

## Praying out of Persecution

*Philippians 1:3-8* - NCBC, November 6, 2022

Main Point: **Persecution changes how we pray for each other.**

- Persecution calls us to pray with gratitude (3-5)
  - Because of our joyful memories
  - Because of our joyful partnership
- Persecution calls us to pray with confidence (6)
  - Because God is working
  - Because glory is coming
- Persecution calls us to pray with love (7-8)
  - Because we share in Christ's grace
  - Because we share in Christ's compassion

Application: **Joyfully share in Christ's suffering with the persecuted.**

---

### Opening Announcements:

- Please plan to Attend our Congregational Meeting Next Sunday during the 9:30a! Our elders are excited to share some ministry updates with us all as we meet together next week!

<<Let Me Be A Blessing>>



What an appropriate prayer to sing together as we remember our Lord Jesus and our persecuted brothers and sisters today on this International Day of Prayer for the Persecuted Church.

Today we are interrupting our study of **Ephesians** to focus on how Paul prayed for persecuted Christians even while he was being persecuted himself the sake of Christ.



So please open your copy of God's Word to **Philippians chapter 1, verses 3-8**. Please raise your hand and we will gladly bring you a Bible if you need one today.

John – thank you for sharing with us, and thank you for your faithful ministry to our persecuted brothers and sisters in Nigeria. It's so good to have you with us today, and in many ways I feel like a persecution kindergartener trying to teach about a topic you've already graduated in. I'm humbled by what you've shared with us, and I'm praying that God will continue to use His Word to help our hearts to think and feel and move more like Jesus because of our time of worship and prayer together this morning.



**This morning our plan is simple.** We're going to learn from how Paul himself prayed out of persecution in **Philippians chapter 1**, and then we are going to take communion together and remember how Jesus Himself was persecuted and killed to bring us to God.

So if you are able, I'd invite you to stand in honor of the public reading of God's Word as I read **Philippians chapter 1, verses 3-8** in the ESV translation:

*3 I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, 4 always in every prayer of mine for you all making my prayer with*

*joy, 5 because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now. 6 And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ. 7 It is right for me to feel this way about you all, because I hold you in my heart, for you are all partakers with me of grace, both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel. 8 For God is my witness, how I yearn for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus.*

This is the reading of God's Word. Please be seated.

**Let's pray.**

---

How do you respond when you hear stories like our sister Rebecca's from Nigeria?<sup>1</sup>

Such testimonies of faith and perseverance through horrific evil disturb our comfort and ease. Persecution humbles our self-centeredness, and reorients our joy and peace in eternity rather than this world. When we hear about this kind of persecution, we yearn for God to bring justice to this world, don't we?

Stories of persecution like Rebecca's are good for us to hear, because persecution has the power to change us. We watch Rebecca pick up her burned Bible, and we immediately become more thankful for our Bibles. We watch her cling to her son, and we become more thankful for our families. We hear John's report and we are moved to do more and pray more for our brothers and

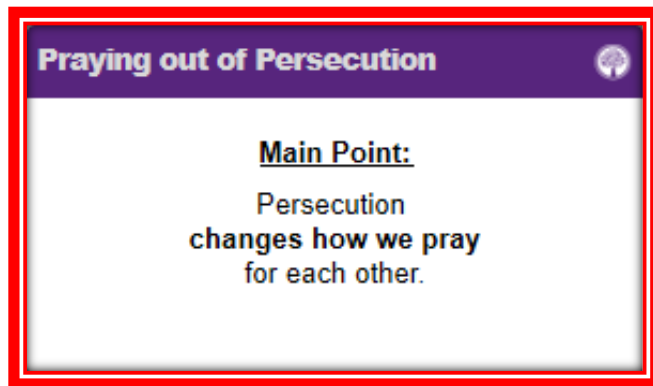
---

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.persecution.com/idop/> or <https://youtu.be/nUrz3xe9E7E>

sisters who have been so horrifically mistreated simply because of their public identification with Jesus.

Persecution is obviously very painful, but for the soul who is hidden in Christ, persecution can be productive. Jesus never wastes our suffering, especially any suffering that we endure for the sake of His Name.

Persecution has the power to make us more like Jesus. Persecution can actually change us for good. And as we open our Bibles to **Philippians chapter 1** this morning, we discover that,



Persecution even changes how we pray for each other.

Regardless of whether we are being persecuted ourselves, or we are just walking alongside others who are being persecuted... the horrors of being mistreated by evil people reorients our prayers to what truly matters, and elevates our prayers above superficiality and selfishness. Persecution calls us to fix our hope in eternity and therefore changes how we pray for each other in the middle of suffering.

Let's quickly set up the context of **Philippians** before we dive into these verses.



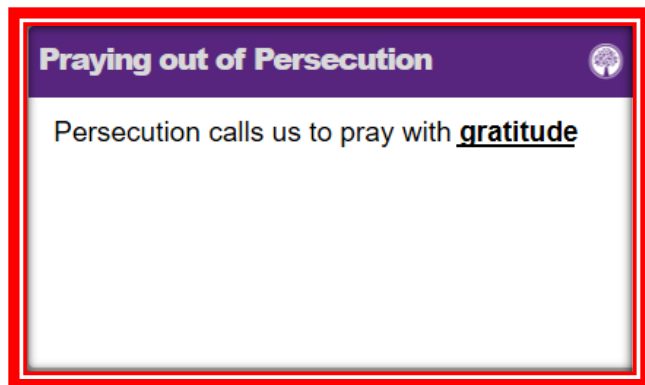
The Apostle Paul is writing this letter to the church in Philippi from a prison cell in Rome. So Paul, the persecuted, is writing to the Philippians, who also have experienced plenty of persecution.<sup>2</sup> And here in his opening address, Paul expresses his prayer for his brothers and sisters in Philippi that he hasn't seen personally for over 5 years.

So on this *International Day of Prayer for the Persecuted Church*, we're going to learn how to pray for our persecuted brothers and sisters... by considering the prayer of our persecuted brother Paul. And through this study God is going to reorient and elevate our prayers beyond the unpleasant circumstances of persecution itself, to anchor our hope in Jesus and His eternal glory.

So now let's begin by looking more closely at **verses 3-5**, which help us understand how,

---

<sup>2</sup> Acts 16:16-24  
Page **3a** of 12



Persecution calls us to pray with gratitude. Persecution is an opportunity for us to pray with thanksgiving.

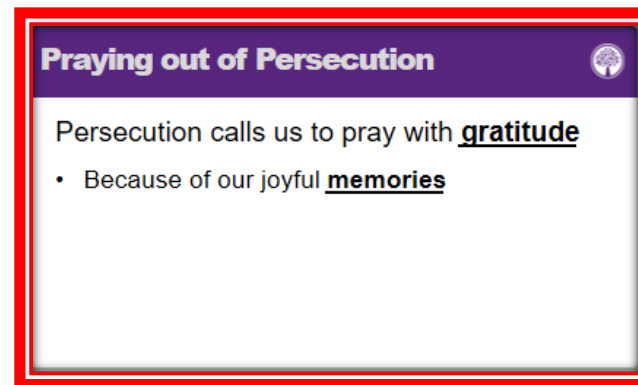
Now that is very counter-intuitive, right? If Paul is suffering under such abusive injustice...wrongly imprisoned and given the death penalty...simply for preaching salvation by faith alone in Christ alone... what would give Paul a reason to be thankful?

Well, in **verses 3-4**, Paul says,

*I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine for you all making my prayer with joy...*

So what motivates Paul to pray out of his persecution with gratitude? His joyful memories of the Philippian believers, right?

When persecution drives us to pray, we can pray with gratitude,



Because of our joyful memories of gospel friends.

Persecution and undeserved suffering can tempt us to fall into self-pity or self-focused bitterness or despair. But when we remember that we are not alone, and we are part of a spiritual family all around the world that is standing firm by God's Spirit against persecution, it encourages our faith and actually brings us joy.

Paul continues to explain his gratitude in **verse 5**, explaining that he is praying for the Philippians with joy,

*Because of your partnership in the gospel, from the first day until now.*

So suffering for the sake of Christ gives Christians an opportunity to pray to God with gratitude,



Because of our joyful partnership with other believers who are also sacrificially proclaiming Christ and standing firm in His Gospel.

Paul was so thankful for how the Philippian church had partnered with him from the very first days of his gospel ministry. The Philippians believed the Gospel, they had prayed for Paul, they had participated in proclaiming the Gospel themselves, and now that Paul had been imprisoned, the Philippians had taken up a collection and sent financial provision<sup>3</sup> to Paul in Rome through their brother Epaphroditus.<sup>4</sup> They were gospel partners with Paul by encouragement, intercession, visitation, and financial support. And this caused Paul such joy and gratitude to God.

So church, as we spend extra time today praying for our persecuted brothers and sisters... will you joyfully thank God that your brothers and sisters are standing firm in their faith? Will you joyfully thank God for their faithfulness in their Gospel partnership with us?

And then also, will you seek opportunities to express your

partnership with our persecuted brothers and sisters in order to increase their gratitude in their prayers? How is God calling you to partner in prayer, participation, praise, or provision with any of our GO partners who are actively serving the persecuted church on our behalf?

The joy of your gospel partnership may be what God uses to help carry another brother or sister through their troubled times.

For example, on the back of today's notes page you will find several links to help connect you with our persecuted loved ones around the world.

If you sign up for the weekly prayer email from [www.icommittoprayer.com](http://www.icommittoprayer.com), each week you'll have an opportunity to send an email note of encouragement directly to a persecuted Christian.

Some of you may choose to partner financially, or even make a personal visit to the field to help encourage and strengthen the faith of our loved ones.

But here's the point: whenever we encounter persecution for the sake of Christ... we want the joyful memories of our practical partnership with other believers to inform our prayers with gratitude to God, rather than grumbling or bitter resentment.

Next **verse 6** illustrates how,

<sup>3</sup> Philippians 4:10-20, especially verse 14-18

<sup>4</sup> Philippians 2:25-30; 4:18

### Praying out of Persecution

Persecution calls us to pray with confidence

Persecution calls us to pray with confidence that God is sovereign and that God is good. Paul says he is absolutely sure of this truth... his prayers are elevated with the confidence that,

### Praying out of Persecution

Persecution calls us to pray with confidence

- Because God is working

God is working. Yes, it seems like evil is winning in the moment. But the same God who began a good work in you...is the same God who will bring that saving work to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.

So when evil attacks...pray with confidence in God's finishing grace, church. The God who called us to salvation is the same God who will glorify us in eternity.

Notice, God is the one who began the good work of salvation where? In you! So Christian – take courage. God Himself is working in you, even while evil people are working against you. And God always keeps His promises.

So we can pray with confidence,

### Praying out of Persecution

Persecution calls us to pray with confidence

- Because God is working
- Because glory is coming

Because glory is coming.

God is going to save every one of His children to the uttermost when, at the day of Jesus Christ. This refers to the Day of the Lord, the day of Jesus' second coming! That final day of judgment when all evil will be punished, and all the righteous will be vindicated and granted an eternal glory in the fullness of God's joy.

The day of Jesus is a fearful day for the wicked. Persecutors and all proud sinners who have refused to bow their necks before Jesus will meet their eternal punishment on the day of Jesus.

But all of God's children – all of those who have trusted in Jesus for their salvation – will receive glory on that day!



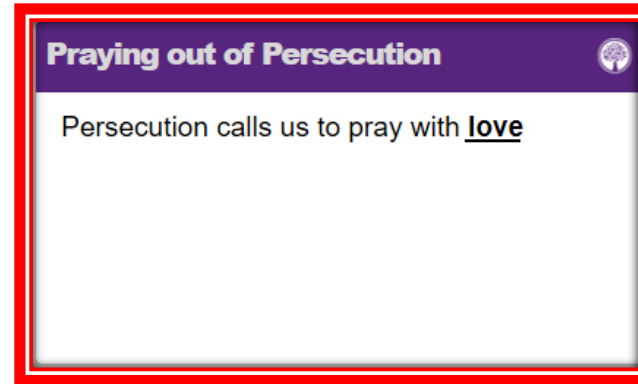
O church – persecution makes us long for the day of the Lord! Persecution calls us to pray with faith, with confidence that this world is not our home. But God is faithful...and He will deliver us in the end!!

Now think about this. Because suffering at the hands of evil people often causes Christians to doubt. Unjust suffering tempts us to become anxious, or to give up, or so doubt the promises of God.

But although Paul's pain in his own persecution is severe... his faith in God remains strong. His confidence of our future glory is certain.

So what about you? When you pray for our persecuted brothers and sisters today... are you absolutely sure of this? That the God who brought them to salvation will personally see them across the finish line? That no human suffering will be able to separate them from God's love? That glory is coming, and God is working, and it will all be worth it in the end?

O church, there's no drop outs in God's plan of salvation. Whomever God saves, God will glorify.<sup>5</sup> And this eternal security of God's saving grace is something that God works in us... not just for us. So embrace the keeping power of God's Spirit who is at work in you. And pray out of persecution with gratitude, with confidence, and then also,



with love. After all, **verses 7-8** illustrate how Paul's persecution gave him an opportunity to pray with love for his brothers and sisters in Philippi. You can escape the deep emotional connection that Paul had with his fellow Christians in these verses.

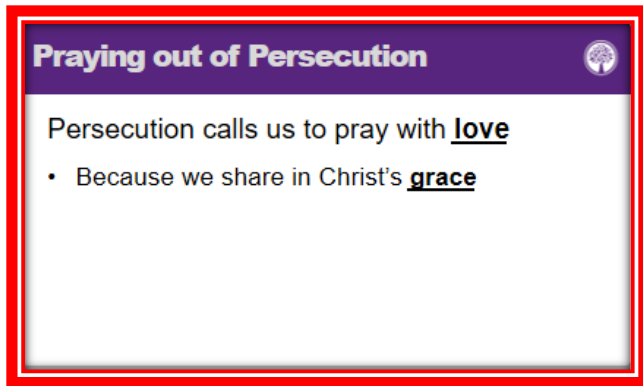
In **verse 7** Paul says it is absolutely right for him to be this confident, and to feel or think this way about his fellow Christians who were being attacked by evil people.

*Because Paul says in **verse 7**, I hold you in my heart, for you are all partakers with me of grace...*

In other words, Paul is praying with deep love and affection for other persecuted Christians,

---

<sup>5</sup> Romans 8:30  
Page **7a** of 12



Because all believers share in Christ's grace together. And notice the two specific ways that Christians share in God's grace,

*Both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel.*

Paul is clear: I love you Philippians because we all share in God's grace of suffering and God's grace of ministry together. God's grace unites all believers together in suffering first.

So while my suffering might look different than Rebecca's, and your suffering for Christ might look different than mine... all Christians who share in Christ's grace will necessarily share in this fellowship of Christ's suffering.

So don't miss this. Suffering for the sake of Christ is actually a grace of God to us. It's not just that God gives us grace in our suffering, but our suffering itself is a grace-gift of God to us.<sup>6</sup>

Persecution and suffering is a grace-gift, because it frees our grip on this world. Suffering is a grace-gift because it shows us more of God's glory and increases our spiritual appetite for heaven.

But all Christians not only share in the grace of suffering, but also the grace of ministry.

Paul says, *You are all partakers with me of grace... in the defense and confirmation of the Gospel.*

Paul knows he's not the only Christian who is being persecuted for righteousness' sake. In fact every Christian is united in the ministry of gospel proclamation.

So remember this church – when you suffer, you're sharing in God's grace with other believers. And when you are sharing the Gospel with someone at work or school, or you are answering an unbeliever's questions about God and the Gospel... you are sharing in God's grace of ministry with all other believers. And this shared experience in God's grace increases your love and affection for other believers who are experiencing the same worldly discomforts and afflictions as you.

Then **verse 8** offers a wonderful insight, teaching that our love for other Christians in persecution is,

---

<sup>6</sup> Philippians 1:29



**Praying out of Persecution**

Persecution calls us to pray with love

- Because we share in Christ's grace
- Because we share in Christ's compassion

Because we share in Christ's compassion.

**Verse 8** says,

*For God is my witness, how I yearn for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus.* Literally, Paul is saying... I have the same feelings for you Philippians that Christ has for you. Jesus' affections for you are inside me. So my union with Christ means that Christ's compassion for you is now my compassion for you.<sup>7</sup> And since Christ is in me, and He loves you, so likewise Paul says he is praying for the persecuted Philippians with great love.

So as you remember our persecuted brothers and sisters today in your prayers, let your emotions be moved. It is right for you to experience great compassion, love, and care for your afflicted gospel partners all around the world.

<sup>7</sup> Galatians 2:20  
Page **9a** of 12

**Praying out of Persecution**

**Main Point:**

Persecution  
changes how we pray  
for each other.

After all, persecution changes how we pray for each other.

Instead of becoming stoic or numbed by the pain of persecution, God's grace enables us to keep praying with love. Instead of doubting or becoming fatalistic, God's promises enable us to keep praying with confidence. And instead of becoming self-focused or bitter, our joyful partnerships enable us to pray with gratitude.

**Praying out of Persecution**

**Application:**

Joyfully share in Christ's suffering  
with the persecuted.



So today we want to joyfully share in Christ's suffering with the persecuted with our prayers, and with our joyful remembrance of all that Christ has suffered for our sake.

As we transition to communion now, we want to remember how Jesus suffered and died to bring us to God.

Will you remember how Jesus lived a perfect life on earth – a perfect life of love without sin – and then gave Himself willingly as the eternal blood sacrifice to pay for your sins? Will you fix your attention on Jesus dying the death your sins deserved on the cross, and shedding His blood to purchase your welcomed acceptance by our Holy Creator? Will you remember how Jesus rose from the dead to triumph over death and sin's power...and to give you everlasting life?

O church – only when we remember how much God has loved us will we find the grace to love others the same way.<sup>8</sup>

So I'd invite you now to open up the top of that communion cup that was provided to you today, and prepare to eat the bread wafer together in a moment.

Jesus taught us to remember Him in this way on the night before His death, when He met with His disciples and transformed the Passover celebration into a Memorial Feast of His death.

So loved ones, this ceremonial meal that we are about to eat together is designed only for those who have repented of their sins and trusted their eternal destiny to the work of Christ alone. If you aren't yet a Christian, please refrain from eating...and just observe us. Because there's no spiritual power in the wafer or the juice we're about to consume. It's a feast of

remembrance. These are just physical symbols that help us remember how Jesus' body was crushed to save us from sin, and His blood was spilled to wash us whiter than snow.

So as we prepare to remember Christ's sacrifice for the payment of our sins, I'd invite you to just bow your heads and pray. Confess any sin that stands between you and joyful intimacy with God. Confess your faith that Jesus' death and resurrection is enough to secure your eternal acceptance forever with God. Thank God for His mercy and grace, and His Spirit that is even now at work in you. Praise Jesus for His love.

And then in a minute, I'll lead us in prayer together before we all eat the bread and remember Jesus' sacrifice together.

Let's pray.

<<Prayer>>

**Amen.**

*The Lord Jesus on the night He was betrayed took bread, and when He had given thanks, He broke it, and said, "This is my body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me."*<sup>9</sup>

Let's eat together.

Now please stay seated as we sing together the wonderful hymn, *Behold the Lamb*, which helps us to celebrate how God so loved us that He sent Jesus to die

---

<sup>8</sup> 1 John 4:19

<sup>9</sup> 1 Corinthians 11:23-24

so that our present sufferings might be connected to eternal glories with our amazing God.

<<Behold the Lamb>>

Amen. Now please peel back the lid of your communion cup and prepare to drink the juice together. This juice represents Jesus' blood. Do you remember, how after supper Jesus took the cup saying,

*This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me?*<sup>10</sup>

Let's drink together.

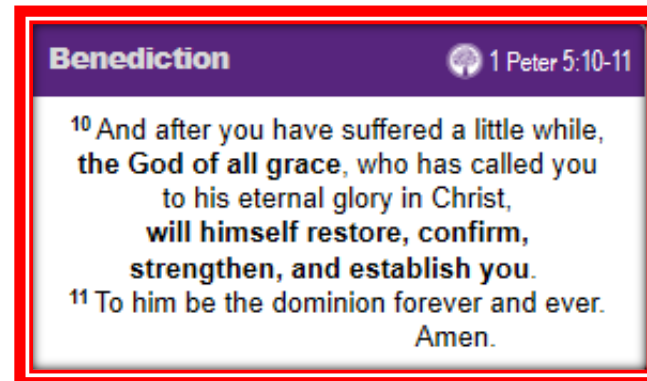
Amen.



Church, Jesus willfully submitted Himself to persecution in order to deliver us from our sins. So as we remember Jesus, we are motivated then to remember and proactively serve the persecuted who are in Jesus' family. May God use our prayers to increase gratitude, confidence, and love in all of our hearts today because of

Jesus.

Let's pray our benediction together:



*And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you. To him be the dominion forever and ever. Amen. 1 Peter 5:10-11*



<sup>10</sup> 1 Corinthians 11:25

### **Recommended Resources on Philippians 1:3-8:**

- Psalm 31
- Matthew 5:11-12
- John 15:20
- Romans 8:29-30
- 2 Corinthians 1:3-11; 4:7-18; 12:7-10
- Philippians 1:29; 2:25; 4:10, 14-20
- 2 Thessalonians 1:5-10
- 2 Timothy 3:12-13
- Hebrews 12:7-8; 13:3
- 1 Peter 4:12-19
- Daily Operation World Prayer Email: <http://www.operationworld.org>
- Weekly Prayer for Persecuted: <https://www.icommittoprayer.com/>
- Voice of the Martyrs: <https://www.persecution.com/> and <https://www.vomradio.net/>
- <https://myncbc.org/media/no-one-forgotten/>
- *Suffering*, Paul Tripp
- *Foxe's Book of Martyrs*, Foxe
- *The Insanity of God*, Ripken

### **Growing Deeper: Life Group Questions**

1. Read Matthew 5:10-12. Would it ever be possible for you to, "rejoice and be glad" when persecuted? Why or why not?
2. Read John 15:18. Are you surprised by the world's antagonism towards you? How does this passage help you better prepare to bear witness when persecuted?
3. Read John 15:26-27. How can you bear witness for Christ? What practical difference does the Spirit of Truth bring to your witness?
4. Read Hebrews 13:3. How is God calling you to serve those who are presently suffering for Christ's sake?
5. Are you willing to bear witness for Christ when representing Him costs you or your loved ones? Why or why not? Share together, and pray for God to increase your faith, hope, and love in Him.

**“Praying Out of Persecution”**  
Philippians 1:3-8 - *Pastor Kevin Sauder*

Main Point: **Persecution changes how we pray for each other.**

- Persecution drives us to pray with \_\_\_\_\_ (3-5)
  - Because of our joyful \_\_\_\_\_
  - Because of our joyful \_\_\_\_\_
  
- Persecution drives us to pray with \_\_\_\_\_ (6)
  - Because \_\_\_\_\_ is working
  - Because \_\_\_\_\_ is coming
  
- Persecution drives us to pray with \_\_\_\_\_ (7-8)
  - Because we are united in \_\_\_\_\_
  - Because we are united in \_\_\_\_\_

Application: **Joyfully share in Christ's suffering with the persecuted.**

---

Your responsibility by God's enabling is to consistently apply the divine principles and truth you've heard (Phil. 2:12-20, 1 Tim. 4:7-9, James 1:22-27).

As you meditate on this message, ask yourself:

- How does God want my beliefs/actions to change?
- How can I accomplish this change?
- What is the first step toward bringing about this change?

(continued on next page)

### **Recommended Resources on Philippians 1:3-8:**

- Psalm 31
- Matthew 5:11-12
- John 15:20
- Romans 8:29-30
- 2 Corinthians 1:3-11; 4:7-18; 12:7-10
- Philippians 1:29; 2:25; 4:10, 14-20
- 2 Thessalonians 1:5-10
- 2 Timothy 3:12-13
- Hebrews 12:7-8; 13:3
- 1 Peter 4:12-19
- Daily Operation World Prayer Email: <http://www.operationworld.org>
- Weekly Prayer for Persecuted: <https://www.icommittoprayer.com/>
- Voice of the Martyrs: <https://www.persecution.com/> and <https://www.vornradio.net/>
- <https://mynCBC.org/media/no-one-forgotten/>
- *Suffering*, Paul Tripp
- *Foxe's Book of Martyrs*, Foxe
- *The Insanity of God*, Ripken

### **Growing Deeper: Life Group Questions**

1. Read Matthew 5:10-12. Would it ever be possible for you to, "rejoice and be glad" when persecuted? Why or why not?
2. Read John 15:18. Are you surprised by the world's antagonism towards you? How does this passage help you better prepare to bear witness when persecuted?
3. Read John 15:26-27. How can you bear witness for Christ? What practical difference does the Spirit of Truth bring to your witness?
4. Read Hebrews 13:3. How is God calling you to serve those who are presently suffering for Christ's sake?
5. Are you willing to bear witness for Christ when representing Him costs you or your loved ones? Why or why not? Share together, and pray for God to increase your faith, hope, and love in Him.