 And not only <i>that</i> , but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance;
πάθημα <i>pathema</i> , <i>path'-ay-mah</i> ; from a presumed derivative of 3806; something undergone, i.e. hardship or pain; subjectively, an emotion or influence: — affection, affliction, motion, suffering.	2Cor. 1:6 Now if we are afflicted, <i>it is</i> for your consolation and salvation, which is effective for enduring the same sufferings which we also suffer. Or if we are comforted, <i>it is</i> for your consolation and salvation.

Looking at the meaning and intent of these biblical words, how would you define persecution? Here is one definition that includes many of the above biblical meanings:

“Persecution Definition: The act or practice of persecuting; harassing or oppressive treatment; especially, the infliction of injury (as loss of property or civil rights, physical suffering, or death) as a punishment for adhering to some opinion or course of conduct, as a religious creed or a mode of worship, which cannot properly be regarded as criminal.”¹

¹ The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language 5th Edition.

The above is a rather technical definition. A more relevant definition that gets to the point is provided by Open Doors founded by Brother Andrew who was better known as “God’s Smuggler.”²,

“While Christian persecution takes many forms, it is defined as any hostility experienced as a result of identification with Jesus Christ. From Sudan to Afghanistan, from Nigeria to North Korea, from Colombia to India, followers of Christianity are targeted for their faith. They are attacked; they are discriminated against at work and at school; they risk sexual violence, torture, arrest and much more.”³

Persecution literally involves enemy adversaries inspired by the spirit of antichrist pursuing and running after followers of Jesus Christ simply because they do not conform to the ungodliness and sinfulness of this world. For this reason, they will persecute you. They will afflict you. They will oppress you. They will trouble you on the right and on the left to get you to fall. And they will try to remove you, to exterminate you, from the face of the earth. Why, because they hate the One you are following. They hate Jesus Christ and because they hate Him, they will hate you. Look at what Jesus said:

- John 15:18-19 “If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before *it hated you*.¹⁹ If you were of the world, the world would love its own. Yet because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you.

Why do they hate Jesus? He says, ***it hates Me because I testify of it that its works are evil*** (John 7:7). The Apostle John also tells the church, ***Do not marvel, my brethren, if the world hates you*** (1John 3:13). The world hates you when you grow in godliness and holiness in Christ. The children of the devil who do not practice righteousness will persecute you because of this. They see Jesus in You and this brings on the conviction of the Holy Spirit regarding the sin in their own lives. Therefore, they persecute you like they persecuted Jesus.

When did persecution begin? The Bible reveals it began with Cain and Abel:

- Gen. 4:3-8 And in the process of time it came to pass that Cain brought an offering of the fruit of the ground to the LORD. 4 Abel also brought of the firstborn of his flock and of their fat. And the LORD respected Abel and his offering, 5 but He did not respect Cain and his offering. And Cain was very angry, and his countenance fell. 6 So the LORD said to Cain, “Why are you angry? And why has your countenance fallen? 7 If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin lies at the door. And its desire is for you, but you should rule over it.” 8 Now Cain talked with Abel his brother; and it came to pass, when they were in the field, that Cain rose up against Abel his brother and killed him.
- 1John 3:10 In this the children of God and the children of the devil are manifest: Whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor *is* he who does not love his brother. ¹¹ For this is the message that you heard from the beginning, that we should love one another, ¹² not as Cain *who*

² Brother Andrew, Open Doors USA

³ Open Doors, Christian Persecution. [Christian Persecution | Persecution Stats | Open Doors USA - Open Doors USA](#)

was of the wicked one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his works were evil and his brother's righteous.

- Heb. 11:4 By faith Abel offered to God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, through which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts; and through it he being dead still speaks.

Just think of it. Cain actually killed his brother. There is nothing new here. The son of perdition will use his children to persecute the church of the living God. The righteous of every generation must understand this. The pressure of persecution is intense in this present age. However, Jesus presents us with a remarkable truth:

- Matt. 5:11 "Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake.
- Luke 6:22 Blessed are you when men hate you, And when they exclude you, And revile you, and cast out your name as evil, For the Son of Man's sake.

Jesus actually views the devastations of the persecution of His disciples as a blessing. Do you have this view, this perspective, today? Are you ready to see persecutions, tribulations, afflictions, and sufferings in Christ in such a positive way? This is a challenging but necessary shift in understanding persecution. This revelation of truth and spiritual understanding can only come to pass by the Word and Spirit of God. Therefore, it remains a clear and certain biblical perspective when it comes to persecution. It is our prayer that the Holy Spirit will bring a full understanding of persecution to young generation saints through this teaching series.

Who Will Be Persecuted and Why

The Bible says that ***all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution*** (2Tim. 3:12). Jesus Himself told His disciples ***in the world you will have tribulation*** (John 14:33). We saw in the previous section what the Bible says persecution is and involves. Now let us look at who will suffer persecution according to the word of God. The above Scripture references show us that it is those who are disciples of Christ, those who belong to Him and pursue godliness, holiness, and righteousness. These are the ones who will suffer the most persecution. There remains a spiritual truth, an unchangeable truth that this generation of believers in Christ needs to realize, accept, and apply in their lives. The Bible calls it a certain and solid foundation:

- 2Tim. 2:19 Nevertheless the solid foundation of God stands, having this seal: "The Lord knows those who are His," and, "Let everyone who names the name of Christ depart from iniquity."

Far too many Christians are failing in the pursuit of godliness. They even joke about sin in their lives. They casually dismiss it. They make no effort towards a pursuit of holiness. On one hand they name the name of Christ but display a love of the world and its pleasures. Will those who say they are Christians but remain poisoned and bound by iniquity be persecuted? I do not believe they will! Instead, they will be rewarded by the world. You see, true love and genuine faith in the Lord Jesus Christ

does not rejoice in iniquity but rejoices in the truth (1Cor. 13:6). Therefore, if you are sealed in this truth, this solid foundation, you are going to suffer persecution. The apostate and backsliding church will not be persecuted according to the word of God. It is important to understand that **the Lord knows those who are His** (2Tim. 2:19)! They are the ones standing tall for Jesus, fighting the good fight of faith, pursuing righteousness, resisting sin, and calling people to be saved from this evil generation. They are the ones the Holy Spirit anoints to preach and teach repentance for the remission of sins through the shed blood of the Lord Jesus Christ with the power, with the boldness, and with the fire of the Holy Spirit. Jesus, the Apostles, and the saints of the Early Church were persecuted for this, and you will be also if you follow their example in this present age. If you have a deep desire and display holiness in your life you will be persecuted. If you boldly preach repentance and call people to Jesus Christ, you can expect persecution. You don't have to look for it, it will find you because the world sees Christ in you. They hate Him and they will hate you. This is why every sincere and genuine Christian can expect persecution. Our co-author in this series, Dr. Samuel Isong, recently explained it in this way:

"Christianity is not inferior faith, it's not religion, it's life, it's a lifestyle, Christ's life expressed in His Disciples. Disciples are the light, lighting the world, exposing deadly works of darkness. Because the world hates the light, they end up hating light bearers - the disciples, they don't want them to be, they are exposers of darkness, they want them stopped or killed. Hence intense persecution since time is short for satan. So, people of the way, don't be intimidated. Bear the light, walk in wisdom, shine the light. Christ must be lifted up everywhere you are."⁴

There are many other reasons why we are targeted simply for following Jesus. Open Doors has focused on strengthening the persecuted for over 60 years. Their team has observed several reasons why Christian persecution happens.⁵

1. *Authoritarian governments who view Christianity as a threat to power.*
2. *Suspicion of anything outside the majority cultural faith.*
3. *Extremist groups who want to destroy Christians.*
4. *Official and cultural domination of a single religion.*
5. *Religious freedom is a disrespected human right.*

You must understand this. You must align yourself with the word of God to capture the right perspective on persecution, including why you are and will be persecuted for your faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. We will take a closer look at what Jesus and the Apostles said about persecution but first let's identify more precisely who you can expect to persecute you.

⁴ Samuel Isong. WhatsApp post from the fields of persecution in Nigeria to the 5-Fold Global Field Team representing seven nations: Nigeria, South Sudan, Uganda, Rwanda, India, Ghana, USA. June 10, 2022.

⁵ Open Doors. *Why does Christian Persecution Happen?* [Christian Persecution](#) | [Persecution Stats](#) | [Open Doors USA](#) - [Open Doors USA](#)

Who Will Persecute You

Where can you expect persecution to come from? Who is behind the persecution coming your way? The Apostle John gives us some important truths about the spirit of antichrist. The following truths should awaken genuine followers of Christ from generation to generation.

- 1John 2:18 Little children, it is the last hour; and as you have heard that the Antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come, by which we know that it is the last hour.
- 1John 2:22 Who is a liar but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ? He is antichrist who denies the Father and the Son.
- 1John 4:3 ...and every spirit that does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is not of God. And this is the *spirit* of the Antichrist, which you have heard was coming, and is now already in the world.
- 2John 7 For many deceivers have gone out into the world who do not confess Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an antichrist.

We learn several things from the above Scriptures about the antichrist spirit. First, we know we live in the last hour when we see many antichrists in operation around the world. It is a sign of the final hour of the end time. Although the evil person of the Antichrist is coming and will be revealed in the future, the spirit of antichrist is already in the world now. This is another thing we learn from these Scriptures. A third thing we learn is that this is the spirit that operates through those who deny Christ. This is the primary spirit we wrestle against in every generation. The spirit of antichrist fuels the rising persecution against Christians.

The spirit of antichrist uses the sons of disobedience and those who deny Christ to carry out its evil plans on earth. Remember, John indicates that ***the whole world lies under the sway of the wicked one*** (1John 5:19). He also said by the Holy Spirit that ***for this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil*** (1John 3:8). This truth must also be a part of our worldview today. Therefore, who will be persecuting you in this present age? The persecution is and will be coming from liberal religious leaders and church institutions that are worldly and embrace practices and social lifestyles that are abominations unto God and His word. In other terms, the apostate church. You will recall that the strongest persecution of Jesus came from the religious leaders of the day. Look what Jesus experienced at Nazareth:

- Luke 4:28-30 So all those in the synagogue, when they heard these things, were filled with wrath,²⁹ and rose up and thrust Him out of the city; and they led Him to the brow of the hill on which their city was built, that they might throw Him down over the cliff.³⁰ Then passing through the midst of them, He went His way.

The religious leaders continually sought to confront and test Jesus with their questions in order to trap Him, but their real intent was to persecute Him in a most serious manner. An inspection of other examples in the experience of Jesus and the Apostles of the Early Church with the religious leaders of their day clearly exposes the real intent of these religious leaders.

- Luke 6:6-11 Now it happened on another Sabbath, also, that He entered the synagogue and taught. And a man was there whose right hand was withered. ⁷ So the scribes and Pharisees watched Him closely, whether He would heal on the Sabbath, that they might find an accusation against Him. ⁸ But He knew their thoughts, and said to the man who had the withered hand, “Arise and stand here.” And he arose and stood. ⁹ Then Jesus said to them, “I will ask you one thing: Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do evil, to save life or to destroy?” ¹⁰ And when He had looked around at them all, He said to the man, “Stretch out your hand.” And he did so, and his hand was restored as whole as the other. ¹¹ But they were filled with rage, and discussed with one another what they might do to Jesus.
- Luke 20:19-20 And the chief priests and the scribes that very hour sought to lay hands on Him, but they feared the people—for they knew He had spoken this parable against them. ²⁰ So they watched *Him*, and sent spies who pretended to be righteous, that they might seize on His words, in order to deliver Him to the power and the authority of the governor.
- Acts 4:13-22 Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated and untrained men, they marveled. And they realized that they had been with Jesus. ¹⁴ And seeing the man who had been healed standing with them, they could say nothing against it. ¹⁵ But when they had commanded them to go aside out of the council, they conferred among themselves, ¹⁶ saying, “What shall we do to these men? For, indeed, that a notable miracle has been done through them *is* evident to all who dwell in Jerusalem, and we cannot deny *it*. ¹⁷ But so that it spreads no further among the people, let us severely threaten them, that from now on they speak to no man in this name.” ¹⁸ So they called them and commanded them not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus. ¹⁹ But Peter and John answered and said to them, “Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you more than to God, you judge. ²⁰ For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard.” ²¹ So when they had further threatened them, they let them go, finding no way of punishing them, because of the people, since they all glorified God for what had been done. ²² For the man was over forty years old on whom this miracle of healing had been performed.
- Acts 5:17-18 Then the high priest rose up, and all those who *were* with him (which is the sect of the Sadducees), and they were filled with indignation, ¹⁸ and laid their hands on the apostles and put them in the common prison.
- Acts 5:26-28 Then the captain went with the officers and brought them without violence, for they feared the people, lest they should be stoned. ²⁷ And when they had brought them, they set *them* before the council. And the high priest asked them, ²⁸ saying, “Did we not strictly command you not to teach in this name? And look, you have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine, and intend to bring this Man’s blood on us!”
- Acts 5:33 When they heard *this*, they were furious and plotted to kill them.
- Acts 6:9-15 Then there arose some from what is called the Synagogue of the Freedmen (Cyrenians, Alexandrians, and those from Cilicia and Asia), disputing with Stephen. ¹⁰ And they were not able to resist the wisdom and the Spirit by which he spoke. ¹¹ Then they secretly induced men to say, “We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses and God.” ¹² And they stirred up the people, the elders, and the scribes; and they came upon *him*, seized him, and brought *him* to the council. ¹³ They also set up false witnesses who said, “This man does not cease to speak blasphemous words against this holy place and the law; ¹⁴ for we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and change the customs which Moses delivered to us.” ¹⁵ And all who sat in the council, looking steadfastly at him, saw his face as the face of an angel.
- Acts 7:54-60 When they heard these things they were cut to the heart, and they gnashed at him with *their* teeth. ⁵⁵ But he, being full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God, ⁵⁶ and said, “Look! I see the heavens opened and the Son of

Man standing at the right hand of God!"⁵⁷ Then they cried out with a loud voice, stopped their ears, and ran at him with one accord;⁵⁸ and they cast *him* out of the city and stoned *him*. And the witnesses laid down their clothes at the feet of a young man named Saul.⁵⁹ And they stoned Stephen as he was calling on *God* and saying, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit."⁶⁰ Then he knelt down and cried out with a loud voice, "Lord, do not charge them with this sin." And when he had said this, he fell asleep.

A great persecution of the church arose because of the above events. In fact, Saul agreed with the stoning of righteous Stephen and ***at that time a great persecution arose against the church which was at Jerusalem*** (Acts 8:1). These additional examples of the persecution from religious leaders display a pattern of persecution that can also be clearly observed today. See if you can identify this pattern of persecution by religious leaders against those who challenge the religious system that is contrary to the plans and purposes of God. They will:

1. Test the righteous with questions to accuse them.
2. Threaten the righteous in order to censor and silence them.
3. Discuss among themselves what to do with the righteous.
4. Spread lies about the righteous to influence people against them.
5. Plot to destroy the righteous.
6. Imprison and kill the righteous if they can.

It is important to understand that this persecution pattern is from the hands of religious leaders. They plotted against Jesus (Matt. 12:14), they plotted against the Apostles (Acts 5:33), and they plotted against Paul (Acts 9:23; 20:3). They consulted against them to persecute and kill them. The religious leaders were determined to do this to those appointed and anointed by God. Even more important is to note that Jesus and the Apostles of the Early Church were not swayed by this pattern of persecution from religious leaders and their councils. They went on with the all-powerful ministry anointed by the Holy Spirit no matter what because they were sent by God. They went forward rejoicing in their persecutions. They knew they were appointed and anointed to continue the glorious ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ on earth. It is also significant to point out that in the midst of great persecution ***they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles*** (Acts 8:1). Although all those who were scattered preached the Word in every place, the apostles stood strong and continued their miraculous ministry in the midst of the persecution in Jerusalem.

The spirit of antichrist also uses government leaders and government systems to persecute those that belong to Christ. We see the antichrist spirit working through political leaders in many nations today. It was no different when Jesus walked the earth nor was it different during the Early Church period and beyond. Remember, King Herod, had all the male children two years and under killed in Bethlehem in order to exterminate the King of the Jews, the Messiah. You can observe a similar pattern leading to this extreme persecution in the account of the wise men from the east, how God warned the wise men not to return to Herod as requested, and how the Lord also warned Joseph to take the Christ Child to Egypt until the death of Herod (Matt. 2:1-23).

They did not return until a new government leader, Archelaus, was in place. But Joseph was warned by the Lord again and directed to the region of Galilee (Matt. 2:22-23). This is how Jesus, the Messiah, arrived in Nazareth in fulfillment of prophecy. Glory to God! And who can forget how Pilate, the Roman Governor of Judea, had Jesus mocked, scourged, and crucified to please the Jews. The Apostles also experienced persecution at the hands of government officials. Herod Agrippa I (37-44 A.D.), the grandson of Herod the Great, began to violently persecute⁶ some in the church. Remember, he had John's brother, James, killed:

- **Acts 12:1-4** Now about that time Herod the king stretched out *his* hand to harass some from the church. ² Then he killed James the brother of John with the sword. ³ And because he saw that it pleased the Jews, he proceeded further to seize Peter also. Now it was *during* the Days of Unleavened Bread. ⁴ So when he had arrested him, he put *him* in prison, and delivered *him* to four squads of soldiers to keep him, intending to bring him before the people after Passover.

Of course, God miraculously delivered Peter and Herod Agrippa I had an untimely and agonizing death by worms (Acts 12:20-23). However, it is clear that the antichrist spirit will use government officials to persecute the church as it did in this situation and also with Paul's numerous experiences before such officials during his frequent imprisonments. Many antichrist governments are working hard seeking to control the world today. This is another reason why persecution is on the rise.

A third persecutor of the church is in the realm of business. We see this in the riot in Ephesus. Look at what this great commotion that enraged the city was all about:

- **Acts 19:23-29** And about that time there arose a great commotion about the Way. ²⁴ For a certain man named Demetrius, a silversmith, who made silver shrines of Diana, brought no small profit to the craftsmen. ²⁵ He called them together with the workers of similar occupation, and said: "Men, you know that we have our prosperity by this trade. ²⁶ Moreover you see and hear that not only at Ephesus, but throughout almost all Asia, this Paul has persuaded and turned away many people, saying that they are not gods which are made with hands. ²⁷ So not only is this trade of ours in danger of falling into disrepute, but also the temple of the great goddess Diana may be despised and her magnificence destroyed, whom all Asia and the world worship." ²⁸ Now when they heard *this*, they were full of wrath and cried out, saying, "Great *is* Diana of the Ephesians!" ²⁹ So the whole city was filled with confusion, and rushed into the theater with one accord, having seized Gaius and Aristarchus, Macedonians, Paul's travel companions.

Note how this business directed its persecution to those who followed Christ. Today, a number of business corporations with global influence and billions of dollars of profits are doing the same. They bend to the whims and threats of unrighteous groups who practice lifestyles that are abominations to God. This is going on now in many parts of the world. Therefore, the church must get ready to endure persecution from religious leaders, government officials, and businesses that are being fueled by their own greed and the spirit of antichrist. They will also riot against the righteous in this present age.

⁶ Harass (Greek *kakosai*) literally means to do evil, harm, afflict. Its root *kakoo* means to injure, to make evil affected in order to harm, hurt, and vex the church.

One final area of persecution comes from immediate family, relatives, and friends. Many do not expect persecution to come from their own family. However, Jesus warned that the gospel would create division even among family members.

- **Luke 12:53** Father will be divided against son and son against father, mother against daughter and daughter against mother, mother-in-law against her daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law.”

This will happen because of your steadfast faith and bold proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Jesus warned us that ***a man’s enemies will be those of his own household*** (Matt. 10:36). Therefore, your faith and relentless commitment to follow Jesus no matter what must be stronger than your love for your family and friends. This is very difficult to understand but Jesus makes it clear in His instructions on the end times.

- **Luke 21:14-19** Therefore settle *it* in your hearts not to meditate beforehand on what you will answer; ¹⁵ for I will give you a mouth and wisdom which all your adversaries will not be able to contradict or resist. ¹⁶ You will be betrayed even by parents and brothers, relatives and friends; and they will put *some of you to death*. ¹⁷ And you will be hated by all for My name’s sake. ¹⁸ But not a hair of your head shall be lost. ¹⁹ By your patience possess your souls.

Some family members, relatives, or friends will believe you are crazy for giving up everything to follow Jesus. Be patient. Do not bend. Do not compromise for their sake. Endure and be led by the Spirit. It is a sign of the end.

Persecution will come from religious leaders, government officials, businesses, and even family and friends. Persecution comes from all directions. And persecutors often work in collaboration with each other. We can see all four categories of the persecution of Christians operating in the world today just as it did in the New Testament.

What Jesus and the Early Church Said about Persecution

We cannot attain a right understanding of persecution in the present age without looking at how Jesus viewed persecution and how the Early Church followed His example. Here is a sample of things Jesus said about persecution compared with what the Apostles said and did after His ascension:

<i>Jesus</i>	<i>The Apostles</i>
<p>Matt. 5:11-12 <i>“Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. ¹² Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you. (Luke 6:22-23)</i></p> <p>Matt. 5:44 <i>But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you,</i></p>	<p>Acts 5:41 So they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name.</p> <p>2Cor. 12:10 Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ’s sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong.</p> <p>Rom. 12:14 Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse.</p>

Matt. 10:23 *When they persecute you in this city, flee to another. For assuredly, I say to you, you will not have gone through the cities of Israel before the Son of Man comes.*

Luke 11:49 *Therefore the wisdom of God also said, "I will send them prophets and apostles, and some of them they will kill and persecute,"*

Luke 21:12 *But before all these things, they will lay their hands on you and persecute you, delivering you up to the synagogues and prisons. You will be brought before kings and rulers for My name's sake.*

John 15:20 *Remember the word that I said to you, "A servant is not greater than his master." If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you. If they kept My word, they will keep yours also.*

John 16:33 *These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world."*

Mark 10:30 *...who shall not receive a hundredfold now in this time—houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions—and in the age to come, eternal life.*

Acts 13:50 But the Jews stirred up the devout and prominent women and the chief men of the city, raised up persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and expelled them from their region.

Acts 20:23 ...except that the Holy Spirit testifies in every city, saying that chains and tribulations await me.

Acts 7:52 Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? And they killed those who foretold the coming of the Just One, of whom you now have become the betrayers and murderers,

Acts 9:15-16 But the Lord said to him, "Go, for he is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel. ¹⁶ For I will show him how many things he must suffer for My name's sake."

Acts 14:22 ...strengthening the souls of the disciples, exhorting *them* to continue in the faith, and saying, "We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God."

1Th. 3:4 For, in fact, we told you before when we were with you that we would suffer tribulation, just as it happened, and you know.

2Tim. 3:11 ...persecutions, afflictions, which happened to me at Antioch, at Iconium, at Lystra—what persecutions I endured. And out of them all the Lord delivered me.

2Tim. 3:12 Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution.

Rom. 5:3 And not only *that*, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance.

I hope you can see the remarkable connection and consistency in what Jesus said about persecution and how the apostles of the Early Church obeyed what He had spoken. The church needs this same understanding of persecution today and the obedience of faith to follow the example of our Lord Jesus Christ and His disciples throughout the Early Church.

Are you ready? Do you have this biblical concept or perspective of persecution? Do you display the mind of Christ about persecution. There are a number of 5-Fold Global partners who are currently enduring and living in severe persecution. We look to them as they follow the same mindset regarding persecution displayed by Jesus, the Apostles, and the saints of the Early Church. For example, a member of our 5-Fold Global Spirit Leads You Team in Myanmar provides an excellent overview and summary in Appendix 1 of what has been presented in this first teaching session. This young emerging leader prepared his brief teaching in the face of persecution from the military government of Myanmar. He reported that the people were without network connection for more than nine months. Recently he wrote *I can only send message to*

*you brother because connection has a problem. The fight is beginning in our villages.*⁷ We withhold his name and the location of his church and village for security reasons. We must listen closely to those who are being persecuted. Stand with them! Fight the good fight of faith with them because persecution is increasing in every place. We end this first equipping session with further advice from the Apostle Paul:

- **2Tim. 3:10-12 But you have carefully followed my doctrine, manner of life, purpose, faith, longsuffering, love, perseverance, ¹¹ persecutions, afflictions, which happened to me at Antioch, at Iconium, at Lystra—what persecutions I endured. And out of *them* all the Lord delivered me. ¹² Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution. ¹³ But evil men and impostors will grow worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived.**

⁷ 5-Fold Global Spirit Leads You Team, May 22, 2022, from the fields of persecution in Myanmar.

Teaching Session 2: Attitude in Persecution (Part 1)

Samuel J. Isong

The Season of the End Time

We want to give all glory to our Lord Jesus Christ for His faithfulness, for His love, for His unfailing promises towards us His children. The Lord has laid it strongly in our hearts that we should come up with teachings from the Scriptures that would equip us as the body of Christ, especially the new generation in this end time. This equipping will prepare us because we know that we are living in a time which I call the end of the end time season. This is characterized by the workings of the antichrist. We need to really understand God's plans for us, how we need to behave or conduct ourselves, and our attitude towards everything in this season of the end time. Shall we pray. Father, thank you for Your word. Speak to our hearts and help us understand Your will and Your purpose and what is expected of us in times like this. In Jesus name. Amen

Encouragement in Persecution from the First Epistle of Peter

We are going to be looking at the book of First Peter. The book of First Peter is very unique when we look at the content and the purpose. Peter wrote to a certain group of believers who were being tortured, who were being attacked, who were going through persecution and suffering because of their faith. These are the kind of experiences that await believers in this end time. So, we are going to look at the introduction of that Epistle. Peter addressed that Epistle to the people he calls the chosen of the Lord, the chosen people of God, God's chosen people. The Good News Bible addresses them as God's chosen people and King James Version calls them the elect of God, the people that God Himself has elected for Himself. And what is the purpose that prompted Peter by the Holy Spirit to write this Epistle?

Number one: To encourage the readers who were facing persecutions and suffering for their faith in Christ. To encourage them. How did this encouragement come? How did Peter project this encouragement of these believers? First, by reminding the chosen people of God of the Good News, the gospel about Jesus Christ, whose death, His resurrection, and the promise of His coming back brought a living hope unto the church, unto the chosen ones. His death, His resurrection, His ascending back to heaven, and the promise of His coming back brought a living hope. It gives us a living hope and an inheritance that can never fade away; which is preserved, which is kept in heaven for us, the believers, the chosen ones. So, this is important. We need to understand the purpose for which this Epistle was written to encourage the believers by reminding you, letting you know that the death of Jesus Christ our Master, His burial, His resurrection, and the promise of His coming back again has brought us a living hope. We have a living hope now. We know what to expect, the hope that cannot be disappointed. It's not a hope based on promise that is standing on probability but very certain. The Lord died and rose again, a very, very proven fact. The Lord ascended to heaven. It is very real. And the promise of His coming back is also very clear. So, we

may not be disappointed when He died on the cross and was buried. He promised that He was going to resurrect. We were not disappointed. He resurrected. He did promise that He would be going back to the Father after days of His resurrection. There was no disappointment. He ascended back to heaven to be with the Father. And, He said let not your heart be troubled, in my Father's house there are many mansions. If it were not so, I would have told you. I am going to prepare a place for you. And when I am done, I will return back. And I will take you unto Myself so that where I am you will also be there with Me. And this is for eternity. So, this hope is a living one. And also, in heaven I am going to prepare a place (See John 14:1-4). So, there are things preserved: the glory, the honor, the celebration, the crown of glory, the crown of joy, and all the crowns, celebrations and honor, the white robe, everything that makes us comfortable, happy throughout eternity. Those things are being reserved in heaven. So, Peter wrote this to remind the chosen ones. So that when temptations, when persecutions would come their way, they would not be carried away. When they remember what is awaiting them, they will know that what they are going through today is a minor experience to be compared to the great and wonderful inheritance preserved for us in heaven.

Secondly, for this they have to accept and endure their suffering. When they understand their living hope and the inheritance or the eternal promises of God, they have to endure their persecutions and the suffering, not giving up. Thirdly, they should have the confidence that their faith is genuine. The devil will not go after a faith that is not a treasure, that is not precious, that is not genuine. When the enemy persecutes you and fights you, he wants you to be deprived. He wants you to be distracted. He wants you to give up following Christ because your faith is genuine. If indeed you accepted Jesus as your Lord and Savior and you were saved, you were redeemed, you were born again, and you're standing daily walking with Jesus, then your faith is a genuine faith. If you're waiting for the soon coming King, then your faith is a genuine faith. If you're obeying the word of God separating yourself from the lifestyle of this present age, your faith is a genuine faith. So, Peter wrote that you will know why the enemy is after you. It is because you have something that is precious. Fourthly, that they will be rewarded on the day when Jesus is revealed. So, one of the ways that they encourage the believers to act rightly in the season, in the time of intense persecution in suffering, is that they will be rewarded when Jesus is revealed. Fifthly, so they should live as people who belong to Christ. That they know that they have been chosen, they have been elected, they have been separated so they need to live daily as the people who do not belong to the world, but they belong to Christ.

What Should Be Our Attitude in Persecution?

So, we are looking at this brief teaching under the topic of *Attitude in Persecution*. What should be your attitude as the children of the Lord, as a leader appointed by God, as a new generation that the Lord expects to carry the Gospel with the fire of the Holy Spirit into the interior lands of your nation, of your community, reaching out without fear no matter the fiery darts of the enemy? What should be your

attitude? Should you give up? Should you complain? Should you be weak? Should you be weary? Or should you fire on reaching new grounds, advancing, going forward, gaining new ground, speaking the Word without responding to things and situations, laws and decrees that want to really close your mouth. What should be your attitude? So, why did the Holy Spirit actually put the burden in our hearts? My father in the Lord said that he also had the leading in his mind that this area of sharing of God's way should be carried out in times like this. Meaning that it is a confirmation that it is the Holy Spirit that is sending this way through us. Of course, in this series we shall be concentrating on equipping the church, equipping the body of Christ, the saints of the Lord, the chosen people of God for the end time living. We live in the end time of the end time where the chosen people really need to understand. So, this teaching is to let us know what the characteristics of this time are. What are the prevailing issues that we should expect in this end time? Those prevailing issues no matter how they might look like I want you to know they are not new to the Scriptures. They have happened before and we saw how the Early Church, the Apostles, handled the persecution, how they acted during the time of persecution and how the Lord proved Himself, how they insisted on keeping, holding onto the faith that was once delivered unto them. We have to understand that it is a time of the workings of the spirit of antichrist, the man of sin, the son of perdition, the enemy of Christ and His people. His workings involve hatred. The workings of the spirit of antichrist involve hatred, persecutions, falsehood, deception, murder, abounding iniquity, falling away, betrayal, torture, and a lot more. These are the things involved in the workings of the antichrist spirit in this end time. And, for you to know the right attitude that you're supposed to put on in the persecution of this end time first of all you must know who you are. And this takes us to that Peter, First Peter, Chapter 1 verse 1 and verse 2:

- **1Pet. 1:1-2 (KJV) Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to the strangers scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, ² Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ: Grace unto you, and peace, be multiplied.**

From this Scripture you are being introduced. Who you are is being presented here. Number one: You are God's chosen. You are chosen by God, elected by God. In Ephesians Chapter 1, looking at verse 4, the Bible says:

- **Eph. 1:4 (KJV) According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love:**

Here, you are God's chosen, with purpose. You are chosen with purpose. There is a purpose behind God's choice of you. For God to choose you is not a minor thing. It is not something to look down upon. It is a serious thing that out of the millions of human beings existing on earth He chose you. You can't joke with that. You can't joke with that choice. He chose you. He separated you. He chose you for what purpose? He chose you and He sanctified you by the Holy Spirit. So, the choice was under the management of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit worked it out and effected that choice of God to be

real by working in your heart. When you received the word of life you believed, and you accepted. That gave the Holy Spirit access to link you with God, to connect your spirit with God and you understood the truth, and you knew the truth, and you were saved through confessing the Lord Jesus Christ. And you became a choice vessel, a treasure in the family of God, having access to the inheritance of God according to Colossians, Chapter 1 verse 12:

- **Col. 1:12 (KJV) Giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light:**

The Lord chose you and brought you into the Kingdom of His Dear Son, Jesus, to share in the inheritance of His family. So, you should understand that this is not what you need to joke with because God Himself is the One who chose you, who separated you by the power of the Holy Spirit. Not only that He chose you. He cleansed you with his blood. He washed you with His blood, the incorruptible blood. You were bought with such a price that no currency on earth can buy you. So, you need to know this and remember the marvelous love. You need to be perfect in this great love of God because He chose you while you were indebted. He cleaned you up. He brought you up from indebtedness to become a very clean vessel in His hand. He chose you when you were weak, when you had no strength to possess this awesome power according to Second Timothy, Chapter 1 verse 7:

- **2Tim. 1:7 (KJV) For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind.**

He chose you to give you a sound mind; to give you boldness and authority over the fire, the powers of the wicked one on earth through the fire of the Holy Spirit working in you. He chose you while you were unholy that you might be holy, that you might be sanctified and pure, separated unto Himself. He chose you a defeated human to become more than a conqueror in Jesus Christ. He chose you out of darkness that you might become the light bearer in this world. He chose you dead so you can live and distribute life to the dying world. He chose you in shame, out of shame so you can bring glory and honor to the present world through the spreading of the word of God. This is the choice of grace. So, you have to understand this so that you don't allow any persecution or things you're suffering to dissuade and distract you and push you away from walking and following the Master, Jesus Christ.

And what is the next purpose for which you were chosen? You were chosen to come and be in union with Christ. That is the Father's primary purpose according to Romans Chapter 8 verse 29. The primary purpose of the Father is choosing you to become in union in Christ, to be like Christ, to speak, to live, to act, to wear the power of God like Christ. Romans Chapter 8 verse 29:

- **Rom. 8:29 (KJV) For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren.**

Jesus was the first, I mean chosen to be the firstborn. So, He also chose you today that you'll be conformed, you'll become like, you'll behave like, you'll live like Him. See, when you look at the Lord Jesus Christ you look at Him knowing that He is your pattern. He is our model. Seeking to be like Christ is a great act of worship to the Almighty Father. To be pleased to the Father is to be conformed to the image of His Son. As a disciple Christ is your target standard. He is the One you're looking at. You are studying. You are learning. You are praying. You're desiring. You're studying. You're serving to be like Him. And so, He chose you to be like Christ. And when you look at Jesus Christ in persecution, He went through it. The servant cannot be greater than his master. He went through all the suffering, all the abuse, all the humiliation of men. Listen, and He is the One you are going to look at. Your attitude when persecuted is looking at Him, looking at Jesus. In Hebrews Chapter 12 verse 1:

- Heb. 12:1-2 (KJV) Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, ² Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.

Now look at verse 2. Just look at verse 2 from Hebrews Chapter 12: He said, **Looking unto Jesus**. Why should we look unto Jesus? He is our standard. Why should we look unto Jesus? He is our pattern. He is our model. We were called to be like Him. We were called to conform to Him. Why should we look at Him? **Looking unto Jesus, the author**, the beginner, the author, the One who foretold our salvation. The One who initiated our salvation with sacrifice, the sacrifice of His life and the **finisher of our faith**. He is our beginning. He is our end. We start with Him. We continue daily with Him, and we must be resilient. We must get on until we end with Him. We can't end on the way. Persecution can't drive us away. Persecution can't stop us. Whatever we suffer cannot stop us. No, He is the author, the beginner, the initiator, so we start with Jesus. We keep on with Him every day and He is the finisher. We end with Him. Until we see Him, we've not done well. Until we see Him, we are not fulfilled. Until we meet Him, we've not done the work that He has called us to do. Until we see Him, the Bible says we shall see Him as He is, for we shall be like Him and says anyone who has this hope in Him, purify himself even as He is pure. Iniquity shall abound and the love of many shall wax cold.

- 1John 3:2-3 KJV Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is. ³ And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure.
- Matt. 24:12 KJV And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold.

Why? Persecution. Things they will suffer. And the Bible says many will fall away and that the son of perdition, the Antichrist, will not fully take over until there is a falling away.

- 2Th. 2:3-4 Let no one deceive you by any means; for *that Day will not come unless the falling away comes first, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition, ⁴ who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshiped, so that he sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God.*

It gives me concern. Who is the one that will fall away? Remember, anything that has already fallen cannot fall again. Before this time many are fallen. It means those who are standing, those who are standing. It is something that is standing that can fall. It is someone that is standing that can fall. That is why we need to look carefully unto the Lord Jesus. We who are standing, we need to take heed lest we fall because no trials, no suffering, no temptation, no persecution that comes to us is above what we can stand. And, in the midst of all these trials and persecutions and sufferings the Mighty God will make a way of escape. And so, there is no excuse. Why should we look unto Him? It says, and the ***finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God*** (Heb. 12:2). That's how we should look unto Him. Oh, Hallelujah! He endured the cross. He endured the shame. He endured the suffering. All the humiliations He went through, He endured it because He had a living hope. There was joy set before Him. And when He looked at the target of that joy, that joy became a goal, a big picture that He was pursuing. He had to endure all the persecutions, all the sufferings, all the manipulation of man, in order to get to that glorious unending unending awaiting inheritance of joy. And beloved, our attitude must be like that of Christ. So, you have to know who you are and the purpose for which you are chosen to be who you are.

Number Two: You are made holy by the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit has made you holy. The Holy Spirit has cleansed you through the word of God, through your repentance, through your daily yielding to Him, in cleansing yourself with the Word that you read. The Word is like water. When you read it the Holy Spirit interprets it in your spirit and you are corrected when you're making mistakes, you are rebuilt, you are refreshed, you are edified, and you keep moving on. And because you are made holy by God can you achieve holiness by the works of your power? Never! And as a result of that, you will not allow persecution and suffering to shift you away. And you know you're purified by the blood of Jesus. Is there any market? Is there any blood bank in any ward, hospital that you can find the blood of Jesus? Never! The blood of God Himself was used in purifying you. So, you can't get back to get contaminated because of suffering and because of things that you are passing through. Therefore, you need to understand the right attitude in times like this.

Finding Yourself in Times of Persecution

Hold firm to your faith. Don't be dissuaded. It is certain that suffering must come. Persecution must come. It is very clear. It must come. Jesus went through it. All the apostles went through it. All the early disciples went through it. They praised God. They thanked God. As we proceed in other sessions, we are going to enumerate one by one

things you ought to be doing. What were the disciples were doing? They were rejoicing. They were praying. They came together. They studied the Word. They encouraged themselves. They found themselves and a new fear of the power of the fire came into them and they kept moving. Beloved, new generation, all the believers, leaders of the body of Christ, we need to know that we are into the real time of the end time and the time of the antichrist working on earth. Therefore, don't expect a Christian life that is void of persecution and suffering. And this great and Almighty God will keep you, will sustain you. This is part one of your attitude in persecution. We'll be coming with another session. And we'll be going deeper and deeper as the Holy Spirit gives us grace. We thank the Lord for this opportunity to hear Him. This word will transform you, will equip you, will strengthen you, will prepare you. You're going to forge ahead. You're going to advance. You're going to be a sweet-smelling savor at every place you step into. In the name of our Almighty Lord Jesus Christ. Amen

Teaching Session 3: Attitude in Persecution (Part 2)

Samuel J. Isong

Get Ready to Stand in Persecution

Amen. Praise the Name of the Lord. Let us pray. Father, we thank You once again for the gift of life. We thank You for being faithful to Your covenant of peace, covenant of protection, and covenant of security over our lives. We thank You for bringing us into this great year of 2021 and beyond. Thank You for keeping our people in 5-Fold Global Ministry all over the world. It has been You and You alone. Blessed be Your Holy Name, Oh Lord. As we share Your word, I pray that You would send forth Your word in power, with great authority. Your power has that authority to transform life, to subdue the enemies plans and programs. Lord, reveal to us Your mind in times like this, Dear Father. In Jesus name. Amen

This is the next in our series on our attitude towards or our attitude in persecution. The first one we took God opened our eyes to understand who we are in Him. Knowing who we are in Him enables us to really take our stand and fulfill God's purposes expected of us. In this Part 2 we are still looking at the right attitude in persecution. But we are going to also consider the keys that we can apply to be able to put up the right attitude, the kind of knowledge, the kind of understanding we really need to have so that we'll be able to fulfill God's mandate and purpose in our life in a very critical period in which we are.

In 2020 a lot of people were yearning to see that year come to an end because it was full of diverse kinds of troubles, a lot of dead, corona virus was ravaging lives, destroying lives across the globe. And people were wishing that the year should come and be gone. Insecurity was at an alarming rate all over the world. And people would say *"Oh, let's get into 2021. In 2021 we're going to have rest, we'll have peace, no trouble, no more battle. We're taking over the year in the sense that there shall be nothing challenging to our faith."* But I want to correct this impression because we are just moving into a season of the manifestation of the activities of antichrist. Persecution is going to be on the increase and there is still going to be a lot of trials, a lot of fiery darts of the enemy being released against the church. We should not just be thinking that 2021 was a year where Satan was no longer going to do anything, he's going to sleep, he's going to rest. The antichrist spirit was not going to be visible. No! Rather, we should have been getting ourselves ready and be ready to stand putting on all the spiritual armor of God so that we can be able to stand and fight. With the Lord Jesus Christ on our side, we know we always record victory. But we must understand the keys that God has given to us to apply.

The Real Meaning of Faith in Persecution

At this point I want us to go to Hebrews Chapter 11. We'll be reading from verse 29 through verse 37:

- Heb. 11:29-37 (KJV) By faith they passed through the Red sea as by dry *land*: which the Egyptians assaying to do were drowned. ³⁰ By faith the walls of Jericho fell down, after they were compassed about seven days. ³¹ By faith the harlot Rahab perished not with them that believed not, when she had received the spies with peace. ³¹ And what shall I more say? for the time would fail me to tell of Gedeon, and of Barak, and of Samson, and of Jephthae; of David also, and Samuel, and of the prophets: ³³ Who through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, ³⁴ Quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens. ³⁵ Women received their dead raised to life again: and others were tortured, not accepting deliverance; that they might obtain a better resurrection: ³⁶ And others had trial of *cruel* mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover of bonds and imprisonment: ³⁷ They were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword: they wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins; being destitute, afflicted, tormented;

Now, when you look at this Scripture carefully you discover there were saints that lived on this same planet earth, serving the same God we are serving today, operating in the covenant of peace, the covenant of life just as we are in today. But they faced all kinds of persecution. They faced all kinds of mockeries, evil operations, afflictions, imprisonment, being stoned. They went through different kinds of experiences for the sake of their faith in God. And when you look at these Scriptures, if you don't really understand the meaning or the faith in the context of this report you say, "*Ah, but faith, is it not to quench the fiery darts of the enemy? Is it not to put the wicked out of the way?*" But here you discover that even by faith they were able to face being cut in pieces. By faith they were able to face imprisonment. By faith they were able to go through bonds and mockeries and being stoned. How come that the faith here was being applied to be able to go through these difficult things? And you really need to understand what is this faith that this Scripture is talking about here. And look at it in three ways. Number one: Faith is choosing God, accepting God as your own God, your own God that you are worshipping. Your own God; the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Choosing Him. Knowing Him. Accepting Him. Putting your trust, putting your belief, putting your conviction in Him that He is your God.

And number two: Faith in this context means choosing the ways of God. The Bible says that the children of Israel knew the acts of God, the miracles of God, the signs and wonders of God. But Moses knew the ways of God, the mind of God, the purpose of God for his life and the season, the time in which he lived. He knew what the program of God was. He knew what God wanted. He knew what God needed to be done. He knew what God actually planned for the world, for His chosen ones, for His elected ones. And so, faith at this second level is knowing His ways, understanding what His will is, the way He wants you to go, the way He wants you to live, the life He wants you to live. And third, totally standing firm in that God you have chosen, following His ways that you have known and refusing to quit no matter what comes whether in life, whether in death, whether in hunger, whether in being filled, whether in pleasure or whether in displeasure, whether in prison or out of prison, whether before the machete,

a weapon to destroy or before a gun. Whatever situation faith is being immovable, standing firm, standing strong no matter what comes, no matter what comes. For example, you could see this strategic initiative of faith in the three Hebrew children in the land of Babylon. The fiery furnace of fire was set and there was a mighty image built and the order was when you hear the sound of the flute you bow down and worship that image. And these three young men they didn't want to bow down to the enemy. They would not give in to the devil. Pressure was on. Certain Chaldeans reported them, and the king commanded them to be brought before the king (See Daniel 3:8-25). And when they appeared before the king, the king said, *"Oh, you know I love you. I give you a little more chance. For your sakes I have the reason to set you free. The flute is going to be blown again and when you hear that just bow down a little then we have the reason for excusing or releasing you."* And behold they said, *"Oh king we are not careful to answer you in this manner. We're not afraid of this fire. We really know that our God is able to deliver us from this fire, but even if He will not deliver us, we have chosen Him, we have accepted Him as our God and we understand His ways that we should not bow to any graven image. Oh, we can never be moved. We can never be carried away even if He will not deliver us. There's no problem. We cannot be taken away. We are standing firm. We're not afraid. We can die in that fire if He will not deliver us."*

So, you can see these three levels of faith based on the context of this Scripture being applied, being displayed by these three brothers in our great God. And so, today, looking at the Scripture here you discover that by faith they passed through the Red Sea. They knew God was able to get them through the Red Sea. And they went through the Red Sea and came out of the Red Sea. They had victory over the Red Sea. And they also had victory over the wall of Jericho by standing with God, following His way. They knew that the plan of God was to give them the land. So, the plan of God is what we should battle for. The will of God is what we should stand for, not our own will. We should not go for our safety. Young generation, I want you to understand that God did not call you to fight for your safety, fight for your pocket to be filled, fight for your tithes and offerings, but the Lord has called you to represent Him and make sure you stand for His will anytime anywhere no matter what comes. You have to choose Him to be your God. You have accepted Him as your God. Understand His ways, His purpose. What is He doing in the now? What is He expecting in this season? And then, you choose never to be carried away. You must see the ways of God come to pass, perfected in your generation, and that your faith says I'm going nowhere. I'm doing this will of God. If it is death, I don't care.

Look at the example of Esther (See Esther 4:15-17). Esther said, *"I am going to gather my people and pray. The will of God is for me to stand as God's instrument for the deliverance of the elect in the land of Shushan. I don't care about whatever order that has been given. The Lord is here. As much as I know God's will and God's ways, God's plans are for me to stand to make sure God is exalted in this land."* I'm going to phrase it in this way, *"If I die let me die. I will go to the king to speak to the king about this great God. I will go to the king to minister to the king what God demands, the ways*

of God. *I do not care about any law binding me from going to see the king. But because this is the right time for me to go and speak to the king about the ways of God and the plans of God concerning His elect here on earth, I will go. My faith is if I die let me die. If I perish let me perish.*” Therefore, I want you to understand that this is the kind of faith that you need, the faith that makes you choose God as the only One that you are submitting to. This is the faith that makes you know His ways, understand His ways, and then standing there doing what He wants you to do in times like this.

Maintaining Your Position in Persecution

Don’t expect a life without persecution. Don’t expect a life without mockery, without imprisonment, without restrictions. You are going to see those things come to play. But when you understand and know your God, you will be strong. You will maintain your position and God will manifest His power through you. He is sending power upon the young generation to stand for Him, to defend the counsel of God, to stand for the will of God, to stand for the plans and the purposes of God. Get yourself ready. By faith many subdued kingdoms. This is the time for us to subdue kingdoms, for us to stand in the authority that God has given to us against whatever comes that is not the plan of God. We can change the course of things in our nations. We can stop the devil manifesting his evil plans prematurely. There is a time assigned for the enemy, the Antichrist. And the Bible says he is already here but not fully manifested because of He who is letting or restraining him.

- **2Th. 2:5-9 KJV Remember ye not, that, when I was yet with you, I told you these things? ⁶ And now ye know what withholdeth that he might be revealed in his time. ⁷ For the mystery of iniquity doth already work: only he who now letteth *will let*, until he be taken out of the way. ⁸ And then shall that Wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming: ⁹ *Even him*, whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders.**

Until that which is letting or restraining him is taken out of the way, there are things the church should not allow to take place. There are things we need to stand against when we know by the word of God that something is not according to the will of God or the ways of God. We should say, *“This thing is not the way of God.”* And we stand by faith and say in the name of Jesus, we cause this to stop. In the name of Jesus, we rebuke this. This will never happen so long as the word of God has not permitted this to happen. Now this one shall not happen. That one should not happen. The church needs to stand up. The church needs to get restored to the authority that God has invested in the church. Therefore, all the leaders in the young generation, understand that God is counting on us in times like this. God is counting on us. We will not disappoint Him. The Bible says, ***others had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover of bonds and imprisonment: They were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword: they wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins; being destitute, afflicted, tormented*** (Heb. 11:36-37 KJV). These are things that these men passed through.

Therefore, I want to conclude by saying: It's good to live in Christ. And if we die in the course of doing His work because God permits it and He allows it, it is equally the best that can happen. Let us live in the will and in the purposes of God, not for ourselves but absolutely for the King of kings who died for us and chooses us to be His. The Lord bless you.

- **1Cor. 15:58 (KJV) Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord.**

Teaching Session 4: Preparing for Persecution

Michael D. Gross

Why This Generation Should Prepare for Persecution

The influential church historian of the 16th century, John Foxe, identified three things from Simon Peter's bold confession of ***Jesus as the Christ, the Son of the living God*** (Matt. 16:16-18). In his renowned history of Christian martyrs Foxe explains:

"Christ our Savior, in the Gospel of St. Matthew, hearing the confession of Simon Peter, who, first of all other, openly acknowledged Him to be the Son of God, and perceiving the secret hand of His Father therein, called him (alluding to his name) a rock, upon which rock He would build His Church so strong that the gates of hell should not prevail against it. In which words three things are to be noted: First, that Christ will have a Church in this world. Secondly, that the same Church should mightily be impugned, not only by the world, but also by the uttermost strength and powers of all hell. And, thirdly, that the same Church, notwithstanding the uttermost of the devil and all his malice, should continue."⁸

John Foxe was focused on the building up of Christ's church on earth. What became *Foxe's Book of Martyrs* was originally published in 1563 as *Acts and Monuments of these Perilous Days*. Foxe recognized in his generation that persecution was a work of the devil to destroy the faith of believers and to stop the expansion of the church on earth. The Apostle Paul also exhorts young Timothy to press on with the work of the Lord in the midst of a great increase of evil in the world. We are seeing the same increase of evil in this generation. But is this generation of believers prepared for or even acknowledge the onslaught of hell against the church today? Look at these Scriptures and let them shape your mind as a young leader of the new generation church:

- 2Tim. 3:1 But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come:
- 1Tim. 4:1 Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons.

Take special note again that Paul is speaking to young leaders he has labored to equip in ministry. Two things are highlighted in these verses. One is that ***perilous times will come*** and the second is that ***some will depart from the faith***. Perilous (Greek *chalepos*) means *harsh, savage, difficult, dangerous, painful, fierce, grievous, hard to deal with*. This undoubtedly describes an environment for the increase of evil in the world and an enraged demonic attack upon those who follow Christ. As a result, some will fall away.

Why should you, a believer and follower of Jesus Christ, prepare for persecution? The primary reason is so you don't fall away from the Lord due to persecution and tribulation. Look at the Lord's teaching on the Parable of the Sower:

⁸ John Foxe. *Foxe's Book of Martyrs: A History of the Lives, Sufferings and Triumphant Deaths of the Early Christian and the Protestant Martyrs*. Edited by William Byron Forbush (1975). Chapter 1, paragraph 1.

- **Matt. 13:18-23** “Therefore hear the parable of the sower: ¹⁹ When anyone hears the word of the kingdom, and does not understand *it*, then the wicked *one* comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart. This is he who received seed by the wayside. ²⁰ But he who received the seed on stony places, this is he who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; ²¹ yet he has no root in himself, but endures only for a while. For when tribulation or persecution arises because of the word, immediately he stumbles. ²² Now he who received seed among the thorns is he who hears the word, and the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and he becomes unfruitful. ²³ But he who received seed on the good ground is he who hears the word and understands *it*, who indeed bears fruit and produces: some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty.”

Note how this parable refers to those who receive the Word of the Kingdom. It is not referring to those who do not receive or reject the Word. Therefore, Jesus taught this parable to instruct believers, those who hear and receive His word. Four categories of receiving the Word are explained by Jesus.

Category of Hearer	Result
Wayside: Does not understand the Word	The devil steals the Word from their heart
Stony: Is not rooted in the Word or Christ	Persecution & tribulation causes them to stumble and fall away.
Thorns: Is worldly and unfruitful	Worldly cares & riches completely strangle the Word.
Good Ground: Understands the Word & is fruitful	Bears fruit 100, 60, & 30-fold

Three of the above conditions involve a falling away. Those who do not understand God’s word, who are not rooted, and are worldly are in danger of falling away. You need to know that persecution and tribulation can cause you to fall away if you are not firmly rooted in Christ and the Word. The young generation church will be tested by God on their approach to the Scriptures and their approach to the Holy Spirit. Persecution and tribulation test the faith of every believer. Are you prepared? If so, how prepared are you? In this equipping session, we will be considering why and how we need to prepare ourselves for persecution. We will be looking at First and Second Thessalonians to gain a deeper understanding of the importance of such preparation.

The Persecution of the Church at Thessalonica

The church at Thessalonica was planted by Paul and Silas on Paul’s 2nd missionary journey. It was planted in only three weeks as recorded in Acts 17:

- **Acts 17:1-4** Now when they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a synagogue of the Jews. ² Then Paul, as his custom was, went in to them, and for three Sabbaths reasoned with them from the Scriptures, ³ explaining and demonstrating that the Christ had to suffer and rise again from the dead, and *saying*, “This Jesus whom I preach to you is the Christ.” ⁴ And some of them were persuaded; and a great multitude of the devout Greeks, and not a few of the leading women, joined Paul and Silas.

What is significant for our study here is that the church was planted in the midst of extreme persecution involving a hostile mob that put the entire city in an uproar. Fueled by envy, they incited others to attack the house of Jason who had hosted Paul and

Silas. They could not find them there, so they resorted to the next best thing. They dragged Jason and some of the believers in front of the rulers of the city.

- **Acts 17:5-9** But the Jews who were not persuaded, becoming envious, took some of the evil men from the marketplace, and gathering a mob, set all the city in an uproar and attacked the house of Jason, and sought to bring them out to the people. ⁶ But when they did not find them, they dragged Jason and some brethren to the rulers of the city, crying out, “These who have turned the world upside down have come here too. ⁷ Jason has harbored them, and these are all acting contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying there is another king—Jesus.” ⁸ And they troubled the crowd and the rulers of the city when they heard these things. ⁹ So when they had taken security from Jason and the rest, they let them go.

The persecution of the church at Thessalonica was on. They, the believers, quickly sent Paul and Silas by night to Berea around a 45-mile journey (Acts 17:10). Paul and Silas conducted a very effective ministry in Berea. The conditions were very favorable to the preaching of Christ. The reason was their readiness, their willingness of heart, and their approach to the Scriptures.

- **Acts 17:10-12** Then the brethren immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea. When they arrived, they went into the synagogue of the Jews. ¹¹ These were more fair-minded than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to *find out* whether these things were so. ¹² Therefore many of them believed, and also not a few of the Greeks, prominent women as well as men.

The persecutors in Thessalonica soon spread their persecution to the believers in Berea.

- **Acts 17:13-15** But when the Jews from Thessalonica learned that the word of God was preached by Paul at Berea, they came there also and stirred up the crowds. ¹⁴ Then immediately the brethren sent Paul away, to go to the sea; but both Silas and Timothy remained there. ¹⁵ So those who conducted Paul brought him to Athens; and receiving a command for Silas and Timothy to come to him with all speed, they departed.

Normally, persecutors of the church are not satisfied with persecuting believers in one place. Remember, Saul went to Damascus to arrest followers of Christ. Therefore, a similar thing happened in Berea that took place in Thessalonica. The only difference was that the Bereans wisely searched the Scriptures to confirm the truth of what had been preached about Christ. Is this generation of believers approaching the Scriptures with this kind of heart and wisdom and desire for the truth? Preparing for persecution requires the Berean approach to the word of God.

Paul was very concerned with the church of Thessalonica. How could this new church survive in the midst of such violent persecution? Two times Paul had tried to return to Thessalonica with the equipping team, but the enemy hindered them.

- **1Th. 2:17-18** But we, brethren, having been taken away from you for a short time in presence, not in heart, endeavored more eagerly to see your face with great desire. ¹⁸ Therefore we wanted to come to you—even I, Paul, time and again—but Satan hindered us.

Finally, Paul and his team could no longer endure, not knowing the faith condition of this young, persecuted church. Therefore, when he was in Athens, he sends Timothy to Thessalonica:

- **1Th. 3:1-5** Therefore, when we could no longer endure it, we thought it good to be left in Athens alone, ² and sent Timothy, our brother and minister of God, and our fellow laborer in the gospel of Christ, to establish you and encourage you concerning your faith, ³ that no one should be shaken by these afflictions; for you yourselves know that we are appointed to this. ⁴ For, in fact, we told you before when we were with you that we would suffer tribulation, just as it happened, and you know. ⁵ For this reason, when I could no longer endure it, I sent to know your faith, lest by some means the tempter had tempted you, and our labor might be in vain.

This was not just an inquiry about their faith. Timothy was also sent to establish (firm up) and encourage their faith in Christ. Why was this so important? What was the concern about the believers in Thessalonica? The concern was that afflictions would cause them to move away from their faith in Christ. This was the concern: The burden of persecutions, tribulations, and afflictions would disturb them so much that their faith would be rocked sideways to and fro until they would fall away. This concern is just as real today as it was then. But, praise God, this falling away was prevented by the equipping ministry of Timothy. Timothy's report brought much joy:

- **1Th. 3:6-8** But now that Timothy has come to us from you, and brought us good news of your faith and love, and that you always have good remembrance of us, greatly desiring to see us, as we also to see you— ⁷ therefore, brethren, in all our affliction and distress we were comforted concerning you by your faith. ⁸ For now we live, if you stand fast in the Lord.

The concern was whether they were going to persevere in the midst of persecution. The following Scriptures confirm this concern and that the young church in Thessalonica had made it through:

- **1Th. 1:2-8** We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers, ³ remembering without ceasing your work of faith, labor of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ in the sight of our God and Father, ⁴ knowing, beloved brethren, your election by God. ⁵ For our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Spirit and in much assurance, as you know what kind of men we were among you for your sake. ⁶ And you became followers of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Spirit, ⁷ so that you became examples to all in Macedonia and Achaia who believe. ⁸ For from you the word of the Lord has sounded forth, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place. Your faith toward God has gone out, so that we do not need to say anything.
- **1Th. 2:13-16** For this reason we also thank God without ceasing, because when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you welcomed *it* not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which also effectively works in you who believe. ¹⁴ For you, brethren, became imitators of the churches of God which are in Judea in Christ Jesus. For you also suffered the same things from your own countrymen, just as they *did* from the Judeans, ¹⁵ who killed both the Lord Jesus and their own prophets, and have persecuted us; and they do not please God and are contrary to all men, ¹⁶ forbidding us to speak to the Gentiles that they may be saved, so as always to fill up *the measure of* their sins; but wrath has come upon them to the uttermost.

- **2Th. 1:3-8** We are bound to thank God always for you, brethren, as it is fitting, because your faith grows exceedingly, and the love of every one of you all abounds toward each other, ⁴ so that we ourselves boast of you among the churches of God for your patience and faith in all your persecutions and tribulations that you endure, ⁵ *which is* manifest evidence of the righteous judgment of God, that you may be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you also suffer; ⁶ since *it is* a righteous thing with God to repay with tribulation those who trouble you, ⁷ and to *give* you who are troubled rest with us when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, ⁸ in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The same concern applies to the present generation of believers. Will the churches today make it through persecution? They will, but only if they are prepared.

Many Will Fall Away

The Bible presents a very sobering warning to believers of every generation. Paul rehearses the falling away of those in the wilderness to admonish believers to the reality that you can fall away if you are not careful.

- **1Cor. 10:11-12** Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come. ¹² Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall.

Many still believe it to be impossible for a believer or churches to fall away from faith in Christ. Although we will avoid getting sidetracked into a theological debate on this topic, we will share what Paul shared with the young Thessalonian Church. He clearly told them that there would be a falling away before the revealing of the Antichrist, the son of perdition.

- **2Th. 2:1-5** Now, brethren, concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him, we ask you, ² not to be soon shaken in mind or troubled, either by spirit or by word or by letter, as if from us, as though the day of Christ had come. ³ Let no one deceive you by any means; for *that Day will not come* unless the falling away comes first, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition, ⁴ who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshiped, so that he sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God. ⁵ Do you not remember that when I was still with you I told you these things?

Note that this falling away comes first! But what is this referring to? The Greek *apostasia* indicates it is talking about a great apostasy or falling away. The following explanation provides us with a clear understanding of what it means to fall away:

“The meaning here is a falling away from the faith; the word is used twice in the NT (Acts 21:21). The nation of Israel fell into repeated backslidings (Jer. 5:6). The prophet Jeremiah predicted the judgment of God upon such disloyalty: “Your own wickedness will correct you, and your backslidings will rebuke you” (Jer. 2:19). In the NT, apostasy is generally defined as the determined, willful rejection of Christ and His teachings by a Christian believer (John 15:22; Heb. 10:26-29). This is different from false belief, or error that is the result of ignorance.”⁹

⁹ Spirit Filled Life Bible, 3rd Edition (2018). Thomas Nelson Publishers, Nashville, TN. Word Wealth 2:3 falling away, *apostasia*; Strong’s #646, p. 1765.

Although some teach that the above falling away is impossible for those who have accepted Jesus Christ as their Savior and Lord, the Biblical warnings speak differently on the matter. You need to understand this truth because the falling away has already begun. For example, the largest Mennonite denomination in America (a very conservative, traditional, and missions minded denomination) recently made the following decisions at their annual conference:

- “The first vote was to retire the 20-year-old [Membership Guidelines](#) that described "homosexual, extramarital and premarital sexual activity" as immoral and sinful. That vote passed 404-84 with three abstentions, according to [MC USA](#).”¹⁰
- “The second vote approved a "[Repentance and Transformation](#)" resolution that highlights the supposed harm caused by previous policies as violence. That measure received a vote of 267 in favor, 212 against, and nine abstentions.”¹¹
- "Excluding LGBTQIA people from the church is a rejection of God's joyous delight in the diversity of creation and a denial of the Divine image and breath animating all humankind," the resolution reads.”¹²

Just think about what they did for a moment. These conservative Bible-believing Christians actually decided by vote that those sinful practices that God declares to be abominations are no longer “*immoral and sinful*.” The vote was not even close. Furthermore, they had to remove what they considered violent measures related to repentance and transformation. In other words, they were saying biblical repentance and admonitions to repent are just too violent for these people who are in bondage to sexual sin. Therefore, we need to get rid of it or at least reduce emphasis on repentance and transformation because it is unloving and harms the sinner. If this is not falling away, then what is it? This is not an isolated case. Many mainline denominations have followed the same course. This apostasy has influenced more believers than we want to admit. This is why you must be prepared. Now let’s see how Paul and his equipping team prepared the church of Thessalonica in the midst of intense persecutions and tribulations.

Preparing the Church for Persecution: The Word, The Power, and Holiness

The Bible says the believers in Thessalonica “***received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Spirit***” (1Th. 1:6). Although we have said this before, you need to hold fast to God’s word. You need to abound and increase more and more in your knowledge and ministry of the Scriptures. You need to become skillful in the Word. Keep in mind that the believers in Thessalonica became examples to all in Macedonia and Achaia who believe (1Th. 1:7). How did this happen? Paul, Silas, and Timothy effectively equipped them in the word of God and in practical matters related to God’s word. They spoke the Word of Truth to them in much conflict (1Th. 2:2). Their

¹⁰ Andrea Morris, CBN News, *USA Mennonites Vote to Approve Same-Sex Marriage, United Methodists Split Over LGBT Issues*. June 8, 2022.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

team teaching laid a solid foundation in the Word. They exhorted them to stand firm, persevere, and to hold onto the Word they had been taught.

- **2Th. 2:15 Therefore, brethren, stand fast and hold the traditions which you were taught, whether by word or our epistle.**

Those most prepared for persecution are those who are established in the Word. In addition, the Word goes forth everywhere these men and women of the Word reside. The believers in Thessalonica were established with undeniable and uncompromising faith in the word of God. And they could not be silenced. God's word and their faith literally echoed and roared through them in every place.

- **1Th. 2:13 For this reason we also thank God without ceasing, because when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you welcomed it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which also effectively works in you who believe.**
- **1Th. 1:8 For from you the word of the Lord has sounded forth, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place. Your faith toward God has gone out, so that we do not need to say anything.**
- **2Th. 3:1-2 Finally, brethren, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may run *swiftly* and be glorified, just as *it is* with you, ² and that we may be delivered from unreasonable and wicked men; for not all have faith.**

The above Scriptures display a preparation in God's word that effectively works in the midst of severe persecution. What was so notable in these believers that they would become such great examples of faith in times of affliction? This is what we learn about them from the Scriptures:

1. They captured, seized the Word for themselves. They accepted the Word as the Word of God and not men.
2. They surrendered themselves to the activation of God's word in their lives.
3. They sounded forth the Word in every place.
4. They prayed for the Word of the Lord to run quickly and be glorified.

In the verses we have looked at, the same Greek word, *execheomai*, is used for **sounded forth** and **gone forth** in relation to the Word and their faith. Where is this resounding echo, this reverberation, this roaring sound of faith and the Word today? It will only come from those believers who are firmly and deeply established in the full counsel of God's word. Therefore, the word of God needs to be living and active in your life and calling. If you are going to stand and not fall in this critical hour, the Word needs to sound forth in and through you!

Believers must also be prepared in the power of the Holy Spirit in the face of persecution. Take special notice how the gospel came to Thessalonica. Paul reminds them that it did not come **in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Spirit and in much assurance** (1Th. 1:5). He also reminded the Corinthian Church of the same thing:

- **1Cor. 2:1-5 And I, brethren, when I came to you, did not come with excellence of speech or of wisdom declaring to you the testimony of God. ² For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified. ³ I was with you in weakness, in fear, and in much trembling.**

⁴ And my speech and my preaching were not with persuasive words of human wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, ⁵ that your faith should not be in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.

Too many believers today have the Word but lack the power. This is shortsighted and during seasons of tribulation places them at risk of being silenced and even falling away. You will be weak in the face of persecution without the power of the Holy Spirit. The Bible says the Word is ***the sword of the Spirit*** (Eph. 6:17). You must have a balanced mix of the Word and the Spirit's power to include all the armor of God, the gifts of the Spirit, and the ministry of the Word with signs, wonders, and miracles to be most effective. The way to withstand all the demonic strategies in this evil age is in God's power. And you will be left boldly standing upright for Christ (Eph. 6:10-20). Therefore, the Word and the Spirit go together. This is why we make every effort to connect this young generation to the Holy Spirit and ensure they are filled with the power of the Holy Spirit before moving forward. The Word is only living and all powerful with the Holy Spirit. The young generation church needs to understand this. Many are devoted to the Word but have yet to experience the power when Jesus said ***you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you*** (Acts 1:8). Paul exhorts the Ephesian believers to ***be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might*** (Eph. 6:10). The apostles of the Early Church operated in the power of the Holy Spirit and so should you. This is why Paul's exhortations to the Thessalonian Church includes ***do not quench the Spirit*** and ***do not despise prophecies*** (1Th. 5:19-20). This confirms that the church of Thessalonica had a lively charismatic character in its worship and ministry. If you have an issue with the Holy Spirit, then you have an issue with God. If there is no fire of the Spirit in your life and calling and your public ministry, then you have quenched or extinguished the Spirit. There are too many extinguishers of the Holy Spirit in the church today. We need more igniters. Determine now that you will be among those who will ignite the fire of the Holy Spirit.

The power of the Holy Spirit also inspired joy in the Thessalonian believers even when they were afflicted. The power, the fire of the Holy Spirit provides the strength of faith not only to endure persecution, but to boldly stand your ground in the face of tribulation. You cannot stand in affliction without the power of the Holy Spirit. Instead, you will gain the readiness and perseverance when you are ***praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints*** (Eph. 6:18). Praying in the Spirit opens up the flow of God's power in your life and ministry. And, when you display the power and anointing of the Holy Spirit in your life and ministry even when persecuted, you will have much assurance, much certainty in Christ. Glory to God!

The preparation of holiness or sanctification stands out in Paul's ministry to the church of Thessalonica and throughout all the churches suffering persecution. There is a very strong prophetic foundation for this emphasis. For example, the prophet Isaiah spoke of a ***Highway of Holiness*** and that those who walk that road will not be deceived or seduced no matter what comes their way. They will not stagger or wander away:

- **Is. 35:8 A highway shall be there, and a road, And it shall be called the Highway of Holiness. The unclean shall not pass over it, But it *shall be* for others. Whoever walks the road, although a fool, Shall not go astray.**

This highway is not the way of an evil and perverse generation. If your pursuit of holiness is weak or half-hearted you will not be adequately prepared to endure persecution. The surrounding culture will influence you and compromise your faith and the way you do ministry. However, if the pursuit of holiness in your life and ministry is strong and persistent, then you will stand and not stray away according to God's word. Holiness and sanctification are used interchangeably in the Bible. Holiness has not been fully completed in any of our lives. Instead, you must make every effort to perfect it with the help of the Holy Spirit.

- **2Cor. 7:1 Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.**

What are the promises that are being talked about in this verse? Paul had just declared that we are ***the temple of the living God*** (2Cor. 6:16). He reminded believers that God will dwell in and among us, that He will receive us, and that He will be our Father (2Cor. 6:16-18). These promises are given in the context of separating ourselves from unclean things of the world. The fear or reverence of God and these promises should motivate us to pursue holiness. Many believers in this generation do not take this biblical admonition seriously and will be at risk of going astray in perilous times. But those who seek the road of holiness will not fall away.

The Thessalonian believers were able to stand and become the examples of faith in persecution because they were taught and were continually encouraged to pursue holiness. The following verses confirm this:

- **1Th. 3:13 so that He may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all His saints.**
- **1Th. 4:7 For God did not call us to uncleanness, but in holiness.**
- **1Th. 4:3 For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you should abstain from sexual immorality; ⁴ that each of you should know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor,**
- **2Th. 2:13 But we are bound to give thanks to God always for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God from the beginning chose you for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth,**

These verses reveal the same context of a pursuit of holiness discussed earlier. There is a stark contrast between uncleanness and holiness, between sexual immorality and sanctification. An evil and adulterous generation blurs the lines between the clean and the unclean. Believers who know by the Spirit the difference and pursue a holy and godly life in the obedience of faith will not fall away no matter the degree of persecution that comes their way. Interestingly, Paul closes his second epistle to the Thessalonian Church with the following instructions:

- 1Th. 5:27 I charge you by the Lord that this epistle be read to all the holy brethren.

Obviously, these believers took the road of holiness in their lives and in the church. Paul even refers to them as ***holy brethren***. They became examples to all the churches in the word of God, in the power of the Holy Spirit, and in their pursuit of holiness in the fear of the Lord. The generation in which we live desperately needs such examples. New Generation Church, Get ready! Be prepared!

Teaching Session 5: Responding to Persecution

Samuel J. Isong

Two Facts About Persecution

In teaching session 4, we have already been taught on preparing for persecution and the right perspective in session 1. These two sessions established the reality and unavoidability of persecution in our Christian faith. Knowing the reality makes you prepare for it. Preparing your mind for it therefore leads you to understanding how to respond to the persecution. In this session we are going to learn how to respond to persecution the way the Bible teaches us and also to see how the victorious saints responded to it in their time. There are certain facts to consider: The first is that persecution is unavoidable. The Bible says, ***Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution*** (2Tim. 3:12). It is also notable that Jesus began to face persecution from the first day of his birth to the last day of physical life on earth.

- **Matt. 2:13-14** Now when they had departed, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream, saying, "Arise, take the young Child and His mother, flee to Egypt, and stay there until I bring you word; for Herod will seek the young Child to destroy Him." ¹⁴ When he arose, he took the young Child and His mother by night and departed for Egypt.
- **Matt. 27:1-2** When morning came, all the chief priests and elders of the people plotted against Jesus to put Him to death. ² And when they had bound Him, they led Him away and delivered Him to Pontius Pilate the governor.

Can you see that Jesus perfectly fulfilled the purpose of His life amidst persecution?

The second fact to consider is the reality of persecution. Jesus clearly told the disciples that in the world we will have tribulation. Seriously consider what He said:

- **John 16:33** These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.
- **Matt. 10:22** And you will be hated by all for My name's sake. But he who endures to the end will be saved.

A Negative Response to Persecution

What does the Bible say about responding to persecution? It is very important we know what it means and how to respond to persecution. It is important because that is the difference between victory and failure in Christian living in regards to persecution. And this has a direct consequence on one's destination in eternity. There is a negative way some Christians respond to persecution, but God expects us to respond positively to persecution. The negative way of responding to persecution usually displays itself in two ways. One is murmuring. God hates murmuring no matter the difficult times. Murmuring shows no trust, no confidence, in the Lord God of your salvation.

- **Num. 14:26-27 KJV** And the LORD spake unto Moses and unto Aaron, saying, ²⁷ How long *shall I bear with* this evil congregation, which murmur against me? I have heard the murmurings of the children of Israel, which they murmur against me.

A second negative way of responding to persecution is drawing back. Jesus said ***because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold*** (Matt. 24:12 KJV). Many would say this is too negative and must be avoided. Therefore, they draw back. They cower with timidity in the face of persecution. Their faith shrinks. They are unaware that the enemy is leading them into apostasy. The Bible warns against losing your confidence and drawing back in such a way.

- Heb. 10:35 KJV Cast not away therefore your confidence, which hath great recompense of reward.
- Heb. 10:39 KJV Now the just shall live by faith: but if *any man* draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him. ³⁹ But we are not of them who draw back unto perdition; but of them that believe to the saving of the soul.

God does not approve of the above response to persecution. It remains a very serious matter with God.

A Positive Response to Persecution

The Bible says ***count it all joy***. This response to persecution is the opposite of how the world thinks. But this is how God thinks and He is our model.

- James 1:2-4 My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, ³ knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. ⁴ But let patience have *its* perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.
- 1Pet. 1:6-9 In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, ⁷ that the genuineness of your faith, *being* much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ, ⁸ whom having not seen you love. Though now you do not see *Him*, yet believing, you rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, ⁹ receiving the end of your faith—the salvation of *your* souls.
- 1Pet. 4:12-14 Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you; ¹³ but rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ's sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy. ¹⁴ If you are reproached for the name of Christ, blessed *are you*, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. On their part He is blasphemed, but on your part He is glorified.

The above Scriptures represent a positive response to persecution that this generation of Christians needs to imitate in every place. How can you do this? Is it even possible? Remember, Jesus said, ***with God all things are possible*** (Matt. 19:26). You must believe this without doubting or the spirit of timidity will overtake you in times of persecution. You must be certain of your faith in the Lord. There is no room for doubt when persecution is at your doorstep!

How do you display a positive response to persecution? You must follow the way of God in this. There are a number of biblical examples of what to do in the face of persecution.

1. **Count it all joy.** God is at work in your life and in the life of the church despite the persecution you are experiencing. Things are being perfected and completed in you. You must joyfully evaluate persecution in this way.
 - James 1:2-4 My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, ³ knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. ⁴ But let patience have *its* perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.
2. **Be consistent in your conviction.** Daniel demonstrated a conviction or assurance of his faith in God when faced with persecution. He did not doubt for one moment God's ability or his trust in Him.
 - Dan. 6:10 Now when Daniel knew that the writing was signed, he went home. And in his upper room, with his windows open toward Jerusalem, he knelt down on his knees three times that day, and prayed and gave thanks before his God, as was his custom since early days.
3. **Keep exercising your gift.** Do this no matter how intense the persecution may appear as long as you have occasion to do so. Joseph did not stop exercising his gift when he was in prison due to persecution, and neither should you. This is how Joseph overcame and you can also.
 - Gen. 40:7-12 So he asked Pharaoh's officers who *were* with him in the custody of his lord's house, saying, "Why do you look so sad today?" ⁸ And they said to him, "We each have had a dream, and *there is* no interpreter of it." So Joseph said to them, "Do not interpretations belong to God? Tell *them* to me, please." ⁹ Then the chief butler told his dream to Joseph, and said to him, "Behold, in my dream a vine *was* before me, ¹⁰ and in the vine *were* three branches; it *was* as though it budded, its blossoms shot forth, and its clusters brought forth ripe grapes. ¹¹ Then Pharaoh's cup *was* in my hand; and I took the grapes and pressed them into Pharaoh's cup, and placed the cup in Pharaoh's hand." ¹² And Joseph said to him, "This *is* the interpretation of it: The three branches *are* three days.
4. **Keep preaching Christ when the season is unfavorable.** You don't stop preaching Christ when persecution comes.
 - 2Tim. 4:2-5 Preach the word! Be ready in season *and* out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching. ³ For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, *because* they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; ⁴ and they will turn *their* ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables. ⁵ But you be watchful in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.
5. **Refuse to bow to the enemy.**
 - Esther 3:2-6 And all the king's servants who *were* within the king's gate bowed and paid homage to Haman, for so the king had commanded concerning him. But Mordecai would not bow or pay homage. ³ Then the king's servants who *were* within the king's gate said to Mordecai, "Why do you transgress the king's command?" ⁴ Now it happened, when they spoke to him daily and he would not listen to them, that they told *it* to Haman, to see whether Mordecai's words would stand; for

Mordecai had told them that he was a Jew. ⁵ When Haman saw that *Mordecai* did not bow or pay him homage, Haman was filled with wrath. ⁶ But he disdained to lay hands on *Mordecai* alone, for they had told him of the people of *Mordecai*. Instead, Haman sought to destroy all the Jews who were throughout the whole kingdom of Ahasuerus—the people of *Mordecai*.

6. Pray and keep praying for divine intervention in the situation of persecution. This is what the apostles did.

- Acts 4:23-31 And being let go, they went to their own *companions* and reported all that the chief priests and elders had said to them. ²⁴ So when they heard that, they raised their voice to God with one accord and said: “Lord, You are God, who made heaven and earth and the sea, and all that is in them, ²⁵ who by the mouth of Your servant David have said: “*Why did the nations rage, And the people plot vain things? ²⁶The kings of the earth took their stand, And the rulers were gathered together Against the LORD and against His Christ.*’ ²⁷ “For truly against Your holy Servant Jesus, whom You anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the people of Israel, were gathered together ²⁸ to do whatever Your hand and Your purpose determined before to be done. ²⁹ Now, Lord, look on their threats, and grant to Your servants that with all boldness they may speak Your word, ³⁰ by stretching out Your hand to heal, and that signs and wonders may be done through the name of Your holy Servant Jesus.” ³¹ And when they had prayed, the place where they were assembled together was shaken; and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and they spoke the word of God with boldness.

7. Be firm and not scared. The Lord is really close when you are being persecuted. Remember, the Lord was in the fire with Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego. He will be in the fires of persecution with you too.

- Dan. 3:14-18 Nebuchadnezzar spoke, saying to them, “*Is it true, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego, that you do not serve my gods or worship the gold image which I have set up?*” ¹⁵ Now if you are ready at the time you hear the sound of the horn, flute, harp, lyre, and psaltery, in symphony with all kinds of music, and you fall down and worship the image which I have made, *good!* But if you do not worship, you shall be cast immediately into the midst of a burning fiery furnace. And who *is* the god who will deliver you from my hands?” ¹⁶ Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego answered and said to the king, “O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer you in this matter. ¹⁷ If that *is* the case, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and He will deliver *us* from your hand, O king. ¹⁸ But if not, let it be known to you, O king, that we do not serve your gods, nor will we worship the gold image which you have set up.”
- Dan. 3:24-25 Then King Nebuchadnezzar was astonished; and he rose in haste *and* spoke, saying to his counselors, “Did we not cast three men bound into the midst of the fire?” They answered and said to the king, “True, O king.” ²⁵ “Look!” he answered, “I see four men loose, walking in the midst of the fire; and they are not hurt, and the form of the fourth is like the Son of God.”

8. Be ready to resist unto death. Do not fear him that only can kill the body and cannot put your soul in hell. Stephen and Paul were both ready to die for their faith in Christ. The threat of death in persecution had no power over them. It could not stop them!

- Heb. 12:3-4 For consider Him who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself, lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls. ⁴ You have not yet resisted to bloodshed, striving against sin.
- Acts 7:54-60 When they heard these things they were cut to the heart, and they gnashed at him with *their* teeth. ⁵⁵ But he, being full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God, ⁵⁶ and said, "Look! I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!" ⁵⁷ Then they cried out with a loud voice, stopped their ears, and ran at him with one accord; ⁵⁸ and they cast *him* out of the city and stoned *him*. And the witnesses laid down their clothes at the feet of a young man named Saul. ⁵⁹ And they stoned Stephen as he was calling on *God* and saying, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." ⁶⁰ Then he knelt down and cried out with a loud voice, "Lord, do not charge them with this sin." And when he had said this, he fell asleep.

9. Be attentive to the voice and direction of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is always present to lead and guide you during persecution. Focus on Him, wait on Him. Some Christians lose their lives due to an inability to hear what God is saying at such time. God may be saying move from here. Some out of fear make moves that land them in casualties when God may be saying at such time stay here. You need to be attentive, not noisy in time of persecution so as to hear when and what the Holy Spirit has to say in a particular situation. There is always a direction from above. Joseph and Mary were obedient to the voice of God in the face of persecution of the Christ Child. Paul and Silas obeyed the Spirit's direction to sing praises to God in the prison. The disciples in Damascus were attentive in the Spirit to receive the right action at that moment when they lowered Paul in a large basket.

- Matt. 2:13, 20 Now when they had departed, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream, saying, "Arise, take the young Child and His mother, flee to Egypt, and stay there until I bring you word; for Herod will seek the young Child to destroy Him." ²⁰ "Arise, take the young Child and His mother, and go to the land of Israel, for those who sought the young Child's life are dead."
- Matt. 10:23 When they persecute you in this city, flee to another. For assuredly, I say to you, you will not have gone through the cities of Israel before the Son of Man comes.
- Acts 9:23-25 Now after many days were past, the Jews plotted to kill him. ²⁴ But their plot became known to Saul. And they watched the gates day and night, to kill him. ²⁵ Then the disciples took him by night and let *him* down through the wall in a large basket.
- Acts 16:25 But at midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them.

Facing and Enduring Persecution with a Positive Mind

Knowing that persecution is unavoidable in our spiritual journey to heaven, we must be ready to face it with a positive mind. Our Master Jesus suffered it, the early Apostles suffered it. All through church history it has been the same thing. Like the early Apostles, let's count it all joy that we are worthy to suffer with Christ in our walk with

Him. Don't deny Christ. Endure persecution to the end. Salvation and eternity with the Lord is sure and certain as we continue to identify with Him to the end.

- **Matt. 24:13 But he who endures to the end shall be saved.**

Teaching Session 6: The Fellowship of His Sufferings

Samuel J. Isong

Three Introductory Scriptures for a Proper Approach to Persecution

As we move into this session on the fellowship of His sufferings, I want us to analytically consider these three introductory scriptures. This step will help both see the position of Paul in his commitment to Christ and how we need to build our present life and cultivate a proper approach to those fiery darts of persecution. Ensuring that in all we walk in the light of the gospel based on the foundation of Christ laid down by the apostles.

- Phil. 3:10 KJV That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death.
- Acts 21:13 Then Paul answered, “What do you mean by weeping and breaking my heart? For I am ready not only to be bound, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus.”
- Gal. 5:11 And I, brethren, if I still preach circumcision, why do I still suffer persecution? Then the offense of the cross has ceased.

The first introductory Scripture, Phil. 3:10, in the Living Bible says, ***Now I have given up everything else—I have found it to be the only way to really know Christ and to experience the mighty power that brought him back to life again, and to find out what it means to suffer and to die with him.*** Here we discover a determination based on love and uncompromising faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. We see undeterred onward movement of Paul on the highway of faith in Christ to accomplishing his divine assignment and meeting Christ in eternity at last.

The second introductory Scripture, Acts 21:13, in the Living Bible says, ***But he said, “Why all this weeping? You are breaking my heart! For I am ready not only to be jailed at Jerusalem but also to die for the sake of the Lord Jesus.”*** What is the lesson here? I believe the lesson is a standard of consecration that Jesus expects from every one of his disciples. We must all come to this level in serving Christ where nothing else in life matters more than living for and serving the Lord, no matter what we suffer in the course of it.

The third introductory Scripture, Gal. 5:11, in the Living Bible says, ***Some people even say that I myself am preaching that circumcision and Jewish laws are necessary to the plan of salvation. Well, if I preached that, I would be persecuted no more—for that message doesn’t offend anyone. The fact that I am still being persecuted proves that I am still preaching salvation through faith in the cross of Christ alone.*** What lesson do we learn here? Those who are determined to preach the truth despite persecutions will not change the true gospel to avoid persecution. Truth is offensive to the enemies of the cross. This is true even today as we stick with preaching salvation through faith in the cross of Christ alone. The antichrist spirit will move men against us to persecute us. Therefore, be armed with this truth that you cannot give up.

The Fellowship of His Sufferings

The Apostle Paul intentionally declared his desire to share in the fellowship of Christ's suffering (Phil. 3:10). This expresses a daily practical living for Jesus Christ. This is what Jesus meant in Mark 8:34-35

- Mark 8:34-35 KJV And when he had called the people *unto him* with his disciples also, he said unto them, **Whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.** ³⁵ For whosoever will save his life shall lose it; but whosoever shall lose his life for my sake and the gospel's, the same shall save it.

Mark the word ***deny himself*** in the above Scripture. That is what Apostle Paul did in the following testimony:

- Phil. 3:8 KJV Yea doubtless, and I count all things *but* loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them *but* dung, that I may win Christ,

Just meditate on what Paul is saying, ***I count all things but loss for the Excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord --- and do count them but dung.*** Next, mark these words of Jesus, ***and take up his cross.*** Of course, we know from the Scriptures that is a daily practice (Luke 9:23). This is what Paul did by undertaking the determination to preach salvation through the cross of Christ only irrespective of the severe persecution he suffered. Finally mark the phrase ***and follow me.*** Paul did this by winning Him, knowing Him, and being found in Him. Whosoever will live for Christ in this way is already a partaker in the fellowship of His sufferings.

12 Practices and Desires of Paul in the Midst of Persecutions

We know from the Scriptures how much persecution the Apostle Paul suffered for the sake of Christ. But what were the Apostle Paul's practices and desires in Christ in the midst of such severe persecutions. At this point we will see a concise account on a life of fellowship with Christ's sufferings while simultaneously fulfilling the kingdom standard and purposeful fruitful Christian life. There is much for you to learn and apply as we examine twelve practices and desires of this mighty man of God, once a persecutor himself, who was taken captive by Christ on the road to Damascus.

A closer examination of Paul's epistle to the Philippians reveals at least twelve practices and desires of this servant of Christ. We will begin with identifying his twelve practices. Carefully review the following chapter in Philippians and write down as many practices as you can identify:

- Phil. 3:1-21 Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord. For me to write the same things to you *is* not tedious, but for you *it is* safe. ² Beware of dogs, beware of evil workers, beware of the mutilation! ³ For we are the circumcision, who worship God in the Spirit, rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh, ⁴ though I also might have confidence in the flesh. If anyone else thinks he may have confidence in the flesh, I more so: ⁵ circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews; concerning the law, a Pharisee; ⁶ concerning zeal,

persecuting the church; concerning the righteousness which is in the law, blameless. ⁷ But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ. ⁸ Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ ⁹ and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which *is* from the law, but that which *is* through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith; ¹⁰ that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death, ¹¹ if, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead. ¹² Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me. ¹³ Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing *I do*, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, ¹⁴ I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. ¹⁵ Therefore let us, as many as are mature, have this mind; and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal even this to you. ¹⁶ Nevertheless, to *the degree* that we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us be of the same mind. ¹⁷ Brethren, join in following my example, and note those who so walk, as you have us for a pattern. ¹⁸ For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, *that they are* the enemies of the cross of Christ: ¹⁹ whose end *is* destruction, whose god *is* their belly, and whose glory *is* in their shame—who set their mind on earthly things. ²⁰ For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, ²¹ who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself.

The above verses display practices of the Apostle Paul in the context of persecution, that he viewed as the fellowship of His sufferings (Phil. 3:10). The following chart reveals at least twelve of these practices.

Practices	Scripture References
1. To Worship God in the Spirit	Phil. 3:3 John 4:24 God <i>is</i> Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.”
2. Have no confidence in the flesh	Phil 3:3-8 1John 2:16 For all that <i>is</i> in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the world.
3. Be found in Him	Phil. 3:9 John 5:4 For an angel went down at a certain time into the pool and stirred up the water; then whoever stepped in first, after the stirring of the water, was made well of whatever disease he had.
4. Count all things loss	Phil. 3:7-8
5. Count all things as dung	Phil. 3:8
6. Have no self-righteousness	Phil. 3:9
7. Following after the knowledge of Christ	Phil. 3:8, 12
8. Forget the past	Phil. 3:13
9. Reach out for future things	Phil. 3:13
10. Press toward the prize	Phil. 3:14
11. Strive to be an example	Phil. 3:15-19
12. Look for the Savior	Phil. 3:20

As a disciple of Jesus today compare your practices for the Lord to those in the previous chart and personally judge yourself. Align yourself with people of such practices, earnestly desire and cry out to God for grace to please Him daily. Now let us look at the twelve great desires of Paul from chapter 3 of Philippians.

The desires and practices of the Apostle Paul in following Christ and fulfilling His calling and destiny in the Lord have a remarkable consistency. It was a most worthy example for others to follow.

Desires	Scripture References
1. That I may win Christ	Phil. 3:8
2. Be found in Him	Phil. 3:9
3. Have His righteousness	Phil. 3:9
4. Know Him	Phil. 3:10
5. Know His power	Phil. 3:10
6. Know the fellowship of His sufferings	Phil. 3:10
7. Be conformed to His death	Phil. 3:10
8. Be in the first resurrection	Phil. 3:11-12
9. Be perfect	Phil. 3:12-13
10. Win the prize	Phil. 3:14
11. Be one with all other believers	Phil. 3:15-19
12. Be changed in body	Phil. 3:21

A Mind Set on Eternity

It takes determination and genuine love for Christ for you to be willing to practically submit yourself to be a partaker of the sufferings of Christ. Paul understood that if he shares in the fellowship of His sufferings, that he will surely be a partaker of His resurrection and reign eternally in glory with crowns that never shall fade away. He declared:

- **2Cor. 4:18 KJV While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal.**

Therefore, live and serve Christ with your mind on eternity.

Teaching Session 7: Primary Strategies for the Persecuted Church

Michael D. Gross

Having a Spiritual Ear in Times of Persecution

What is the Holy Spirit saying to the church today? Many spiritual leaders struggle with this question. I often consult the Lord's messages to the seven churches in the book of Revelation. Seven times Jesus makes the following statement: ***He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches*** (Rev. 2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22). Note how Jesus Christ, the Head of the church, reveals that the Holy Spirit speaks to the churches (plural). He speaks to the churches in every place and in every generation. He has also given you an ear to hear (singular). The last time I checked I had two ears, but Jesus is referring to a specific ear that is tuned in to what the Holy Spirit is speaking. This ear hears what the Spirit says. You desperately need this spiritual ear in these difficult times. I also noticed in the messages of Jesus to the churches that only two were without criticism.

The Persecuted Church	The Faithful Church
Rev. 2:8-11 “And to the angel of the church in Smyrna write, ‘These things says the First and the Last, who was dead, and came to life: ⁹ ‘I know your works, tribulation, and poverty (but you are rich); and <i>I know</i> the blasphemy of those who say they are Jews and are not, but <i>are</i> a synagogue of Satan. ¹⁰ Do not fear any of those things which you are about to suffer. Indeed, the devil is about to throw <i>some</i> of you into prison, that you may be tested, and you will have tribulation ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life. ¹¹ “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. He who overcomes shall not be hurt by the second death.” ’	Rev. 3:7-13 “And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write, “These things says He who is holy, He who is true, ‘ <i>He who has the key of David, He who opens and no one shuts, and shuts and no one opens</i> ’”: ⁸ “I know your works. See, I have set before you an open door, and no one can shut it; for you have a little strength, have kept My word, and have not denied My name. ⁹ Indeed I will make <i>those</i> of the synagogue of Satan, who say they are Jews and are not, but lie—indeed I will make them come and worship before your feet, and to know that I have loved you. ¹⁰ Because you have kept My command to persevere, I also will keep you from the hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth. ¹¹ Behold, I am coming quickly! Hold fast what you have, that no one may take your crown. ¹² He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he shall go out no more. I will write on him the name of My God and the name of the city of My God, the New Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from My God. And <i>I will write on him</i> My new name. ¹³ “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.” ’

There are severe aspects of persecution and tribulation in both of the above messages. A strategic war between the synagogue of Satan and the synagogue of the Lord (the church) makes it difficult for Christians to live there. But these churches are spiritually rich in the midst of tribulation, poverty, suffering and death. This is the persecuted

church. The Lord has a glorious plan for the persecuted church. This includes plans and strategies that will be powerful and effective in times of persecution. These plans and strategies will work because they arise from God, from His word. In this segment we will look at some of these strategies in God’s word.

The Importance of Strategic Level Prayer

Prayer initiatives today are too often heavily weighted on prayer requests built around personal prayer requests, church programs, building projects, and current events. This was not the case in the Early Church. The Apostles and the believers in the Early Church demonstrated a strategic level of praying that was much more focused and targeted on God’s priorities. This was very evident in a relentless environment of severe persecution. Of course, the first priority was the preaching of Jesus Christ as Lord of all through His death and resurrection. The apostles and believers ministered the way Jesus modeled for them. They preached repentance for the remission of sins and performed miracles in the name of Jesus. Equally important for them was to follow up with the absolute priority for believers to be baptized with the Holy Spirit and fire like they had been. The focus on the Holy Spirit in prayer is fully documented in their ministry and in their prayers. The prayers of the 120 were very strategically targeted.

- **Acts 1:14** These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with His brothers.
- **Acts 2:1-4** When the Day of Pentecost had fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. ² And suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. ³ Then there appeared to them divided tongues, as of fire, and one sat upon each of them. ⁴ And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.

There are more examples of the Early Church praying for believers to be filled with the Holy Spirit than for anything else (See Acts 8:14-17; 4:31; 9:17-20; 19:6-7). You must keep this in mind at all times.

All of the above examples in the Early Church occur in the midst of persecution. Let’s look more closely at two examples where a higher strategic level of prayer was in operation while facing persecution.

The Persecution	The Strategic Prayer
<p>Acts 4:15-21 But when they had commanded them to go aside out of the council, they conferred among themselves, ¹⁶ saying, “What shall we do to these men? For, indeed, that a notable miracle has been done through them <i>is</i> evident to all who dwell in Jerusalem, and we cannot deny <i>it</i>. ¹⁷ But so that it spreads no further among the people, let us severely threaten them, that from now on they speak to no man in this name.” ¹⁸ So they called them and commanded them not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus. ¹⁹ But Peter and John answered and said to them, “Whether it is right in the</p>	<p>Acts 4:23-31 And being let go, they went to their own <i>companions</i> and reported all that the chief priests and elders had said to them. ²⁴ So when they heard that, they raised their voice to God with one accord and said: “Lord, You <i>are</i> God, who made heaven and earth and the sea, and all that is in them, ²⁵ who by the mouth of Your servant David have said: “<i>Why did the nations rage, And the people plot vain things? ²⁶ The kings of the earth took their stand, And the rulers were gathered together Against the LORD and against His Christ.</i>’ ²⁷ “For truly against Your holy</p>

<p>sight of God to listen to you more than to God, you judge. ²⁰ For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard.” ²¹ So when they had further threatened them, they let them go, finding no way of punishing them, because of the people, since they all glorified God for what had been done.</p>	<p>Servant Jesus, whom You anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the people of Israel, were gathered together ²⁸ to do whatever Your hand and Your purpose determined before to be done. ²⁹ Now, Lord, look on their threats, and grant to Your servants that with all boldness they may speak Your word, ³⁰ by stretching out Your hand to heal, and that signs and wonders may be done through the name of Your holy Servant Jesus.” ³¹ And when they had prayed, the place where they were assembled together was shaken; and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and they spoke the word of God with boldness.</p>
<p>Acts 12:1-4 Now about that time Herod the king stretched out <i>his</i> hand to harass some from the church. ² Then he killed James the brother of John with the sword. ³ And because he saw that it pleased the Jews, he proceeded further to seize Peter also. Now it was <i>during</i> the Days of Unleavened Bread. ⁴ So when he had arrested him, he put <i>him</i> in prison, and delivered <i>him</i> to four squads of soldiers to keep him, intending to bring him before the people after Passover.</p>	<p>Acts 12:5 Peter was therefore kept in prison, but constant prayer was offered to God for him by the church. Acts 12:11-12 And when Peter had come to himself, he said, “Now I know for certain that the Lord has sent His angel, and has delivered me from the hand of Herod and <i>from</i> all the expectation of the Jewish people.” ¹² So, when he had considered <i>this</i>, he came to the house of Mary, the mother of John whose surname was Mark, where many were gathered together praying.</p>

What would happen if the church today demonstrated the same strategic prayer focus for the persecuted church? The church needs to rediscover the importance of strategic level prayer because the persecution is increasing daily against Christianity.

The Priority of House Church Development

5-Fold Global from the beginning has been a strong advocate for the establishment of house church networks.¹³ One of the primary reasons for this is that in the New Testament the most prominent and effective way of spreading the Gospel of Jesus Christ was from house to house. And this was in the times of the greatest persecution. Even more amazing was that this miraculous growth of Christianity continued well into the 4th century without the building of church structures. Therefore, we pose the following question to the new generation church of today: *Could it be that God in His wisdom is going to reach our contemporary world from house to house?* Most pastors and spiritual leaders do not see this happening. They still view the centralized church building as the most important and necessary means for success in ministry. They prioritize the purchasing of land and the building of a physical church. We see this pattern all over the world. It remains the primary means of church growth today. And it appears this ministry model has been passed on to the new generation. The

¹³ Michael Gross. *House Churches: A Biblical Model and an Apostolic Pattern with a Contemporary Impact* (2018). 5-Fold Global Ministries. resources-leaders.house.pdf (snappages.site).

danger in this approach is that the church building becomes the mission. It becomes the heart's desire of young leaders and the vision of the people. It is important that the new generation church of today understands that this was not the way or the experience of Jesus and of the Early Church.

Wolfgang Simson in his foundational house church book makes a profound statement. He says *God's work done God's way still attracts God's blessing*.¹⁴ Young leaders, you need to return to the ways of God in doing church. This is where the Lord invests His power. This is where His church is established. Review these statements by Brother Simson.

- "The house church is a way of living the Christian life communally in ordinary homes through supernatural power."¹⁵
- "House churches emerge when truly converted people stop living their own lives for their own ends, and begin living a community life according to the values of the Kingdom of God, sharing their lives and resources with those Christians and not-yet-Christians around them."¹⁶
- "House-church Christianity is the body of Christ in ordinary houses, the society of the "three-times converted": those who are vertically converted to God, horizontally converted to each other (like the more than thirty "one another" verses in the New Testament exhort us to be), and broadly converted to serve the world in love, compassion, and power."¹⁷
- "Because the house church is a supernatural creation, invented and endowed by God, it has certain capabilities. One is its ability to form its own support structure from within, in what is known as the fivefold ministry."¹⁸

It is time for His church to return to house-to-house ministry. The following chart clearly displays how far we have strayed from what Jesus had established for His church.¹⁹

New Testament Church	Congregational Church
Moving from house to house	Meeting in sanctuaries
Apostles, prophets	Pastors, teachers
Elders	Evangelists
Sharing all they had	Tithing
Community lifestyle	Individual
Natural discipling of neighbors; multiplying itself	Outreach, action, programs, specialists
Getting the church into people's homes	Getting people into the church
Small intimate groups	Large impersonal groups
Kinetic, discussion based	Static, sermon centered
Go and make disciples!	Come and become a member!
Equipping oriented	Performance oriented
Church sending itself as a multipliable unit	Church sending specialized missionaries

¹⁴ Wolfgang Simson. *The House Church Book: Rediscover the Dynamic, Organic, Relational, Viral Community Jesus Started* (p. 13). Tyndale House Publishers, Inc.. Kindle Edition.

¹⁵ Ibid. (p.31).

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Simson (p.32).

¹⁸ Ibid. (pgs. 32-33).

¹⁹ Ibid. (p. 8).

In addition to the above chart, Simson shares twelve advantages of a house church movement over a traditional congregational-style church.²⁰

1. Discipled multiplication
- 2. Persecution-proof structure**
3. Freedom from church growth barriers
4. More efficient involvement of a higher percentage of people
5. A break from the pastoral care dilemma
6. A place of life transformation and accountability
7. A better place of growth for new Christians
8. A solution for the leadership crisis
9. A way to eliminate the clergy-laity division
10. A biblically based pattern
11. A budget-conscious way of operating
12. A resurrection of the city church

All of the above are remarkable advantages for church leaders who are willing to move in this direction under the supervision of the Holy Spirit. But did you notice the second advantage? The advantage of a *persecution-proof structure*. This is the advantage we will focus on in this teaching session.

The Advantage of a *Persecution-Proof Structure*

The Lord Jesus Christ is our model in times of persecution. Often, He set up His ministry headquarters in homes. For example, Simon Peter's home in Capernaum was established by Jesus as a ministry center.

- **Mark 1:29-34** Now as soon as they had come out of the synagogue, they entered the house of Simon and Andrew, with James and John. ³⁰ But Simon's wife's mother lay sick with a fever, and they told Him about her at once. ³¹ So He came and took her by the hand and lifted her up, and immediately the fever left her. And she served them. ³² At evening, when the sun had set, they brought to Him all who were sick and those who were demon-possessed. ³³ And the whole city was gathered together at the door. ³⁴ Then He healed many who were sick with various diseases, and cast out many demons; and He did not allow the demons to speak, because they knew Him.
- **Mark 2:1-4** And again He entered Capernaum after *some* days, and it was heard that He was in the house. ² Immediately many gathered together, so that there was no longer room to receive *them*, not even near the door. And He preached the word to them. ³ Then they came to Him, bringing a paralytic who was carried by four *men*. ⁴ And when they could not come near Him because of the crowd, they uncovered the roof where He was. So when they had broken through, they let down the bed on which the paralytic was lying.

The above Scriptures reveal a model for ministry established by Jesus. He repeated it over and over again during His time on the earth. In addition, villages and cities were reached with miraculous power from such home bases of operation. The Early Church followed the same ministry pattern in accordance with the mission instructions of Jesus.

²⁰ Wolfgang Simson (pgs. 10-12).

It was an advance of the Kingdom of God during immense persecution, using houses as bases of operation to reach cities primarily from house to house.

- Luke 10:5-12 But whatever house you enter, first say, "Peace to this house." ⁶ And if a son of peace is there, your peace will rest on it; if not, it will return to you. ⁷ And remain in the same house, eating and drinking such things as they give, for the laborer is worthy of his wages. Do not go from house to house. ⁸ Whatever city you enter, and they receive you, eat such things as are set before you. ⁹ And heal the sick there, and say to them, "The kingdom of God has come near to you." ¹⁰ But whatever city you enter, and they do not receive you, go out into its streets and say, ¹¹ "The very dust of your city which clings to us we wipe off against you. Nevertheless know this, that the kingdom of God has come near you." ¹² But I say to you that it will be more tolerable in that Day for Sodom than for that city.

The above instructions by our Lord Jesus Christ are divinely designed to use houses to reach cities. Are these instructions only for the Early Church? Of course not! You need to implement these instructions in your ministry assignment. Churches today are not reaching the cities and towns where they are located. Did you notice that the actual persecution did not take place in the house. The house church base of operation was not the place of persecution. Nor did persecution come to the house of the **son of peace**. It was the city that rejected the servants of God. Likewise, persecution did not come to Simon Peter's house in Capernaum. The scribes asked Jesus questions, but He was not threatened, arrested, or even ridiculed by them. They were only **reasoning in their hearts**.

- Mark 2:5-12 When Jesus saw their faith, He said to the paralytic, "Son, your sins are forgiven you." ⁶ And some of the scribes were sitting there and reasoning in their hearts, ⁷ "Why does this *Man* speak blasphemies like this? Who can forgive sins but God alone?" ⁸ But immediately, when Jesus perceived in His spirit that they reasoned thus within themselves, He said to them, "Why do you reason about these things in your hearts?" ⁹ Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, "Your sins are forgiven you," or to say, 'Arise, take up your bed and walk'? ¹⁰ But that you may know that the Son of Man has power on earth to forgive sins"—He said to the paralytic, ¹¹ "I say to you, arise, take up your bed, and go to your house." ¹² Immediately he arose, took up the bed, and went out in the presence of them all, so that all were amazed and glorified God, saying, "We never saw *anything* like this!"

Although house churches and the homes of believers cannot be totally persecution-proof, they do offer a resistance to persecution that the conventional churches of today do not. For example, when God sent an angel to release Peter from prison where did he go in the midst of such persecution?

Acts 12:12-17 So, when he had considered *this*, he came to the house of Mary, the mother of John whose surname was Mark, where many were gathered together praying. ¹³ And as Peter knocked at the door of the gate, a girl named Rhoda came to answer. ¹⁴ When she recognized Peter's voice, because of *her* gladness she did not open the gate, but ran in and announced that Peter stood before the gate. ¹⁵ But they said to her, "You are beside yourself!" Yet she kept insisting that it was so. So they said, "It is his angel." ¹⁶ Now Peter continued knocking; and when they opened *the door* and saw him, they were astonished. ¹⁷ But motioning to them with his hand to keep silent, he declared to them how the Lord had

brought him out of the prison. And he said, "Go, tell these things to James and to the brethren." And he departed and went to another place.

House churches are fluid and movable. They blend into the whole community. They can also go underground if necessary. Traditional or conventional church buildings are static and immovable and an easy target for persecutors. A successful conventional church becomes inoperative when persecution prevents the flock from gathering in their building or even destroys it. However, if the same church exercises wisdom and foresight to establish operational house churches in addition to meeting in the church building, the ministry can successfully advance no matter what level of persecution comes their way. The underground church as it is called thrives in the most severe environments of persecution. Therefore, house churches provide a much higher degree of protection for believers than the church building. This appears to be the case because Herod's search party could not find Peter.

- **Acts 12:18-19** Then, as soon as it was day, there was no small stir among the soldiers about what had become of Peter. ¹⁹ But when Herod had searched for him and not found him, he examined the guards and commanded that *they* should be put to death. And he went down from Judea to Caesarea, and stayed *there*.

It is important that you see a biblical pattern here. The persecutors could not find Peter after much searching. He was a wanted man! This was also the case with Paul and Silas in Philippi. The persecution was not in the house of Lydia (Acts 16:15, 40) but they were arrested and imprisoned on their way to prayer after casting out the spirit of divination from a slave girl who followed them (Acts 16:16-18). Her masters who profited from her brought them to the authorities (Acts 16:19-24). Although in Thessalonica the authorities assaulted the house of Jason that was located next to the synagogue, the mob could not find Paul and Silas (Acts 17:5-9). The believers were then able to immediately send them away by night (Acts 17:10). But you say Saul arrested followers of the Way in their homes. The Bible says ***he made havoc of the church, entering every house, and dragging off men and women, committing them to prison*** (Acts 8:3). This is true, but also remember that he did not get far with that plan because God arrested him on the Damascus Road. These biblical examples show that the house-to-house operation of believers provided a much higher level of resistance and security from persecution. Let's now look at some practical examples of this in some of the most persecuted places in the world.

The Twang District of the frontier state of Arunachal Pradesh in Northeast India borders China. It is a very remote region with a porous border that has been disputed for decades. In fact, if you look on a map today it will indicate a border that is *claimed by China*. I was told when I was there with 5-Fold Global partner, Rev. Chungthang Thiek, in April of 2005 that many referred to the region as the *China frontier*. I was also informed that there was only one church there and it had been destroyed and rebuilt twice with the looming threat of a third time. In addition, Twang City was home to the second largest Buddhist Monastery and a number of pagan tribes. We preached in the

church for two nights not knowing whether it would be destroyed for a third time during this time or shortly after our departure. There was little to no advance of the Gospel in this place. But God had a plan. He was about to show it to us. The following report documents the experience.

“April 21-26: The team traveled to Guwahati, the capital of Assam , where Santhosh departed for Andhra Pradesh while Chungthang and Michael went on to Tezpur. Here we joined Ama, his wife, and Zorim. Ama [executive secretary] and Zorim [missions secretary] are two young executive officials of the 254 church Nishi Baptist Christian Council of Arunachal Pradesh. These churches are mostly smaller with some house churches and have been established only since 1972 due to persecution and anti-conversion laws. They faithfully escorted us through dense jungle and mountainous rain forests to the frontier region of the Tawang District and to the only church in the region. We preached twice in the church. Chungthang delivered a strong message on the strength of God' love in us, and Michael was the first white foreigner to preach in the church. We were impressed to find around 12 young people in the church and four of them were waiting for sponsors to enter Bible College with the goal of returning and reaching the various tribes for Christ. Immediately we began planning by the leading of the Holy Spirit for a mission's training center and the establishment of an international school of ministry [ISOM]. In addition, the brethren were very enthusiastic about a comprehensive teaching strategy for making disciples. Although weather and security concerns prevented us from visiting places outside the city, we went to some sites and prayed together over the region. A Christian doctor [veterinarian] invited us to his home for a meal on our final night. There, we prayed for a young man with severe pain in both shoulders. Jesus instantly healed him, and the brothers took him to another room where he received Christ. This was all witnessed by a Buddhist policeman who was present and is unaware that his daughter has recently converted to Christianity and taken water baptism. This confirmed again to all that house gatherings would be God's primary means for the spread of the gospel throughout the region.”

The above firsthand report has an important postscript. Although I had no knowledge that the Buddhist policeman was at the house gathering, the Lord was ready to display His power to save and to heal. The policeman needed to see the power of God. The young man that was healed was in his early twenties. He could not lift his hands above his shoulders and could not work to support his family. I recall when I prayed over him for healing in the name of Jesus that he immediately lifted both hands above his head at my request and his arms above his shoulders. The healing was sudden and complete. I proceeded to lead him to Christ, but the brethren quickly restrained me saying they would take him to another room because the Chief of Police was present who was a Buddhist. Only then did I learn of his presence in the home. It was several months later when I received the report that another daughter of the Buddhist policeman converted to Christ and took water baptism. They boldly came to their father, and he could no longer resist. They led him to Christ. Is this not how God works? The Buddhist policeman had witnessed with his own eyes the display of God's power in that simple house gathering. It is where God chose to reveal Himself and manifest His power. This is not to say He cannot do this inside a church building, but the house-to-house strategy advances the Kingdom forward with a documented effectiveness in the Scriptures that cannot be denied. Although the brethren in Twang City acknowledged that God had shown them the way to reach the city was from house-to-house, they failed to do so following our departure. Today, church planting around a church building is taking place in Twang City by the Christian Revival Church and others with much difficulty. They are experiencing the same forms of persecution. It begs the

question: Would the situation be different in Twang City today if the Church had fully grasped the advantages of house-to-house ministry in the power of the Holy Spirit? What would have happened if they had followed the example of Jesus and the Early Church in preaching the nearness of the Kingdom of God, healing the sick, and casting out demons from house-to-house instead of repeatedly erecting a church building?

Now, let us look at another example. This time in the nation of Nigeria. Nigeria is listed seventh among the nations where the persecution of Christians is most severe in 2022 (See Appendix 2). In fact, the persecution of Christians has become extreme, and projections indicate it will get much worse in the future. Open Doors USA reports that every two hours a Nigerian is murdered for their faith in Jesus Christ. This totals thirteen Christians each day, 372 each month, and 4,650 each year who are paying the ultimate price of martyrdom simply for believing and following Christ.²¹ And, these figures only include the reported deaths. Many go unreported so the figures are suspected to be even much higher.

A very strategic 5-Fold Global operation was conducted in Nigeria in 2018. Although the persecution had not fully erupted in the South at that time, the equipping focus of the 5-Fold Global Team from four nations was on building the church His way. A review of the teaching sessions at one of the conferences for new generation leaders during the mission operation reveals the need for this generation to be fully equipped in the house church strategy of the Scriptures.²²

Day 1

- Session 1: *The House-to-House Ministry and Mission Instructions of Jesus*
- Session 2: *The Glorious Church*
- Session 3: *What Kind of Person will God Use to Bring Back the Holy Spirit and His Glory to the Church?*

Day 2

- Session 1: *The House-to-House Ministry of the Jerusalem Church*
- Session 2: *Strategic Level Prayer Activation*
- Session 3: *How to Keep the Fire Burning*

Day 3

- Session 1: *The House Church Mission of the Antioch Church*
- Session 2: *Building the Glorious Church in God's Wisdom*
- Session 3: *The Shekinah Glory*

Day 4

- Session 1: *Leadership Structure and Activation of a House Church Network*

²¹ Open Doors USA (July 21, 2022). Lindy Lowry: [10 Nigerian martyrs that show us the power of faith - Open Doors USA - Open Doors USA](#).

²² *5-Fold Global Strategic Mission Report*, October 10-24, 2018. [operations-reports-nigeria2018.pdf](#) ([snappages.site](#)).

- Session 2: *How Can We Build Rightly?*
- Session 3: *What Happens When God Comes to Church?*

This is the kind of strategic teaching this generation needs today because persecution will increase in every place.

The New Generation Conference in Nigeria began with 113 young leaders on the first day and by the second day there were at least 200. There were very strong moves of God as the team equipped and proclaimed that *the miracles are going to be restored when the church returns to the original New Testament pattern*. It quickly became evident what God was doing. The 5-Fold Global Team was approached by four teams of young leaders totaling around 30 in all. These young leaders indicated they were ready to immediately begin house churches at their places of ministry. This was in response to three practical questions Dr. Samuel Isong presented to launch these new generation leaders into action.

1. What is God asking me to do?
2. What am I going to do with what God is telling me?
3. When am I going to begin to do what the Lord is telling me to do?

The above questions made a strong impact upon these young leaders. In addition, a quote by Wolfgang Simson, whom we reference a number of times in this equipping manual, had a great impact upon their hearts and minds.

“Do you know what? If I were you, I would stop pastoring in the traditional sense. I would realize, in your case, that I have a more apostolic role, lay down my office, get my hands free, and start fathering and equipping a new generation of house-church planters.”²³

5-Fold Global has been advocating the above counsel to young leaders for several decades. We have experienced only a few who follow-through to actively pursue house church development in the nations. This changes, however, when persecution comes to the church door. Although the 5-Fold Global House Church Network was officially launched in October 2020, the Holy Spirit had been developing the strategy among them since 2018. The following report from Nigeria displays things the Holy Spirit is saying to the churches today.

“It is time to advance no matter the difficulties. The passion for house church is growing daily. House church is the answer in these intense persecutions. We are on it! My daughter moved to a town in my state a month ago. This week she planted a house church with three young members. Last Sunday I and two young pastors visited an old dying house church in the hottest area and revived the house church there. We are gradually moving on. Will soon tell you about the house church base. We will have in-house camping retreat with theme: Equipping/Grace for the end times. We will focus on training for house church prayers and evangelism.”²⁴

Many do not take seriously the apostolic and prophetic warnings of perilous times in the last days. Persecution, however, serves as a wake-up call to a sleepy and

²³ Wolfgang Simson

²⁴ 5-Fold Global Report Nigeria Mission 2021. [operations-reports-nigeria2021.pdf \(snappages.site\)](#). pg. 3.

lukewarm church. Persecution restores the apostolic structure to the church. It brings a spiritual alertness to do things God's way. It returns us to the ministry strategies that work, that are effective. You can find them by the Holy Spirit in God's word. They are there!

Ministry with Technology

My first exposure in using technology in ministry was in my role as a Navy Chaplain on active duty from 1983-86 assigned to the Marines. The computers were mostly used for budgeting and monitoring the annual religious programs and had little to do with the day-to-day operations of ministry. However, this changed dramatically soon afterwards. Today, many cannot imagine doing ministry without the use of technology. However, technology should not be used to replace the person-to-person ministry that is so vividly and powerfully displayed in the Scriptures. Nor should it replace the gathering together of God's people because this is the place, according to God's word, where we most effectively incite, stimulate, and exhort each other in the things of God.

- **Heb. 10:24-25** And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, ²⁵ not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as *is* the manner of some, but exhorting *one another*, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.

The above verses are specifically directed toward ***the Day approaching*** or the last days. These are the days of ever-increasing persecution. We are to take seriously each other's spiritual well-being ***so much the more*** in these days of persecution. And this is best done when we assemble together with one another. So, it is wise not to become too dependent upon technology in ministry, but to use it in a strategic manner that does not diminish the importance of ***the assembling of ourselves together***.

How do you properly use technology including the internet and social media platforms for ministry? Are such platforms secure in these days of increasing persecution of Christians around the world? And how do you develop a digital strategy of discipleship? These are some of the questions we will be addressing in this section. It is important that you understand that technology must serve the mission Christ gave to His church. The Barna Research Group provides sound advice on this point:

"A new digital innovation may help us to reach more people or change the world in some way, but it should still be scrutinized—if anything, to help remind us that technology should always be the servant and never the master. The master should be our biblical convictions on what the Church is and the mission God has given us."²⁵

In other words, using available digital technology can help you equip and make more and better disciples of Christ. It can help you engage the world with the truth of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. This is the mindset and approach you need to effectively use technology for ministry. Otherwise, you can become distracted by social media where you are just connecting with people online without any clear spiritual purpose. Familiar

²⁵ Barna Research Group. [Excerpt: Better Questions & Disciplines for Digital Church Innovation - Barna Group](#). February 2, 2022.

spirits love to operate and are rampant in that environment. Therefore, your use of technology for ministry must be built around the strategic mission of Christ and not your need for personal connectivity with people. Making disciples, equipping leaders, and engaging the world with the truth of Jesus Christ are the primary reasons for using technology. This generation needs to stay focused on these priorities. Too many believers are using social media for personal attention rather than sharing their faith. Christ is not glorified in this and those who engage in this way do not produce much fruit. How fruitful are your social media engagements as a disciple of Christ? Who are you joining with on social media? How much time are you spending? If you are living too much on social media, then you are not abiding in Christ the way you should.

- **John 15:4 MSG** “Live in me. Make your home in me just as I do in you. In the same way that a branch can’t bear grapes by itself but only by being joined to the vine, you can’t bear fruit unless you are joined with me.

How can you be fruitful for Christ in a digital age with the increase in the persecution of Christians? 5-Fold Global launched a Spirit empowered digital strategy of ministry with the help of young leaders with the Subsplash Church Group on December 31, 2019. It began with the development of a new 5-Fold Global Website and Mobile App. This soon expanded to live streaming and podcasts on multiple platforms. In addition, Subsplash messaging was added to provide the capability to communicate within the mobile app itself without interference from the outside. Believers, therefore, have a means of speaking to one another that is private and guarded from antichrist authorities and mobs seeking to persecute them or gain information about their whereabouts and activities. They can use this feature for prayer initiatives, to announce meetings in homes, and to warn each other of approaching persecution by antichristian factions. The Holy Spirit alerted us beforehand that major social platforms like Facebook, WhatsApp, YouTube, Google, Messenger and the like were not the friends of Christianity. Did you know according to a Pew Research Center survey in 2021 that 41% of adults in the United States of America have experienced online harassment and over half of them say it was because of their religious beliefs?²⁶ It is important for you to recognize that the harassment of those who follow Christ is increasing rapidly in what was once considered the freest nations on earth. In addition, the Subsplash Team reported the following:

“In 2021, 23% of Christians reported being victims of cyberbullying because of their faith, compared to only 5% back in 2017. This trend appears to be growing as popular culture moves further away from biblical principles, ethics, and morality.”²⁷

I pray you can see where the trend is going. The Spirit warned me about censorship and that the day would come when they would not permit the message of Christ on their

²⁶ Pew Research Center. *About one in five Americans who have been harassed online say it was because of their religion*. February 1, 2021. [Online Harassment & Bullying - Research and data from the Pew Research Center](#).

²⁷ Subsplash. *The Complete Guide to Protecting Your Online Church*,. [Big Tech Censorship Ebook 2022.pdf \(subsplash.com\)](#). p. 8.

platforms. Even now, you will be censored if you preach and teach the truth about what the Bible says about such things as morality and marriage, homosexuality, or abortion. These topics and many more go against their ungodly values. The tech giants have already created the algorithms against such preaching and teaching of the truth. They also have informers who report to them Christian messages they find offensive. This is the form of persecution arising in the free societies of North America and Western Europe. Others in Africa and Asia are facing being arrested and killed for following Jesus Christ. This is the world we are called to minister in. It is a digital one that we are called to reach with the fullness of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

The best and most effective way to use technology in the midst of persecution is to stay centered on your relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ and His mission in your life. You cannot afford to lose sight of your biblical convictions at any time on social media. I recently read if the church resists using digital technology, it will lose two of the youngest generations and also the next generation of church leaders.²⁸ So, how do you use technology when you are facing persecution? There are some practical things that you need to pay careful attention to with the mindset and approach described earlier in this section. The first thing is to continue to boldly preach Christ and teach the Word publicly. This includes on as many digital platforms as possible, in church, and from house-to-house. Digital online ministry, however, should support and not replace or be used as a substitute for in person ministry. It must never be viewed as a full expression of the church. I say this because the new generation is in danger of losing sight of what is real when the offline and the online worlds collide and cohabitate in the same digital spaces. Therefore, the real body of Christ in the offline world must be preserved at all costs in every place. Secondly, you need to add digital platforms that allow you to share the fullness of the Gospel of Jesus Christ without restrictions or fear of censorship. This keeps your ministry of the Word going forth when other platforms increase their harassment and persecution of Christians.

Online security and privacy are also of great concern in times of persecution. As a believer and ambassador of Christ, you need to pay closer attention and take this much more seriously. Platforms like Facebook, YouTube, WhatsApp, and Messenger are making billions and now trillions of dollars for their founders and leaders. They promote an increasingly antichrist agenda. They are not the friends of devoted followers of Christ. In addition, they use all of our personal information for their own gain and one day will censor the preaching of Christ on their platforms. This censoring has already begun with algorithms that have been designed to limit anything that contradicts their antichrist value system. 5-Fold Global recently urged our partners to begin adding different social media platforms to combat the future onslaught of censorship. For example, we recently asked our 5-Fold Global partners to consider downloading Signal, a highly secure non-profit platform for our most important communication and strategic

²⁸ Barna Research Group. [Excerpt: Better Questions & Disciplines for Digital Church Innovation - Barna Group](#). February 2, 2022.

mission planning. We attached the following comparison chart for partners to review and pray for God’s direction.



Young leaders especially have become very chained to Facebook, WhatsApp, and YouTube in particular so that they are unable to see the seriousness of the censorship coming their way. But security and protection become extremely important in persecution when antichrist authorities have all your personal information at their grasp. This leads us to the question the prophet Isaiah asked King Hezekiah when the Babylonian envoys came to him in a friendly and caring way. ***What Have They Seen in Your House?***

- 2Kings 20:12-18 At that time Berodach-Baladan the son of Baladan, king of Babylon, sent letters and a present to Hezekiah, for he heard that Hezekiah had been sick. ¹³ And Hezekiah was attentive to them, and showed them all the house of his treasures—the silver and gold, the spices and precious ointment, and all his armory—all that was found among his treasures. There was nothing in his house or in all his dominion that Hezekiah did not show them. ¹⁴ Then Isaiah the prophet went to King Hezekiah, and said to him, “What did these men say, and from where did they come to you?” So Hezekiah said, “They came from a far country, from Babylon.” ¹⁵ And he said, “What have they seen in your house?” So Hezekiah answered, “They have seen all that *is* in my house; there is nothing among my treasures that I have not shown them.” ¹⁶ Then Isaiah said to Hezekiah, “Hear the word of the LORD: ¹⁷ “Behold, the days are coming when all that *is* in your house, and what your fathers have accumulated until this day, shall be carried to Babylon; nothing shall be left,” says the LORD. ¹⁸ “And they shall take away some of your sons who will descend from you, whom you will beget; and they shall be eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon.’ ”

In the above passage Isaiah revealed there was a sinister spirit behind this group from Babylon. The same can be said of the mega social media giants of the world today. Paul faced a similar thing when false brethren came in by stealth to spy out their liberty in Christ.

- Gal. 2:4-5 And *this occurred* because of false brethren secretly brought in (who came in by stealth to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, that they might bring us into bondage), ⁵ to whom we did not yield submission even for an hour, that the truth of the gospel might continue with you.

Paul was referring to an extremely important gathering of spiritual leaders in the above verses. Note that Paul says ***we did not yield submission even for an hour; that the truth of the gospel might continue with you.*** This is why you need to exercise caution and God's wisdom in using technology. There are strategic plans and communications ministers of the Lord need to keep in-house especially among those in most persecuted regions. Although we encourage you all to continue to use every available media platform to preach and teach the full gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, it is essential that we have a secure platform that no one with sinister plans can spy on our liberty in Christ. Pray for God's wisdom and spiritual discernment in your use of technology. We are living in perilous times.

Teaching Session 8: Dealing with Food Scarcity and Economic Hardship

Michael D. Gross

20 References to Food and Supplies in the Book of Acts

Paul and Barnabas experienced much persecution in preaching and teaching the people about Jesus Christ. For example, in Lystra **they stoned and dragged Paul out of the city, supposing him to be dead**. But when the disciples gathered around him, he got up, returned to the city, and proceeded the next day to Derbe where he continued preaching **and made many disciples** (Acts 14:19-21). In addition, Paul and Barnabas returned to a number of cities to strengthen the faith of the new converts. A particular exhortation stands out above the rest.

- **Acts 14:21-22** And when they had preached the gospel to that city and made many disciples, they returned to Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch, ²² strengthening the souls of the disciples, exhorting *them* to continue in the faith, and saying, “We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God.”

Note the Scripture is speaking to us with absolute clarity about what we must go through. It is with many tribulations, speaking of afflictions, persecutions, and burdensome troubles that we enter the kingdom of God. Paul and Barnabas spoke this truth by the Holy Spirit to the new converts in multiple cities. It was an essential part of their preaching and teaching to believers. How could this message from the servants of God strengthen them or bring them any comfort? How would these recent converts continue in the faith knowing they would face so many afflictions? How would they provide the basic necessities of life (food, shelter, and clothing) for themselves and their families? How were they going to survive in the midst of so much persecution? In this teaching session, we will look carefully at the Scriptures to learn how to deal with food shortages and economic hardships in times of persecution. Antichrist governments will not only censor, arrest, and kill Christians, but they will also attempt to shut down the supply of food to cities and regions where believers in Christ reside. This is going on in the world today. Samuel Isong and I are searching the Scriptures on how we can best help those facing this situation today. We believe God has a plan and that plan is found in His word.

The book of Acts has about 20 references to food and supplies. In addition, the references of the apostles and their associates staying for a number of days in specific houses on their journeys from city to city assumes that the residents of these homes provided food and shelter for the servants of God. Here are the 20 references that give us some guidance on how believers in the Early Church sustained themselves in times of persecution.

1. **Acts 2:44-46** Now all who believed were together, and had all things in common, ⁴⁵ and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need. ⁴⁶ So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, ⁴⁷ praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.

2. Acts 4:32-37 Now the multitude of those who believed were of one heart and one soul; neither did anyone say that any of the things he possessed was his own, but they had all things in common. ³³ And with great power the apostles gave witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And great grace was upon them all. ³⁴ Nor was there anyone among them who lacked; for all who were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the proceeds of the things that were sold, ³⁵ and laid *them* at the apostles' feet; and they distributed to each as anyone had need. ³⁶ And Joses, who was also named Barnabas by the apostles (which is translated Son of Encouragement), a Levite of the country of Cyprus, ³⁷ having land, sold *it*, and brought the money and laid *it* at the apostles' feet.
3. Acts 6:1-2 Now in those days, when *the number of* the disciples was multiplying, there arose a complaint against the Hebrews by the Hellenists, because their widows were neglected in the daily distribution. ² Then the twelve summoned the multitude of the disciples and said, "It is not desirable that we should leave the word of God and serve tables.
4. Acts 7:11-12 Now a famine and great trouble came over all the land of Egypt and Canaan, and our fathers found no sustenance. ¹² But when Jacob heard that there was grain in Egypt, he sent out our fathers first.
5. Acts 9:19-20 So when he had received food, he was strengthened. Then Saul spent some days with the disciples at Damascus. ²⁰ Immediately he preached the Christ in the synagogues, that He is the Son of God.
6. Acts 10:9-11 The next day, as they went on their journey and drew near the city, Peter went up on the housetop to pray, about the sixth hour. ¹⁰ Then he became very hungry and wanted to eat; but while they made ready, he fell into a trance ¹¹ and saw heaven opened and an object like a great sheet bound at the four corners, descending to him and let down to the earth.
7. Acts 10:40-41 Him God raised up on the third day, and showed Him openly, ⁴¹ not to all the people, but to witnesses chosen before by God, *even* to us who ate and drank with Him after He arose from the dead.
8. Acts 11:1-3 Now the apostles and brethren who were in Judea heard that the Gentiles had also received the word of God. ² And when Peter came up to Jerusalem, those of the circumcision contended with him, ³ saying, "You went in to uncircumcised men and ate with them!"
9. Acts 11:27-30 And in these days prophets came from Jerusalem to Antioch. ²⁸ Then one of them, named Agabus, stood up and showed by the Spirit that there was going to be a great famine throughout all the world, which also happened in the days of Claudius Caesar. ²⁹ Then the disciples, each according to his ability, determined to send relief to the brethren dwelling in Judea. ³⁰ This they also did, and sent it to the elders by the hands of Barnabas and Saul. (See also Acts 12:25)
10. Acts 12:20 Now Herod had been very angry with the people of Tyre and Sidon; but they came to him with one accord, and having made Blastus the king's personal aide their friend, they asked for peace, because their country was supplied with food by the king's *country*.
11. Acts 14:17 Nevertheless He did not leave Himself without witness, in that He did good, gave us rain from heaven and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness."
12. Acts 16:32-34 Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house. ³³ And he took them the same hour of the night and washed *their* stripes. And immediately he and all his family were baptized. ³⁴ Now when he had brought them into his house, he set food before them; and he rejoiced, having believed in God with all his household.
13. Acts 18:1-4 After these things Paul departed from Athens and went to Corinth. ² And he found a certain Jew named Aquila, born in Pontus, who had recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla (because Claudius had commanded all the Jews to depart from Rome); and he came to them. ³ So, because he was of the same trade, he stayed with them and worked; for by occupation they were

tentmakers. ⁴ And he reasoned in the synagogue every Sabbath, and persuaded both Jews and Greeks.

14. Acts 20:7-11 Now on the first *day* of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul, ready to depart the next day, spoke to them and continued his message until midnight. ⁸ There were many lamps in the upper room where they were gathered together. ⁹ And in a window sat a certain young man named Eutychus, who was sinking into a deep sleep. He was overcome by sleep; and as Paul continued speaking, he fell down from the third story and was taken up dead. ¹⁰ But Paul went down, fell on him, and embracing *him* said, "Do not trouble yourselves, for his life is in him." ¹¹ Now when he had come up, had broken bread and eaten, and talked a long while, even till daybreak, he departed.
15. Acts 23:12-14 And when it was day, some of the Jews banded together and bound themselves under an oath, saying that they would neither eat nor drink till they had killed Paul. ¹³ Now there were more than forty who had formed this conspiracy. ¹⁴ They came to the chief priests and elders, and said, "We have bound ourselves under a great oath that we will eat nothing until we have killed Paul.
16. Acts 24:22-23 But when Felix heard these things, having more accurate knowledge of *the Way*, he adjourned the proceedings and said, "When Lysias the commander comes down, I will make a decision on your case." ²³ So he commanded the centurion to keep Paul and to let *him* have liberty, and told him not to forbid any of his friends to provide for or visit him.
17. Acts 27:21-26 But after long abstinence from food, then Paul stood in the midst of them and said, "Men, you should have listened to me, and not have sailed from Crete and incurred this disaster and loss. ²² And now I urge you to take heart, for there will be no loss of life among you, but only of the ship. ²³ For there stood by me this night an angel of the God to whom I belong and whom I serve, ²⁴ saying, "Do not be afraid, Paul; you must be brought before Caesar; and indeed God has granted you all those who sail with you." ²⁵ Therefore take heart, men, for I believe God that it will be just as it was told me. ²⁶ However, we must run aground on a certain island."
18. Acts 27:33-38 And as day was about to dawn, Paul implored *them* all to take food, saying, "Today is the fourteenth day you have waited and continued without food, and eaten nothing. ³⁴ Therefore I urge you to take nourishment, for this is for your survival, since not a hair will fall from the head of any of you." ³⁵ And when he had said these things, he took bread and gave thanks to God in the presence of them all; and when he had broken *it* he began to eat. ³⁶ Then they were all encouraged, and also took food themselves. ³⁷ And in all we were two hundred and seventy-six persons on the ship. ³⁸ So when they had eaten enough, they lightened the ship and threw out the wheat into the sea.
19. Acts 28:7-10 In that region there was an estate of the leading citizen of the island, whose name was Publius, who received us and entertained us courteously for three days. ⁸ And it happened that the father of Publius lay sick of a fever and dysentery. Paul went in to him and prayed, and he laid his hands on him and healed him. ⁹ So when this was done, the rest of those on the island who had diseases also came and were healed. ¹⁰ They also honored us in many ways; and when we departed, they provided such things as were necessary.
20. Acts 28:30-31 Then Paul dwelt two whole years in his own rented house, and received all who came to him, ³¹ preaching the kingdom of God and teaching the things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ with all confidence, no one forbidding him.

I urge you to familiarize yourself with the full context of each of the above references from the book of Acts. When you do you will discover that most are in the context of very active and powerful displays of ministry, and the provision of food and shelter

needed to continue and fulfill the ministry of Jesus Christ. For example, the two references in Acts 2 and 4 reveal this truth:

- Acts 2:40-43 And with many other words he testified and exhorted them, saying, “Be saved from this perverse generation.”⁴¹ Then those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them.⁴² And they continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers.⁴³ Then fear came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles.
- Acts 4:33 And with great power the apostles gave witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And great grace was upon them all.

It appears that the provision of food and shelter was there. Apparently, they did not pray a lot for provision because you will not find much evidence of them doing that in the Early Church. They prayed for and ministered the power of the Holy Spirit, boldness, and miracles of healing and deliverance but not often for provision (Acts 4:29-31). The continual ministry of Jesus in the power of the Holy Spirit was the overwhelming priority of the Early Church. They must have had so much confidence in the Lord to provide because the Scriptures point to the fact that food and shelter were there despite the level of persecution. The provision followed or accompanied the ministry. This should greatly encourage you and all believers in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Houses of Provision

The mission instructions Jesus gave the 12 and also the 70 confirm that God has houses of provision in every place.

- Luke 9:3-4 And He said to them, “Take nothing for the journey, neither staffs nor bag nor bread nor money; and do not have two tunics apiece.”⁴ “Whatever house you enter, stay there, and from there depart. (See also Mark 6:7-12)
- Luke 10:4-9 Carry neither money bag, knapsack, nor sandals; and greet no one along the road.⁵ But whatever house you enter, first say, “Peace to this house.”⁶ And if a son of peace is there, your peace will rest on it; if not, it will return to you.⁷ And remain in the same house, eating and drinking such things as they give, for the laborer is worthy of his wages. Do not go from house to house.⁸ Whatever city you enter, and they receive you, eat such things as are set before you.⁹ And heal the sick there, and say to them, “The kingdom of God has come near to you.”

We need to understand that in addition to giving them power and authority to heal the sick, cast out demons, and preach, Jesus sent them out **as lambs among wolves** (Luke 10:3). This means He sent them to places of impending persecution. Even today the ripest harvest of souls is found among the poorest of the poor. However, it is remarkable that Jesus Christ told them not to bring any money with them because He had a house that would provide food, water, and shelter for them.

The apostles and the Early Church followed the instructions of Jesus not only in ministry, but also regarding provision. How did they handle things when it came to food and other necessities of life? Let’s look more closely at the biblical descriptions to see

how the believers supplied each other with the necessities of life in the midst of severe persecution.

Description	Meaning
Had all things in common (Acts 2:44; 4:34). Nor did anyone say that any of the things he possessed was his own (Acts 4:34).	A unity and fellowship in Christ where possessions were freely shared. The sharing was spontaneous and voluntary under the direction of the Holy Spirit. It was not forced. Believers had the mindset of Christ in giving.
Sold their possessions and goods (Acts 2:45). For all who were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the proceeds of the things that were sold, ³⁵ and laid <i>them</i> at the apostles' feet (Acts 4:34-36; 5:1-11).	For some this involved land or property. For others it was food and supplies that could be moved. Sometimes believers who owned land or property would sell it and bring the finances to the apostles. All or a portion of the sale of the property to be given was up to the owner. Some gave all and others gave a portion. Believers were encouraged.
Divided them among all, as anyone who had need (Acts 2:45) Distributed to each as anyone had need (Acts 4:35)	Food and other necessities were given to those who were in greatest need. Believers shared in this way and the Apostles also participated in this distribution.
Nor was there anyone among them who lacked (Acts 4:34)	No one was deficient of food and necessities among the believers.
Breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people (Acts 2:46-47)	Sharing of food occurred from house to house. There was abounding joy with praise to the Lord when they partook of food together.

The above descriptions represent how the primitive church functioned in regard to food and provisions in the midst of persecution. There was the highest level of generosity among believers. This was evidenced from house to house in the Early Church. This level of generosity in sharing food and goods with one another needs to be restored today among believers. The Persecuted Church should do exactly what the believers in the Early Church did. What the examples in the Early Church show us is that the church today has the capacity in Christ to adequately provide food and the other necessities of life for each other no matter the level of persecution.

Prophetic Preparation

The Bible has much to say regarding times of food scarcity and economic hardships. Paul and Barnabas had to remind the idolatrous people of Lystra that it was God who ***gave us rain from heaven and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness*** (Acts 14:17). Even then they barely prevented the people from offering sacrifices to them following the miracle healing of one cripple (Acts 14:18). Although God provides rain, fruitful seasons, and food supplies to mankind, there are also seasons of famine and extreme hardships. How do you view these seasons? Paul viewed his sufficiency in Christ alone when it came to his material needs. For example, he appreciated and was thankful for things he received from the Philippian Church, but he did not waver in his trust and reliance on Christ's sufficiency regardless of life's circumstances.

- Phil. 4:10-20 But I rejoiced in the Lord greatly that now at last your care for me has flourished again; though you surely did care, but you lacked opportunity. ¹¹ Not that I speak in regard to need, for I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content: ¹² I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. ¹³ I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me. ¹⁴ Nevertheless you have done well that you shared in my distress. ¹⁵ Now you Philippians know also that in the beginning of the gospel, when I departed from Macedonia, no church shared with me concerning giving and receiving but you only. ¹⁶ For even in Thessalonica you sent *aid* once and again for my necessities. ¹⁷ Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the fruit that abounds to your account. ¹⁸ Indeed I have all and abound. I am full, having received from Epaphroditus the things *sent* from you, a sweet-smelling aroma, an acceptable sacrifice, well pleasing to God. ¹⁹ And my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus. ²⁰ Now to our God and Father *be* glory forever and ever. Amen.

There are some very familiar verses that we often quote in the above account. However, the full context gives us important direction for all the seasons of life. Paul had a remarkable and unwavering approach to life's circumstances that was shared by the Apostles and the Early Church. They were content no matter their situation. How can you be content in times of persecution when food is scarce and daily life is very difficult?

"The key to contentment is realizing that God has given you in your present circumstances everything you need to endure, grow closer to him and remain victorious in your relationship with Christ (1Cor. 15:57; 2Cor. 2:14; 1Jn. 5:4). The ability to live steadily and triumphantly above changing circumstances comes from Christ's power flowing in and through you (v. 13). This ability does not come naturally, however; it must be learned and developed through dependence on and obedience to Christ."²⁹

"Paul emphasizes the loving care of God the Father for his children. As you remain faithful to God and willing to share what he has given you to help meet others' needs, God also will meet all your needs (material, physical, and spiritual) as you turn them over to him. Notice that in this context it is the Philippians' faithfulness to help others that brings God's blessing into their own lives."³⁰

The bottom line is that your joy, like Paul's, is not based upon the measure of your material needs. But there's a famine in the land! Our persecutors are starving us! Our lives are too difficult! The Bible reveals that God raises up prophets in such times.

The church today lacks what I call a *prophetic preparation* for times of persecution, famine, and the like, where daily life and food supplies are depleted. For example, Joseph interpreted Pharaoh's dreams revealing prophetically the coming of seven years of plenty followed by seven years of famine and great trouble in the land. God's wisdom was activated through Joseph to prepare for this situation. Just think of this for a moment. Without the preparation under divine guidance in this time of severe food scarcity and economic hardships seventy of God's chosen people including Jacob and the fathers of the twelve tribes of Israel would have perished. This demonstrates the high value God places on the remnant of His people. This is why the remnant

²⁹ Fire Bible Global Study Edition (2009). *I Have Learned to be Content*. Life Publishers, Springfield, MO. p. 2284, note 4:11.

³⁰ Ibid. p. 2284-85, note 4:19.

among His people today need to pay attention to prophetic announcements of what lies ahead. Although drought and famine can be used by God to humble nations that have forsaken Him, He also hears the prayers of the prophets in such times. Remember, the prophet Elijah after the shakedown with the false prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel prayed until a cloud appeared like a man's hand with rain. The power of God came upon Elijah who ran ahead of King Ahab's chariot like a supernatural marathon runner for almost 25 miles (40 kilometers).

- **1Kings 18:41-46** Then Elijah said to Ahab, "Go up, eat and drink; for *there is* the sound of abundance of rain." ⁴² So Ahab went up to eat and drink. And Elijah went up to the top of Carmel; then he bowed down on the ground, and put his face between his knees, ⁴³ and said to his servant, "Go up now, look toward the sea." So he went up and looked, and said, "*There is nothing.*" And seven times he said, "Go again." ⁴⁴ Then it came to pass the seventh *time*, that he said, "There is a cloud, as small as a man's hand, rising out of the sea!" So he said, "Go up, say to Ahab, 'Prepare *your chariot*, and go down before the rain stops you.'" ⁴⁵ Now it happened in the meantime that the sky became black with clouds and wind, and there was a heavy rain. So Ahab rode away and went to Jezreel. ⁴⁶ Then the hand of the LORD came upon Elijah; and he girded up his loins and ran ahead of Ahab to the entrance of Jezreel.

The same power of God is available to the new generation church in the midst of persecution even when it involves food shortages. You can run ahead of things in the power that comes from above. How can you do this? Let's look at an example in the Early Church where prophetic preparation brought relief.

The number of disciples multiplied in the Jerusalem Church in the midst of severe persecution. Stephen was stoned after his thorough preaching of the history of God's dealing with Israel leading up to Christ's death and resurrection. He was full of the Holy Spirit, and he saw an open heaven.

- **Acts 7:54-60** When they heard these things they were cut to the heart, and they gnashed at him with *their teeth*. ⁵⁵ But he, being full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God, ⁵⁶ and said, "Look! I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!" ⁵⁷ Then they cried out with a loud voice, stopped their ears, and ran at him with one accord; ⁵⁸ and they cast *him* out of the city and stoned *him*. And the witnesses laid down their clothes at the feet of a young man named Saul. ⁵⁹ And they stoned Stephen as he was calling on *God* and saying, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." ⁶⁰ Then he knelt down and cried out with a loud voice, "Lord, do not charge them with this sin." And when he had said this, he fell asleep.

Notice Stephen sees Jesus standing and makes sure his persecutors know this. It is very significant that these are the only references of Jesus standing at God's right hand in heaven. Jesus sits at the right hand of God in all other references, but in this one case He is standing. And it is in relation to severe persecution. You must know that you have the full attention of heaven in every situation of persecution. Now what follows is also of great importance. Remember, they placed Stephen's clothes **at the feet of a young man named Saul**. He agreed with Stephen's death and became the most zealous persecutor of the church.

- Acts 8:1-4 Now Saul was consenting to his death. At that time a great persecution arose against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles. ² And devout men carried Stephen *to his burial*, and made great lamentation over him. ³ As for Saul, he made havoc of the church, entering every house, and dragging off men and women, committing *them* to prison. ⁴ Therefore those who were scattered went everywhere preaching the word.

The above verses confirm the severity of the persecution in Jerusalem, but it also bears witness to the perseverance and determination of the believers to preach Christ in every place. Some of those who were scattered after the stoning of Stephen came to Antioch where a church was established that would become a great mission church.

- Acts 11:19-26 Now those who were scattered after the persecution that arose over Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch, preaching the word to no one but the Jews only. ²⁰ But some of them were men from Cyprus and Cyrene, who, when they had come to Antioch, spoke to the Hellenists, preaching the Lord Jesus. ²¹ And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number believed and turned to the Lord. ²⁰ Then news of these things came to the ears of the church in Jerusalem, and they sent out Barnabas to go as far as Antioch. ²³ When he came and had seen the grace of God, he was glad, and encouraged them all that with purpose of heart they should continue with the Lord. ²⁴ For he was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith. And a great many people were added to the Lord. ²⁵ Then Barnabas departed for Tarsus to seek Saul. ²⁶ And when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch. So it was that for a whole year they assembled with the church and taught a great many people. And the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch.

Saul, the great persecutor of the church, had now become a preacher of the One he had been persecuting. His name was Jesus. So, Barnabas brings Saul to Antioch where they spend a year teaching the people. It is the first mention of disciples being called Christians. The Jerusalem Church had sent Barnabas and now they send prophets to the church at Antioch.

- Acts 11:27-30 And in these days prophets came from Jerusalem to Antioch. ²⁸ Then one of them, named Agabus, stood up and showed by the Spirit that there was going to be a great famine throughout all the world, which also happened in the days of Claudius Caesar. ²⁹ Then the disciples, each according to his ability, determined to send relief to the brethren dwelling in Judea. ³⁰ This they also did, and sent it to the elders by the hands of Barnabas and Saul.

The above account reveals the prophetic preparation and action that is needed in times of food shortages and economic hardships. For the most part, this is lacking in the church today. The first assignment given to Barnabas and Saul from Antioch was the collection for food relief. But look more closely at the prophecy delivered by Agabus. The famine was going to be great and worldwide. However, the relief was ***to the brethren dwelling in Judea***. This was strategic giving directed to brothers and sisters in Christ in a specific region of the world that would face food shortages and many economic difficulties. We need to learn much from this example about prophetic preparation and action.

1. Prophetic preparation and action are strategically targeted for brothers and sisters in Christ who are most affected by food shortages in persecuted areas.

2. Prophetic preparation and action involve the collection of the saints and its delivery by trustworthy servants of the Lord.
3. Prophetic preparation and action are according to one's level of prosperity or ability.
4. Prophetic preparation and action are in accordance with New Testament giving principles. (See Appendix 3).

Barnabas and Saul completed their assignment. The collection for the saints was successful and the relief for the brethren in Judea was completed.

- **Acts 12:25** And Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem when they had fulfilled *their* ministry, and they also took with them John whose surname was Mark.

They fulfilled their assignment to collect relief for the brothers and sisters in Judea. However, Paul had to exhort the Corinthian Church to participate in the collection for the saints.

- **1Cor. 16:1-2** Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given orders to the churches of Galatia, so you must do also: ² On the first *day* of the week let each one of you lay something aside, storing up as he may prosper, that there be no collections when I come.
- **2Cor. 8:1-7** Moreover, brethren, we make known to you the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia: ² that in a great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded in the riches of their liberality. ³ For I bear witness that according to *their* ability, yes, and beyond *their* ability, *they were* freely willing, ⁴ imploring us with much urgency that we would receive the gift and the fellowship of the ministering to the saints. ⁵ And not *only* as we had hoped, but they first gave themselves to the Lord, and *then* to us by the will of God. ⁶ So we urged Titus, that as he had begun, so he would also complete this grace in you as well. ⁷ But as you abound in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in all diligence, and in your love for us—see that you abound in this grace also.
- **2Cor. 9:1-6** Now concerning the ministering to the saints, it is superfluous for me to write to you; ² for I know your willingness, about which I boast of you to the Macedonians, that Achaia was ready a year ago; and your zeal has stirred up the majority. ³ Yet I have sent the brethren, lest our boasting of you should be in vain in this respect, that, as I said, you may be ready; ⁴ lest if *some* Macedonians come with me and find you unprepared, we (not to mention you!) should be ashamed of this confident boasting. ⁵ Therefore I thought it necessary to exhort the brethren to go to you ahead of time, and prepare your generous gift beforehand, which *you had* previously promised, that it may be ready as *a matter of generosity* and not as a grudging obligation.

What do you see in the above exhortations? One thing is that all the churches were instructed to give toward the collection for the Judean saints in response to the prophetic warning. This involved preparation for this divine assignment by laying something aside beforehand. Paul also highlights the giving example of the other churches in Macedonia and Achaia. What was the situation of these churches.

“The Macedonian churches had been persecuted since their founding. See Acts 16-17; Phil. 1:28-30; 1Thess. 1:6. They were also financially poor, yet they had great joy and liberality in giving.³¹”

³¹ Spirit Filled Life Bible. Study Note 8:2 Trial, p. 1684.

The context for the giving was **deep poverty** and **great trial of affliction** (2Cor. 8:2). And yet they gave willingly and beyond their ability (2Cor. 8:3). Please understand that the Corinthian believers abounded in faith and everything else but not so much in the collection for the saints in Judea. Apparently, they had promised to participate but were unprepared to follow through with their promise. Although they had zeal to give that stirred up the majority, they were unprepared to complete what they had promised. Therefore, Paul and his fellow worker, Titus, pointed them to Christ's pattern and advised them that it would be to their advantage to complete the giving they had promised. The full context of what they shared is profitable for our instruction.

- 2Cor. 8:8-24 I speak not by commandment, but I am testing the sincerity of your love by the diligence of others. ⁹ For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich. ¹⁰ And in this I give advice: It is to your advantage not only to be doing what you began and were desiring to do a year ago; ¹¹ but now you also must complete the doing of it; that as *there was* a readiness to desire it, so *there also may be* a completion out of what you have. ¹² For if there is first a willing mind, *it is* accepted according to what one has, *and* not according to what he does not have. ¹³ For *I do not mean* that others should be eased and you burdened; ¹⁴ but by an equality, *that* now at this time your abundance *may supply* their lack, that their abundance also may supply your lack—that there may be equality. ¹⁵ As it is written, “*He who gathered much had nothing left over, and he who gathered little had no lack.*” ¹⁶ But thanks be to God who puts the same earnest care for you into the heart of Titus. ¹⁷ For he not only accepted the exhortation, but being more diligent, he went to you of his own accord. ¹⁸ And we have sent with him the brother whose praise *is* in the gospel throughout all the churches, ¹⁹ and not only *that*, but who was also chosen by the churches to travel with us with this gift, which is administered by us to the glory of the Lord Himself and *to show your ready mind*, ²⁰ avoiding this: that anyone should blame us in this lavish gift which is administered by us— ²¹ providing honorable things, not only in the sight of the Lord, but also in the sight of men. ²² And we have sent with them our brother whom we have often proved diligent in many things, but now much more diligent, because of the great confidence which *we have* in you. ²³ If *anyone inquires* about Titus, *he is* my partner and fellow worker concerning you. Or if our brethren *are inquired about*, *they are* messengers of the churches, the glory of Christ. ²⁴ Therefore show to them, and before the churches, the proof of your love and of our boasting on your behalf.

What would you do with such an exhortation today? Would you accept it? Would you give willingly? Would you prepare beforehand? What advice would you give others regarding participation in a collection for the saints?

Prophetic assignments dealing with food scarcity are just as important today than they were in the Early Church. Is the church today willing to fulfill the mission to bring targeted relief to our brothers and sisters in Christ? Or is the church going to continue to use most of its resources on land and church buildings? I believe God will raise up prophets like Elijah and Agabus in the new generation church who will warn the body of Christ of coming famines, pestilences, and the like because we are living in difficult times. All churches large and small, rich and poor, safe and persecuted in this generation must **remember the words of Jesus when He said, “It is more blessed to give than to receive”** (Acts 20:35).

Miracle Provision

Dealing with food scarcity and economic hardships presents much pressure and anxiety among believers. Life becomes extremely difficult under such circumstances. The situation should not be taken lightly. The body of Christ should be active in this regard like the Early Church. Likewise, they should prepare when the prophets forewarn of what lies ahead. In addition, the persecuted church needs to understand that our God is a miracle working God. He can and will provide a miracle multiplication of food on occasion. How do you know this? Because He has done it before! Let's look at some biblical examples.

The Bible is filled with many accounts of miracles. A number of them deal with miracle provision for God's people. For example, the church in the wilderness received manna or angel's food. Each day this special food supply from heaven fell to the ground where it was gathered under divine instructions. Just meditate on this for a moment: **Men ate angels' food. He sent them food to the full** (Psalm 78:25). God literally rained **the bread of heaven** down on them (Psalm 78:24). They did not need any bread because they had angel's food. God also provided water and meat for His people during the forty years in the wilderness. Here is the testimony of the Psalmist David:

- **Psa. 78:14-29** In the daytime also He led them with the cloud, And all the night with a light of fire. ¹⁵ He split the rocks in the wilderness, And gave *them* drink in abundance like the depths. ¹⁶ He also brought streams out of the rock, And caused waters to run down like rivers. ¹⁷ But they sinned even more against Him By rebelling against the Most High in the wilderness. ¹⁸ And they tested God in their heart By asking for the food of their fancy. ¹⁹ Yes, they spoke against God: They said, "Can God prepare a table in the wilderness? ²⁰ Behold, He struck the rock, So that the waters gushed out, And the streams overflowed. Can He give bread also? Can He provide meat for His people?" ²¹ Therefore the LORD heard *this* and was furious; So a fire was kindled against Jacob, And anger also came up against Israel, ²² Because they did not believe in God, And did not trust in His salvation. ²³ Yet He had commanded the clouds above, And opened the doors of heaven, ²⁴ Had rained down manna on them to eat, And given them of the bread of heaven. ²⁵ Men ate angels' food; He sent them food to the full. ²⁶ He caused an east wind to blow in the heavens; And by His power He brought in the south wind. ²⁷ He also rained meat on them like the dust, Feathered fowl like the sand of the seas; ²⁸ And He let *them* fall in the midst of their camp, All around their dwellings. ²⁹ So they ate and were well filled, For He gave them their own desire.

The above is just one of several reminders for God's people to have faith in Him for miracle provision. The supply from heaven was by God's power. It is important to review the realities for how God provided for His people in the wilderness because you need confidence in the Lord during times of persecution. How did the church in the wilderness survive? They survived because God miraculously provided for them. Did you know that their clothes and shoes did not wear out? Moses reminded the people of this along with many other things:

- **Deut. 29:2-13** Now Moses called all Israel and said to them: "You have seen all that the LORD did before your eyes in the land of Egypt, to Pharaoh and to all his servants and to all his land— ³ the great trials which your eyes have seen, the signs, and those great wonders. ⁴ Yet the LORD has not

given you a heart to perceive and eyes to see and ears to hear, to this *very day*.⁵ And I have led you forty years in the wilderness. Your clothes have not worn out on you, and your sandals have not worn out on your feet.⁶ You have not eaten bread, nor have you drunk wine or *similar* drink, that you may know that I *am* the LORD your God.⁷ And when you came to this place, Sihon king of Heshbon and Og king of Bashan came out against us to battle, and we conquered them.⁸ We took their land and gave it as an inheritance to the Reubenites, to the Gadites, and to half the tribe of Manasseh.⁹ Therefore keep the words of this covenant, and do them, that you may prosper in all that you do.¹⁰ “All of you stand today before the LORD your God: your leaders and your tribes and your elders and your officers, all the men of Israel,¹¹ your little ones and your wives—also the stranger who *is* in your camp, from the one who cuts your wood to the one who draws your water—¹² that you may enter into covenant with the LORD your God, and into His oath, which the LORD your God makes with you today,¹³ that He may establish you today as a people for Himself, and *that* He may be God to you, just as He has spoken to you, and just as He has sworn to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

You need to understand that you like the church in the wilderness are in a covenant relationship with God today through the shed blood of Jesus Christ. How will you survive persecution? Where will your food and other necessities of life come from? There is miracle provision available for you! Consider the prophet Elijah who prophesied a drought in the land and was all alone in a cave because of the persecution of Jezebel.

- 1Kings 17:1-6 And Elijah the Tishbite, of the inhabitants of Gilead, said to Ahab, “As the LORD God of Israel lives, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years, except at my word.”² Then the word of the LORD came to him, saying,³ “Get away from here and turn eastward, and hide by the Brook Cherith, which flows into the Jordan.⁴ And it will be *that* you shall drink from the brook, and I have commanded the ravens to feed you there.”⁵ So he went and did according to the word of the LORD, for he went and stayed by the Brook Cherith, which flows into the Jordan.⁶ The ravens brought him bread and meat in the morning, and bread and meat in the evening; and he drank from the brook.
- 1Kings 19:4-8 But he himself went a day’s journey into the wilderness, and came and sat down under a broom tree. And he prayed that he might die, and said, “It is enough! Now, LORD, take my life, for I *am* no better than my fathers!”⁵ Then as he lay and slept under a broom tree, suddenly an angel touched him, and said to him, “Arise *and* eat.”⁶ Then he looked, and there by his head *was* a cake baked on coals, and a jar of water. So he ate and drank, and lay down again.⁷ And the angel of the LORD came back the second time, and touched him, and said, “Arise *and* eat, because the journey *is* too great for you.”⁸ So he arose, and ate and drank; and he went in the strength of that food forty days and forty nights as far as Horeb, the mountain of God.

Would the same God do any less for you? Birds fed the servant of God. Two times an angel came, baked a cake, and provided a jar of water to Elijah. And, ***He went in the strength of that food forty days and forty nights.*** This was during times of severe drought and persecution. God will miraculously provide for the persecuted church today. Do you believe it? Do you expect it? You may be asking what about my family hiding in the hills of another nation due to persecution. Consider the widow and her son when Elijah approached her for food and water. And also Elijah’s spiritual son, Elisha, in a similar situation.

- **1Kings 17:12-16** So she said, “As the LORD your God lives, I do not have bread, only a handful of flour in a bin, and a little oil in a jar; and see, I *am* gathering a couple of sticks that I may go in and prepare it for myself and my son, that we may eat it, and die.” ¹³ And Elijah said to her, “Do not fear; go *and* do as you have said, but make me a small cake from it first, and bring *it* to me; and afterward make *some* for yourself and your son. ¹⁴ For thus says the LORD God of Israel: “The bin of flour shall not be used up, nor shall the jar of oil run dry, until the day the LORD sends rain on the earth.” ¹⁵ So she went away and did according to the word of Elijah; and she and he and her household ate for *many* days. ¹⁶ The bin of flour was not used up, nor did the jar of oil run dry, according to the word of the LORD which He spoke by Elijah.
- **2Kings 4:1** A certain woman of the wives of the sons of the prophets cried out to Elisha, saying, “Your servant my husband is dead, and you know that your servant feared the LORD. And the creditor is coming to take my two sons to be his slaves.” ² So Elisha said to her, “What shall I do for you? Tell me, what do you have in the house?” And she said, “Your maidservant has nothing in the house but a jar of oil.” ³ Then he said, “Go, borrow vessels from everywhere, from all your neighbors—empty vessels; do not gather just a few. ⁴ And when you have come in, you shall shut the door behind you and your sons; then pour it into all those vessels, and set aside the full ones.” ⁵ So she went from him and shut the door behind her and her sons, who brought *the vessels* to her; and she poured *it* out. ⁶ Now it came to pass, when the vessels were full, that she said to her son, “Bring me another vessel.” And he said to her, “*There is* not another vessel.” So the oil ceased. ⁷ Then she came and told the man of God. And he said, “Go, sell the oil and pay your debt; and you *and* your sons live on the rest.”

These examples confirm that miracle provision is available to you in the most difficult times and places. Confidence in God’s provision in persecution must increase in this generation. Spiritual fathers need to teach and strengthen the faith in spiritual sons and daughters for miracle provision in the days of growing persecution that lies ahead.

Miracle provision was also a part of the ministry of Jesus. Remember, how He fed the 5000 and also the 4000 from a very limited amount of food. And yet everyone ate their full. There were certain amounts of food left over revealing a spiritual warning to beware of the leaven or doctrine of the Pharisees and Sadducees (Matt. 16:5-12). You can learn much from the miraculous multiplication of food when Jesus fed the multitudes. If you have faith and believe that nothing is impossible for God and the situation of persecution has deprived the saints of food, then God can do it again. If He sent ravens to bring food to a prophet, if He prevented the flour and oil from being depleted for a widow and her son, then He can do it for the persecuted church filled with saints being deprived of food today. Let’s take a closer look at the two accounts of Jesus feeding the multitudes. The following chart contrasts these two events where miracle provision is demonstrated by the hand of the Lord.

Feeding the 5000 (Matt. 14:13-21; Mark 6:30-44; Luke 9:10-17; John 6:5-14)	Feeding the 4000 (Matt. 15:32-39; Mark 8:1-10)
Bethsaida	Decapolis
Sat on the grass	Sat on the ground
Jesus desired to rest before	Jesus was traveling before
A storm came afterward	No storm mentioned
Multitudes came from nearby	Multitudes came from a long distance

Ministry in mostly Jewish territories	Ministry in mostly Gentile territories
5000 fed besides women and children	4000 fed besides women and children
Multitudes been with Jesus 1 day	Multitudes been with Jesus 3 days
Disciples did not have enough money	Disciples cannot find enough money
Disciples used a hand basket	Disciples used a big basket
12 baskets left over	7 baskets left over
Feeding found in all the Gospels	Feeding found only in two of the Gospels

Have you ever experienced the miraculous multiplication and distribution of food demonstrated in the above accounts? God used 5-Fold Global in 2013 to raise funds to purchase rice, beans, and some cooking oil for 100 families in the Wudu Village area of Kajo Keji County in South Sudan as persecution and civil unrest loomed over the region. Although we did our best, it fell far short of what was needed. Instead of being disappointed, we thanked God for what we had and prayed for Him to use and multiply it for His glory. The miracle report that all families received what they needed brought great joy to us and we glorified the Lord. The Lord brought forth miracle provision!

Use what is in your hands when facing food shortages in difficult times of persecution. Jesus thanked God and prayed over extremely limited provisions. You need to do the same. Have confidence in God for provision. And, when it comes to dealing with food shortages and economic hardships, you need to move out in faith. Be confident and joyful in sharing with your brothers and sisters from house to house what you have, in responding to prophetic warnings of coming famines and persecutions, and in the availability of miracle provision in the wilderness.

Teaching Session 9: Revival Fire and the Persecuted Church

Samuel J. Isong

Persecution Cannot Stop the Spread of the Gospel

- Matt. 5:10-12 KJV 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. 10:23 KJV But when they persecute you in this city, flee ye into another...

A careful study of persecution in the Early Church shows that persecution could not stop the spread of the gospel. Instead, it fueled the fire of revival that resulted in the rapid growth of the gospel and the church into Judea, Samaria, and the uttermost part of the earth. In modern times and even until today it remains the same. Let's look at what revival fire did in the Early Church in the midst of persecution.

The Journey of the Gospel by Revival Fire Due to Persecution

Remember Jesus pictured the progressive geographical and cultural extension of the gospel in verse 8 of the first chapter of Acts.

- Acts 1:8 KJV But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.

Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, the end of the earth. How was this achieved?

1. **The Holy Spirit** came upon the disciples.

Acts 2:1-4 When the Day of Pentecost had fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. ² And suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. ³ Then there appeared to them divided tongues, as of fire, and *one* sat upon each of them. ⁴ And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.

2. **Jerusalem** - 3000 souls were saved at a moment. The next 5000, and then the multitude of believers.

- Acts 2:40-41 And with many other words he testified and exhorted them, saying, "Be saved from this perverse generation." ⁴¹ Then those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added *to them*.
- Acts 4:4 However, many of those who heard the word believed; and the number of the men came to be about five thousand.
- Acts 6:7 Then the word of God spread, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were obedient to the faith.

3. **Judea** - There was great persecution in Jerusalem. Saul led a persecution movement that scattered the believers to Judea. Many Jews became disciples of Christ. These Jews were of the same culture as the Jews in Galilee and Jerusalem.
- Acts 8:1 Now Saul was consenting to his death. At that time a great persecution arose against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles.
 - Acts 8:4 Therefore those who were scattered went everywhere preaching the word.
4. **Samaria** - Also received a great influx of believers (Acts 8:1). In Samaria Philip filled with the Holy Spirit and fire, preached and there was a great revival. Many were saved and became disciples of Christ (Acts 8:4-8). Then the gospel crossed the religious barrier between Jews and Samaritans. Peter and John, the senior Apostles from Jerusalem, visited the Samaritan believers who were also filled with the Holy Spirit. (Acts 8:9-25). Here you can see how persecution in Jerusalem caused this scattering into Samaria. The gospel broke the cultural barrier, resulting in leaders from the Jewish culture crossing into the Samaritan culture - the first cross cultural evangelism of the Church.
- Acts 8:4-8 Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria and preached Christ to them. ⁶ And the multitudes with one accord heeded the things spoken by Philip, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did. ⁷ For unclean spirits, crying with a loud voice, came out of many who were possessed; and many who were paralyzed and lame were healed. ⁸ And there was great joy in that city.
 - Acts 8:9-25 But there was a certain man called Simon, who previously practiced sorcery in the city and astonished the people of Samaria, claiming that he was someone great, ¹⁰ to whom they all gave heed, from the least to the greatest, saying, "This man is the great power of God." ¹¹ And they heeded him because he had astonished them with his sorceries for a long time. ¹² But when they believed Philip as he preached the things concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, both men and women were baptized. ¹³ Then Simon himself also believed; and when he was baptized he continued with Philip, and was amazed, seeing the miracles and signs which were done. ¹⁴ Now when the apostles who were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent Peter and John to them, ¹⁵ who, when they had come down, prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit. ¹⁶ For as yet He had fallen upon none of them. They had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. ¹⁷ Then they laid hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit. ¹⁸ And when Simon saw that through the laying on of the apostles' hands the Holy Spirit was given, he offered them money, ¹⁹ saying, "Give me this power also, that anyone on whom I lay hands may receive the Holy Spirit." ²⁰ But Peter said to him, "Your money perish with you, because you thought that the gift of God could be purchased with money! ²¹ You have neither part nor portion in this matter, for your heart is not right in the sight of God. ²² Repent therefore of this your wickedness, and pray God if perhaps the thought of your heart may be forgiven you. ²³ For I see that you are poisoned by bitterness and bound by iniquity." ²⁴ Then Simon answered and said, "Pray to the Lord for me, that none of the things which you have spoken may come upon me." ²⁵ So when they had

testified and preached the word of the Lord, they returned to Jerusalem, preaching the gospel in many villages of the Samaritans.

Saul planned to extend the persecution to the Jewish believers in Damascus but Jesus encountered him on his way there and Saul was radically converted (Acts 9:1-19). The church throughout Judea, Galilee, and Samaria increased in the power of the Holy Spirit and in the fear of God.

- **Acts 9:31** Then the churches throughout all Judea, Galilee, and Samaria had peace and were edified. And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, they were multiplied.

5. **Ends of the Earth** - Then God gives a vision to Peter to go to Caesarea and preach the gospel to a Gentile centurion and his friends. The Holy Spirit was poured upon the entire house. They all got saved and filled with the Holy Spirit. A controversy arose in Jerusalem about the inclusion of Gentiles, but this was eventually settled and accepted.

- **Acts 10:44-48** While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who heard the word. ⁴⁵ And those of the circumcision who believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out on the Gentiles also. ⁴⁶ For they heard them speak with tongues and magnify God. Then Peter answered, ⁴⁷ “Can anyone forbid water, that these should not be baptized who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?” ⁴⁸ And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord. Then they asked him to stay a few days.
- **Acts 11:18** When they heard these things they became silent; and they glorified God, saying, “Then God has also granted to the Gentiles repentance to life.”

The Explosion of the Gospel Among the Gentiles

Those who had been scattered by the persecution in connection with Stephen's martyrdom, traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch telling the gospel message only to the Jews. However, some of them, men from Cyprus and Cyrene, went to Antioch and began to speak to the Greeks also telling them the Good News about the Lord Jesus. The Lord's hand was with them, and a great number of people believed and turned to the Lord.

- **Acts 11:19-27** Now those who were scattered after the persecution that arose over Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch, preaching the word to no one but the Jews only. ²⁰ But some of them were men from Cyprus and Cyrene, who, when they had come to Antioch, spoke to the Hellenists, preaching the Lord Jesus. ²¹ And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number believed and turned to the Lord. ²² Then news of these things came to the ears of the church in Jerusalem, and they sent out Barnabas to go as far as Antioch. ²³ When he came and had seen the grace of God, he was glad, and encouraged them all that with purpose of heart they should continue with the Lord. ²⁴ For he was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith. And a great many people were added to the Lord. ²⁵ Then Barnabas departed for Tarsus to seek Saul. ²⁶ And when he had

found him, he brought him to Antioch. So it was that for a whole year they assembled with the church and taught a great many people. And the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch.

You can see how the gospel catches fire among Greek speaking Gentiles. Do you see how persecution brought revival fire and brought the gospel to the Gentile world? This is evident from the stoning of Stephen, the killing of James by Herod, and the arrest and imprisonment of Peter.

- **Acts 7:57-60** Then they cried out with a loud voice, stopped their ears, and ran at him with one accord; ⁵⁸ and they cast *him* out of the city and stoned *him*. And the witnesses laid down their clothes at the feet of a young man named Saul. ⁵⁹ And they stoned Stephen as he was calling on God and saying, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." ⁶⁰ Then he knelt down and cried out with a loud voice, "Lord, do not charge them with this sin."

The escape of Peter by the Angel of God as answer to Holy ghost filled prayers by the church, all these acts of persecution exploded the gospel by revival fire of the Holy Spirit. Persecution is not meant to diminish the Gospel but by the Holy Spirit explode the Gospel.

- **Acts 12:1-5** Now about that time Herod the king stretched out *his* hand to harass some from the church. ² Then he killed James the brother of John with the sword. ³ And because he saw that it pleased the Jews, he proceeded further to seize Peter also. Now it was *during* the Days of Unleavened Bread. ⁴ So when he had arrested him, he put *him* in prison, and delivered *him* to four squads of soldiers to keep him, intending to bring him before the people after Passover. ⁵ Peter was therefore kept in prison, but constant prayer was offered to God for him by the church.

The escape of Peter by the Angel of God was an answer to Holy Ghost filled prayers of the church. All these acts of persecution expanded the gospel by revival fire of the Holy Spirit. Although persecution is meant to stop the spread of the gospel, the gospel explodes by the power and fire of Holy Spirit.

Great Lessons for Disciples

There are practical and insightful lessons of how God was working in the Early Church in relation to persecution and revival fire. Barnabas went to Tarsus and brought Saul to help him with the mighty work in Antioch. He had been in Tarsus for almost a decade due to the persecution he faced in chapter 9 of Acts. He continued to be involved in ministry nonstop throughout his life. So, if persecution has slowed you down in any way don't be despaired. God is preparing to use you in a mighty way. Only submit to the Holy Spirit.

- **Acts 11:25-26** Then Barnabas departed for Tarsus to seek Saul. ²⁶ And when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch. So it was that for a whole year they assembled with the church and taught a great many people. And the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch.

Herod Agrippa begins to persecute the church, teaching us that persecution often goes in cycles. We must be ready for when our time comes.

- **Acts 12:1** Now about that time Herod the king stretched out *his* hand to harass some from the church.

One of the inner circle disciples, Apostle James is killed. We learn that none of us is indispensable, God can call any of us home at any time. God has the full knowledge of His timing for us.

- **Acts 12:2-3** Then he killed James the brother of John with the sword. ³ And because he saw that it pleased the Jews, he proceeded further to seize Peter also. Now it was *during* the Days of Unleavened Bread.

Peter's miraculous and amazing deliverance from a very secured jail through the Holy Spirit filled prayers of the Church teaches us that God delivers us from troubles even when our mind is shaking.

- **Acts 12:5-17** Peter was therefore kept in prison, but constant prayer was offered to God for him by the church. ⁶ And when Herod was about to bring him out, that night Peter was sleeping, bound with two chains between two soldiers; and the guards before the door were keeping the prison. ⁷ Now behold, an angel of the Lord stood by *him*, and a light shone in the prison; and he struck Peter on the side and raised him up, saying, "Arise quickly!" And his chains fell off *his* hands. ⁸ Then the angel said to him, "Gird yourself and tie on your sandals"; and so he did. And he said to him, "Put on your garment and follow me." ⁹ So he went out and followed him, and did not know that what was done by the angel was real, but thought he was seeing a vision. ¹⁰ When they were past the first and the second guard posts, they came to the iron gate that leads to the city, which opened to them of its own accord; and they went out and went down one street, and immediately the angel departed from him. ¹¹ And when Peter had come to himself, he said, "Now I know for certain that the Lord has sent His angel, and has delivered me from the hand of Herod and *from* all the expectation of the Jewish people." ¹² So, when he had considered *this*, he came to the house of Mary, the mother of John whose surname was Mark, where many were gathered together praying. ¹³ And as Peter knocked at the door of the gate, a girl named Rhoda came to answer. ¹⁴ When she recognized Peter's voice, because of *her* gladness she did not open the gate, but ran in and announced that Peter stood before the gate. ¹⁵ But they said to her, "You are beside yourself!" Yet she kept insisting that it was so. So they said, "It is his angel." ¹⁶ Now Peter continued knocking; and when they opened *the door* and saw him, they were astonished. ¹⁷ But motioning to them with his hand to keep silent, he declared to them how the Lord had brought him out of the prison. And he said, "Go, tell these things to James and to the brethren." And he departed and went to another place.

Herod Agrippa, the cruel prosecutor, the tyrant, meets his due at the end, being struck down by God in public. Judgement may delay but surely comes in the end.

- **Acts 12:19-23** But when Herod had searched for him and not found him, he examined the guards and commanded that *they* should be put to death. And he went down from Judea to Caesarea, and stayed *there*. ²⁰ Now Herod had been very angry with the people of Tyre and Sidon; but they came to him with one accord, and having made Blastus the king's personal aide their friend, they asked for peace, because their country was supplied with food by the king's *country*. ²¹ So on a set day Herod, arrayed in royal apparel, sat on his throne and gave an oration to them. ²² And the people kept shouting, "The voice of a god and not of a man!" ²³ Then immediately an angel of the Lord struck him, because he did not give glory to God. And he was eaten by worms and died.

In spite of persecution the word of God continued to increase and spread.

- **Acts 12:24** But the word of God grew and multiplied.

Man can persecute and kill God's people but ultimately the gospel will prevail. Tertullian, one of the early church fathers said *the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church*.

In my nation, I have witnessed that killings and the burning of church buildings in intense persecution has fanned the fire for house church. It is bringing the church back to the principle of Christ and the Early Church on house church evangelism. The revival fire and the unity of believers is rekindled. A unity in purpose is restored. This is an answer to the prayer of the Lord Jesus in John 17:21.

- **John 17:21 That they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me.**

There is a mighty revival fire of prayers in my nation due to the deadly persecutions facing us daily. Therefore, do not let persecution weaken or discourage you. Fire on. Go forth and fear no ought. Fight on, onward soldier. Stand firm for Jesus. Lift up His royal banner and let it not suffer loss. From victory to victory His army shall He lead till every foe is vanquished and Christ is Lord indeed. Stand fast and fight on and finish strong.

**Stand up, stand up for Jesus! ye soldiers of the cross;
Lift high His royal banner, it must not suffer loss:
From vict'ry unto vict'ry, His army shall He lead,
Till every foe is vanquished, and Christ is Lord indeed.**

**Stand up, stand up for Jesus! The trumpet call obey:
Forth to the mighty conflict, in this His glorious day;
Ye that are men now serve Him against unnumbered foes;
Let courage rise with danger, and strength to strength oppose.**

**Stand up, stand up for Jesus! Stand in His strength alone,
The arm of flesh will fail you, ye dare not trust your own;
Put on the gospel armor, and watching unto prayer,
Where calls the voice of duty, be never wanting there.**

**Stand up, stand up for Jesus! the strife will not be long;
This day the noise of battle, the next the victor's song;
To him that overcometh a crown of life shall be;
He with the King of glory shall reign eternally.³²**

³² George Duffield (1858). *Stand Up, Stand Up for Jesus*. A Hymn of the Church.

Teaching Session 10: Persecution in the 21st Century

Michael D. Gross

Open Doors Global Statistics 2022

How do you best measure the level of persecution in the world today? Although there are several parachurch ministries focusing on persecution, we have chosen Open Doors USA founded by Brother Andrew for the most reliable information. I believe you will find the following statistics from the Open Doors 2022 World Watch List alarming for the time in which we live:³³

- 360 million out of 2.5 billion Christians around the world suffer high levels of persecution and discrimination for their faith. That is 1 in every 7 Christians worldwide.
- 5,898 Christians were murdered for their faith last year.
- 5,110 churches and Christian buildings were attacked last year.

Open Doors reports that these are *the highest levels since the World Watch List began nearly 30 years ago*.³⁴ Of course Afghanistan is ranked first on the Open Door's 2022 World Watch List (Appendix 2). This country is the most dangerous place for Christians to live. It is so dangerous that Open Doors finds it almost impossible to talk to Christians living in Afghanistan. They give the following report after the Taliban took control of the nation in 2022:

"It's nearly impossible to talk to the few Christians who remain in country, because of the critical risk it could mean to their lives. There are no churches, gatherings, or worship services. Any Christian faith must remain behind closed doors. One slip-up could mean arrest, torture and worse. It has become a hunting ground for Christians."³⁵

It is important for us to understand that Christians all over the world are being persecuted to some degree for their faith in Jesus Christ. Many are in critical situations where they are being pressured and arrested. Others are being tortured and even killed in the time in which we live. Did you know that 8,000 churches have been shut down by the Rwandan government under the guise of poor sanitation and inadequate chairs. Did you know that 73 Christians each day in India are being abused for their faith in Christ? Did you know that every two hours a Christian is killed for their faith in Nigeria? Nigeria is ranked 7th and India 10th on the Open Doors 2022 World Watch List. It is difficult for those of us who are yet to experience such intense sufferings for Christ to identify with the depth and severity of the persecution they are currently experiencing nor the high level of faith they are displaying. Even though 5-Fold Global has done a number of strategic mission operations in these nations in the 21st century, it is still difficult to fully relate to their experience, except by the Spirit. However, Open Doors reminds everyone of some things we all need to realize about the time in which we live:

³³ Open Doors. *World Watch List 2022 Video*. [Open Doors International - Serving Persecuted Christian's Worldwide](#).

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Open Doors. [Afghanistan: How to pray after 1 year of Taliban rule - Open Doors USA - Open Doors USA](#).

“There will be violence in this world until Christ returns for His people. Prayer and our relationship with God is our number one weapon against it. From the jungles of Nigeria to the cities of China to our own homes, God answers prayers all over the world, and He is with His people. Trust He will be with us wherever He would have us go, no matter the persecution, no matter the violence.”³⁶

- **Josh. 1:9 Have I not commanded you? Be strong and of good courage; do not be afraid, nor be dismayed, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go.”**

5-Fold Global Prayer Alerts

5-Fold Global prayer alerts are used to mobilize skilled intercessors around the world for united, strategic, and targeted prayer initiatives. One of our key leaders in a highly persecuted region wrote this:

“I praise God for intercessors. Our God remains in charge. It’s wonderful when the intercessors are alert.”³⁷

The above statement was made during an intense situation of persecution in Nigeria. Just think of this for a moment. Our 5-Fold Global partners in Nigeria are praising God for intercessors. They are saying that they know God is in charge no matter what happens to them when intercessors are alert and praying for them. Although believers dwelling in safety may find it difficult to fully comprehend what our persecuted brothers and sisters are experiencing, they can and should align with them in prayer.

What is God calling you to do in relation to the Persecuted Church? How do you engage in prayer when you receive a call to intercede for those being persecuted for their faith in Jesus Christ? I believe the Holy Spirit will place a burden upon your heart to guide your intercession. He can bring you to the place where you can actually sense what they are experiencing.

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

The above Scripture reveals that identifying with those enduring evil mistreatment in persecution is more than a feeling. Believers who have rest and peace are morally united or tied with those being persecuted. It is similar to the instructions Paul gave to the Corinthian Church when he said, **And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it** (1Cor. 12:26). To suffer (Greek *pentho*) means to experience a sensation or impression, usually painful, with those being persecuted. You are actually tempered together with them in their suffering. In essence, the Holy Spirit causes you to become a companion in their persecution. Not in the physical sense, but in the Spirit. If you can have a close association and partnership with Christ’s sufferings, then it follows that you can also be joined by the Spirit with persecuted and suffering Christians around the

³⁶ Open Doors. [Living in a violent world—7 lessons from persecuted Christians - Open Doors USA - Open Doors USA](#).

³⁷ 5-Fold Global (2021). *A Call to Intercessors: 5-Fold Global Spring Offensive Operation*, p. 5. [calltoprayer-nigeria21.pdf \(snappages.site\)](#)

world. Those who remember and relate to the persecuted church in this way will intercede for them in a wonderful and effective manner.

5-Fold Global Heroes of Faith

The Bible contains many accounts of those who overcome adversities and bring glory to God in the midst of persecution. These individuals are considered heroes of the faith. The New Testament chronicles these heroes of faith in order to build our faith in very difficult times, including persecution.

- Heb. 11:4 By faith Abel offered to God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, through which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts; and through it he being dead still speaks.
- Heb. 11:5-6 By faith Enoch was taken away so that he did not see death, *“and was not found, because God had taken him”*; for before he was taken he had this testimony, that he pleased God. ⁶ But without faith *it is impossible to please Him*, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and *that* He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.
- Heb. 11:7 By faith Noah, being divinely warned of things not yet seen, moved with godly fear, prepared an ark for the saving of his household, by which he condemned the world and became heir of the righteousness which is according to faith.
- Heb. 11:8-10 By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to the place which he would receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going. ⁹ By faith he dwelt in the land of promise as *in* a foreign country, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise; ¹⁰ for he waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker *is* God.
- Heb. 11:11-12 By faith Sarah herself also received strength to conceive seed, and she bore a child when she was past the age, because she judged Him faithful who had promised. ¹² Therefore from one man, and him as good as dead, were born as *many* as the stars of the sky in multitude— innumerable as the sand which is by the seashore.
- Heb. 11:13-16 These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced *them* and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. ¹⁴ For those who say such things declare plainly that they seek a homeland. ¹⁵ And truly if they had called to mind that *country* from which they had come out, they would have had opportunity to return. ¹⁶ But now they desire a better, that is, a heavenly *country*. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them.
- Heb. 11:17-19 By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises offered up his only begotten son, ¹⁸ of whom it was said, *“In Isaac your seed shall be called,”* ¹⁹ concluding that God *was* able to raise *him* up, even from the dead, from which he also received him in a figurative sense.
- Heb. 11:20 By faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau concerning things to come.
- Heb. 11:21 By faith Jacob, when he was dying, blessed each of the sons of Joseph, and worshiped, *leaning* on the top of his staff.
- Heb. 11:22 By faith Joseph, when he was dying, made mention of the departure of the children of Israel, and gave instructions concerning his bones.
- Heb. 11:23-29 By faith Moses, when he was born, was hidden three months by his parents, because they saw *he was* a beautiful child; and they were not afraid of the king’s command. ²⁴ By faith Moses, when he became of age, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter, ²⁵ choosing rather to

suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin, ²⁶ esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt; for he looked to the reward. ²⁷ By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king; for he endured as seeing Him who is invisible. ²⁸ By faith he kept the Passover and the sprinkling of blood, lest he who destroyed the firstborn should touch them. ²⁹ By faith they passed through the Red Sea as by dry *land*, whereas the Egyptians, attempting *to do so*, were drowned.

- Heb. 11:30-31 By faith the walls of Jericho fell down after they were encircled for seven days. ³¹ By faith the harlot Rahab did not perish with those who did not believe, when she had received the spies with peace.
- Heb. 11:32-40 And what more shall I say? For the time would fail me to tell of Gideon and Barak and Samson and Jephthah, also of David and Samuel and the prophets: ³³ who through faith subdued kingdoms, worked righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, ³⁴ quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, became valiant in battle, turned to flight the armies of the aliens. ³⁵ Women received their dead raised to life again. Others were tortured, not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection. ³⁶ Still others had trial of mockings and scourgings, yes, and of chains and imprisonment. ³⁷ They were stoned, they were sawn in two, were tempted, were slain with the sword. They wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented— ³⁸ of whom the world was not worthy. They wandered in deserts and mountains, *in dens and caves of the earth*. ³⁹ And all these, having obtained a good testimony through faith, did not receive the promise, ⁴⁰ God having provided something better for us, that they should not be made perfect apart from us.

Sixteen heroes of faith are mentioned by name in the above list. However, these servants of God do not comprise a complete number of those in the Bible or those down through the centuries who endured sufferings. I believe the Lord is still adding and will continue adding to His list of heroes of the faith.

Victorious saints today are being recorded in the heavenly ledgers. This is particularly true for those who are currently suffering persecution. 5-Fold Global has a number of partners who fit this persecuted category. We will highlight those from Myanmar and Nigeria, however, there are others in India and a number of nations. Although their chapters have not been fully written yet, I believe they will emerge as modern-day heroes of faith. Here are some of the situations of persecution a few of our 5-Fold Global Partners are in and the faith they are displaying:

1. Myanmar – Ranked 12th on the 2022 World Watch List (Appendix 2). Review these recent quotes from three young emerging Christian leaders of the 5-Fold Global Spirit Leads You Team. Two of them are in exile waiting for God to open the door for them to return to the nation of their calling.
 - "I can only send message to you brother because connection has a problem. The fight is beginning in our villages. Today we are fasting and praying with the church members."
 - "Myanmar has not yet come for me due to dictatorship and ongoing political chaos. Now, I am stuck here in (Redacted) since before. And I am turning up a person who is jobless and I have to live in fear of (Redacted) police at all times for there are many cases ahead that people from Myanmar were arrested and under observation. Actually, I have been managing myself everything almost reaching a year after my college. I stay alone in a Christian family's spare house."
 - "I have plan for future ministry in Myanmar, for that I need to prepare. Right now, Myanmar condition is worse day by day and it is not safe to stay. Even in (Redacted) because (Redacted) Government does not

allow us to stay in (Redacted) so my families are hiding here and there. So, I stay here and plan to stay more because here I can serve God freely and the church leaders request me to stay so I might have to stay the whole year. To fulfill my plan, I want to go to the third country for some years. I mean if the Lord allows me to go there.”

2. Nigeria – Ranked 7th on the 2022 World Watch List (Appendix 2). Steve Cleary of Revelation Media recently reported: *There are currently more documented cases of Christian martyrs in Nigeria than all other nations combined, and it is growing at an alarming rate.*³⁸ Here are some quotes from our 5-Fold Global Partners spearheading the advance of God’s kingdom from their House Church Coordinating Center.
 - “There’s serious blood flow in (Redacted) since last night. Burning of places, so much panic everywhere. 24 hours curfew was declared that made us to postpone the liberation prayer initiative till further date when calmness returns. Daddy continuous prayer is needed. Shooting everywhere as I am writing. A lot of running, we really need Gods intervention. Nigeria is very hot now, but we do believe God, that His own is under His shield and coverage. Shootings are still on. But God is with us. Boko Haran plus antichrist Nigerian joint forces came in suddenly and started killing massively, destroyed several lives. All roads blocked, there was a total seizure of the entire region with burning of buildings even until now as I’m writing. I’m someone who believes in serving God in the midst of persecution while trusting Him for protection. There’s war in my region right now, severe one. Several innocents killed already including pastors. My heart bleeds as we lost a young generation Pastor yesterday to the army’s bullet. The father was the chairman of pastor’s fellowship when you came the 2nd time. We need God’s intervention in Nigeria, mostly the South. The violence is getting severe, many lives have been wasted. We lost two pastors in the land to bullets. Tension is increasing, please continue praying for us. No movements at all. Now people know the importance of house church. Yesterday the situation was about calming down. Suddenly, early this morning the worst started. Joint forces now house to house shooting, a lot of casualties as I speak. All roads blocked, no going out, no hiding place. Situation is bad. But I believe in Psalm 27:5 as you declare it again. That’s the situation so far.”
 - “Two nights ago they came to attack us in the Church premises but as we prayed and the children shouting the blood of Jesus, the Lord drove them away. It was so traumatic on children. I shared with you last time I needed to relocate and move into a strong base where I can fully operate and supervise house church operation from there. Tomorrow Pastor (Redacted) will sneak into another house church, spend the night and pray with them. Right now, since yesterday one young leader by name (Redacted) is in another house church praying there at another hot area. There is also another like that. House church is the key. Grace has been so much on me, praying day and night for the nation and the church. We will all come out stronger in the power of our God. God is working out victory for us. Shooting is reducing, only now there is a total lockdown and hunger in the land. Shooting now once a while night and day. God told me yesterday that there’s victory in the spirit realm already.”
 - “We sense another level powers of darkness coming heavily on our community. Killings was about to intensify again. So, we decided to embark on prayer walk for past two weeks through the major roads connecting Jesus Road, anointing and praying, passing decrees. Renewing the enthronement of our Lord Jesus in the community, these kept me and Elders at the Gate very busy. Now we can testify of God’s intervention . Yesterday the Area Command Police officer that was making passage through Jesus Road was suddenly removed. And a new one was sent. God is at work here.”
 - “Daddy greetings in Jesus Name. Daddy Satan is using Muslim Political leaders to tighten things for Christians in the Country especially in the South, Southeast and Southwest. They sponsor terrorists and even enroll them into the army and release them down South. They keep killing and maiming. They want to

³⁸ Steve Cleary. *Revelation Media* (2022). Richardson, TX.

subdue Christians and continue in power in 2023 or sabotage if they see tendency of Christian winning. But despite all these we are getting stronger. Christians are praying and uniting more than ever. Just to give you a clue on our situation. And Daddy there's hunger even in our family.”

These firsthand reports from the field of persecution reveal more than a severity of persecution. They also show us examples of a higher level of faith, the faith that Dr. Samuel Isong taught us about in Session 3. What can you learn from them?

Seven Things You Can Learn from the Persecuted Church

The Persecuted Church lives in a violent world. What can you learn from them? What do you see them focused upon in such severe conditions? Open Doors reveals seven things you can learn from those facing and living in persecution.³⁹

The Persecuted Church Focus	Scripture Reference
1. Always give thanks (in all circumstances whether you feel like it or not – Praise the Lord!)	1Th. 5:18 KJV In every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you.
2. Refuse to let fear win (in all circumstances battle against fear, give your fear to the Lord, and surrender your will and life to Him)	2Cor. 12:9 And He said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.
3. Rely on God (in all circumstances know that politics, policies, and your own strength will not deliver you, but put your faith in Christ alone and be clothed with His peace)	John 14:27 Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.
4. Take a courageous next step (in all circumstances do not hesitate to boldly live for Christ and step forth to do His will and ministry to advance His Kingdom)	1Cor. 16:13 Watch, stand fast in the faith, be brave, be strong.
5. Grieve what you’ve lost (in all circumstances know that Jesus sees you and knows the grief and pain you carry, but you can rest in Him)	Matt. 11:28 Come to Me, all <i>you</i> who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.
6. Forgive your enemies (in all circumstances release forgiveness, breaking the power that comes with holding onto hate of your persecutors remembering that Jesus does not hold your sin over your head)	Matt. 5:44 But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you.
7. Keep persevering (in all circumstances keep your focus fixed upon Jesus, knowing if you stay firmly grounded in your faith in Him, there is nothing you can’t handle through Him)	Heb. 12:2 looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of <i>our</i> faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

³⁹ Open Doors. [Living in a violent world—7 lessons from persecuted Christians - Open Doors USA - Open Doors USA](#).

We began this training manual with Paul's admonition to his spiritual son, Timothy, regarding persecution. The fuller context of Paul's exhortation is very relevant to a new generation of Christian leaders and believers.

- 2Tim. 3:10-17 But you have carefully followed my doctrine, manner of life, purpose, faith, longsuffering, love, perseverance, ¹¹ persecutions, afflictions, which happened to me at Antioch, at Iconium, at Lystra—what persecutions I endured. And out of *them* all the Lord delivered me. ¹² Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution. ¹³ But evil men and impostors will grow worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived. ¹⁴ But you must continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of, knowing from whom you have learned *them*, ¹⁵ and that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. ¹⁶ All Scripture *is* given by inspiration of God, and *is* profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, ¹⁷ that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.

Dr. Samuel Isong and I urge you to pay close attention to the full counsel of God's word represented in the above Scripture. Get fully acquainted with the anointing and power of the Holy Spirit. This will prepare you for whatever comes your way now and in the future. Paul says ***evil men and impostors will grow worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived***. He also says, ***But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come*** (2Tim. 3:1). ***But know this!*** What do you need to know? You need to know that iniquity, perverse things, calamities, destruction, and other violent afflictions are coming. It may already be there for many of you. But there is something different about you. You have carefully followed the Lord Jesus Christ. You have learned from the Godly examples of others. You have known the Holy Scriptures. You are complete and fully equipped for every good work no matter what persecution comes your way. You are a victorious saint for the glory of Jesus Christ.

For in the time of trouble

He shall hide me in His pavilion;

In the secret place of His tabernacle

He shall hide me;

He shall set me high upon a rock.

And now my head shall be lifted up above my enemies all around me;

Therefore I will offer sacrifices of joy in His tabernacle;

I will sing, yes, I will sing praises to the LORD.

Psalm 27:5-6

Appendix 1

The Biblical Concept of Persecution

By 5-Fold Global Young Pastor in Myanmar

“The basic Hebrew word for persecution and the Greek word for persecution both emphasize the perception of to pursue or bring trouble. The meaning of these words can include pursuing or pressing on, to oppress, harass, and also to bring punishment. It was the understanding that sacrifice, suffering, shame, and even death were the normal cost of being a Christian that drove the evangelistic efforts of the first century church.

Both the Old and New Testament report physical, social, mental, and spiritual persecution. Extreme physical persecution includes taking another’s life. Social persecution, which may be called discrimination, involves making individuals or a group outcast. The most common forms are religious persecution, racism, and political persecution. Christians face suicide attacks on churches, imprisonment of pastors, abduction of girls, forced conversions, and concentration camps. The Bible says blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me (Matt. 5:10-11). Rejoice and be glad because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you (v. 13). But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you (Matt. 5:44). That is why, for Christ’s sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties, for when I am weak then I am strong (2Cor. 12:10). (See also 1Pet. 3:14; Rom. 8:35-37; 1Pet. 4:14; James 1:12; Rom. 5:3-5; James 1:1-4; Rev. 3:11). Persecution is a strong word. It is oftentimes caused by anger, hate, jealousy, and wrath.

Persecution at its core is essentially a form of a spiritual matter that is completely evil in its origin and power. From the point of view of God’s plan, persecution is anticipated and necessary. The Bible predicts that those who follow Christ and God’s word and who practice His commandments will be persecuted. Persecution is the unavoidable standard of the Christian life because the world hates Christ. Persecution is essential to establish the church of Jesus Christ. Persecution is a necessary consequence of our identification with Christ. In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted is the advice given by Paul to Timothy:

Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution.

1 Timothy 3:12

Appendix 2

The World Watch List 2022⁴⁰

Country	Source of Persecution	Region	Main Religion
1 Afghanistan	Islamic oppression	Asia	Islam
2 North Korea	Communist and post-communist oppression	Asia	Agnosticism
3 Somalia	Clan oppression	Africa	Islam
4 Libya	Islamic oppression	Africa	Islam
5 Yemen	Islamic oppression	Middle East	Islam
6 Eritrea	Dictatorial paranoia	Africa	Islam
7 Nigeria	Islamic oppression	Africa	Christianity
8 Pakistan	Islamic oppression	Asia	Islam
9 Iran	Islamic oppression	Middle East	Islam
10 India	Religious nationalism	Asia	Hinduism
11 Saudi Arabia	Islamic oppression	Middle East	Islam
12 Myanmar	Religious nationalism	Asia	Buddhism
13 Sudan	Islamic oppression	Africa	Islam
14 Iraq	Islamic oppression	Middle East	Islam
15 Syria	Islamic oppression	Middle East	Islam
16 Maldives	Islamic oppression	Asia	Islam
17 China	Communist and post-communist oppression	Asia	Various
18 Qatar	Islamic oppression	Middle East	Islam
19 Vietnam	Communist and post-communist oppression	Asia	Buddhism
20 Egypt	Islamic oppression	Africa	Islam
21 Uzbekistan	Dictatorial paranoia	Central Asia	Islam
22 Algeria	Islamic oppression	Africa	Islam
23 Mauritania	Islamic oppression	Africa	Islam
24 Mali	Islamic oppression	Africa	Islam
25 Turkmenistan	Dictatorial paranoia	Central Asia	Islam
26 Laos	Communist and post-communist oppression	Asia	Buddhism
27 Morocco	Islamic oppression	Africa	Islam
28 Indonesia	Islamic oppression	Asia	Islam
29 Bangladesh	Dictatorial paranoia	Asia	Islam
30 Columbia	Organized crime and corruption	Latin America	Christianity
31 Central African Republic	Islamic oppression	Africa	Christianity
32 Burkina Faso	Islamic oppression	Africa	Islam
33 Niger	Islamic oppression	Africa	Islam
34 Bhutan	Religious nationalism	Asia	Buddhism
35 Tunisia	Islamic oppression	Africa	Islam
36 Oman	Clan oppression	Middle East	Islam
37 Cuba	Dictatorial paranoia	Latin America	Christianity

⁴⁰ Open Doors. Adapted from the annual report of the top 50 countries where its most difficult to follow Jesus. [World Watch List 2022 | Learn More | Open Doors USA - Open Doors USA.](#)

38 Ethiopia	Denominational protectionism	Africa	Christianity
39 Jordan	Islamic oppression	Middle East	Islam
40 Democratic Republic of the Congo	Islamic oppression	Africa	Christianity
41 Mozambique	Islamic oppression	Africa	Christianity
42 Turkey	Islamic oppression	Middle East	Islam
43 Mexico	Organized crime and corruption	Latin America	Christianity
44 Cameroon	Islamic oppression	Africa	Christianity
45 Tajikistan	Dictatorial paranoia	Central Asia	Islam
46 Brunei	Islamic oppression	Asia	Islam
47 Kazakhstan	Dictatorial paranoia	Central Asia	Islam
48 Nepal	Religious nationalism	Asia	Hinduism
49 Kuwait	Islamic oppression	Middle East	Islam
50 Malaysia	Islamic oppression	Asia	Islam

Extreme



Very High



Appendix 3

Principles of Grace Giving

We learn that prophets came from Jerusalem to Antioch (Acts 11:27) and one of them named Agabus showed by the Spirit that a famine was coming upon Judea (11:28). The disciples decided to send relief, each according to his ability (11:29). Barnabas and Saul (Paul) were commissioned to take this gift to the elders. Chapters 8 and 9 of II Corinthians deal with the further collection of voluntary offerings for Judea. These two chapters present a clear model for all Christian giving.

- 8:1-4** **Principle #1** - Outward circumstances and difficulties should not inhibit generosity in giving.
- The Macedonian churches were not giving out of their abundance; they gave out of their poverty.
 - They gave not because they had to give, but because they wanted to give.
 - Their giving far exceeded their financial ability.
 - They viewed this special offering as a privilege; not as an obligation.
 - Giving is viewed as a Christian "grace."
 - Joy and generosity are twins; they accompany one another.
- 8:5** **Principle #2** – All financial giving should be preceded with Self-giving
- They first gave themselves to the Lord.
- 8:6-7** **Principle #3** – Believers should seek to excel in the grace of Giving.
- 8:6, 10-11; 9:5** **Principle #4** – Worthy stewardship goals should be brought To completion
- Finish what you begin.
 - In spiritual things, there is value in completing what you start.
- 8:8-9,24** **Principle #5** – Generous giving gives evidence of the sincerity of one's love.
- One's motivation for giving should always be love for the Lord and the saints.
- 8:8-9** **Principle #6** – There is a connecting link between the grace of God and the grace of giving.
- The grace of God becomes the supreme motivation factor in true Christian stewardship.
 - Our giving should be rooted in His giving.
- 8:12** **Principle #7** – A willingness to give is more important than the amount given.

- 8:13-15** **Principle #8** – In the economy of God, the sufficiency of some ministers to the deficiency of others.
- 8:16-21** **Principle #9** – The expenditure of God's money should be done judiciously.
- ☐ To honor the Lord
 - ☐ To do vital ministry
 - ☐ To avoid any type of criticism
- 9:1-2** **Principle #10** – Generous, spiritual giving will have a positive influence on the giving of others.
- 9:5-7** **Principle #11** – The attitude in which a gift is given is of utmost importance to God; give cheerfully and willingly; not grudgingly.
- 9:8-11** **Principle #12** – Generosity moves the heart of God to provide more seed and meet all needs.
- ☐ All grace
 - ☐ Always
 - ☐ All sufficiency
 - ☐ All things
- 9:11-14** **Principle #13** – Generosity will result in praise and Thanksgiving to God
- 9:15** **Principle #14** – Generous giving is the natural response to God's indescribable gift.

Taken from a chart by Jim Peacock MA (Hons), Diploma of Teaching.