



GLOBAL
CHRISTIAN
RELIEF

RESPONDING TO PERSECUTION:
*What the Bible Teaches About
Following Jesus in a Hostile World*

INTRODUCTION — WHY THIS MATTERS NOW



Around the world today, millions of Christians face harassment, discrimination, and violence because of their faith. And in the West, tensions are rising too — the word ‘persecution’ is showing up in news feeds, debates, and everyday conversations. Even at the United Nations, world leaders called Christianity “the most persecuted religion in the world,” a phrase that grabbed attention. Much of that talk has been focused on the United States — and it reflects real anxiety among believers who wonder what the future will hold here. But long before it made headlines, Scripture had already told us: opposition to Jesus and His people will come.

This guide seeks to flip the script: to take our concerns about persecution close to home and connect them with the wisdom of the global persecuted church, which can show us how to respond faithfully.

That truth can feel unsettling, especially when we’re surrounded by cultural confusion and division. Yet the Bible gives us a clear way forward. From the lips of Jesus to the letters of Paul and Peter, God’s Word prepares us not to be surprised by hostility but to stand firm in the midst of it. And the global persecuted church shows us what this looks like in practice — believers holding fast to Christ with courage, joy, and forgiveness, even under pressure.

WHAT IS PERSECUTION?

It’s also important to be clear about what persecution is — and isn’t. Scripture describes it as hostility or suffering that comes directly because of allegiance to Jesus (see Matthew 5:10–12; John 15:18–20; 2 Timothy 3:12). It is not every hardship, nor every insult. Illness, financial struggles, or natural disasters may be painful, but they are not persecution in the biblical sense. Neither is every cultural disagreement. ***Persecution, rightly defined, is opposition to Christ and to His gospel as it takes shape in the lives of His people.***

This clarity matters. When we confuse ordinary trials with persecution, we risk cheapening the costly witness of believers who truly suffer for their faith. At the same time, we must not ignore the subtle ways opposition shows up in our own contexts — ridicule, exclusion, or hostility that arise precisely because we follow Jesus. Naming these realities rightly allows us to respond in the way Scripture commands: not with outrage or fear, but with faith, endurance, and love.

This guide is written to help you step into that story. It will ground you in what the Bible really teaches about persecution and invite you to learn from brothers and sisters who are living it today. Our hope is simple: that as you read, you won’t just gain information, but formation. May you be drawn closer to Christ, strengthened in courage, and united with His people worldwide. Persecution is not new, and it is not the end. It is the place where God often does His deepest work. And along the way, we’ll look at three biblical themes the persecuted church embodies again and again: blessing in the face of hate, endurance with joy, and fearless witness. These threads will carry through each chapter and help us see how Scripture and the global church light the path forward.

Chapter 1 — Jesus' Promise: Persecution Is Certain

We don't have to wonder whether opposition will come to those who follow Jesus. He said it plainly: "If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first" (John 15:18). Paul was just as direct: "Everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted" (2 Timothy 3:12).

The Bible is clear — persecution is not the exception; it is the expectation.

Almost all of Scripture testifies to this reality. From the patriarchs wandering without a home, to Israel groaning under Pharaoh, to prophets mocked and silenced, to the Church born under Roman rule — the story of God's people has always been written in the shadow of struggle. Even Revelation unfolds against the backdrop of empire and oppression. Persecution isn't a footnote to the Bible's story; it's the stage upon which God reveals His power and faithfulness.

That truth may sound heavy, but it's also freeing. It keeps us from surprise when opposition comes. It steadies us when the headlines shake us. And it connects us to a family that stretches across time and geography — a family that has walked this road before.

- In the first century, Roman governors dragged believers before tribunals and threw them to the lions.
- In the Middle Ages and Reformation, dissenters who clung to Scripture were mocked, imprisoned, or executed.
- Under communism, pastors were pulled from pulpits and locked in labor camps.

And persecution happens today, too.

THE TESTIMONIES OF TODAY



In Nigeria, Tabitha's life was shattered when Boko Haram swept through her village. She returned to find only ashes and bones — her home gone, her family's livelihood destroyed. Yet even in her grief, she clung to Christ. "They took everything from me," she said, "but they could not take my faith." Her testimony is not one of despair but of steadfast hope: the fire that consumed her village could not consume her trust in Jesus.

In India's Punjab region, Pastor Kumar was brutally attacked with swords for leaving Sikhism to follow Christ. "They wanted my head," he recalls, "but God's mercy is greater." His wife and brother were also injured, yet even amid threats and rejection, the church rallied to cover medical costs and care for his family. Today Kumar bears scars but also a bold confession: "If I live, I live for God. If I die, I die for God." His suffering has only deepened his witness that the Body of Christ grows stronger under pressure.

THE ILLUSION OF CULTURAL APPROVAL

At times, Christianity has appeared to hold cultural approval. Mid-20th century America is often remembered as a “Christian era,” where biblical values shaped the public square. Yet cultural advantage never erased spiritual opposition. During those years, disciples who resisted racism or corruption often faced pushback, showing that social respectability is not the same as true discipleship — and it cannot shield us from opposition.

The point is clear: hostility to true discipleship has never gone away. It was there under Rome, it was there under communism, it was there in the “Christian” America of the 1950s and ‘60s, and it is here today. Jesus’ promise has always been true: *“If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first”* (John 15:18).

THE CHURCH ENDURES

Yet in each of these moments, the church did not die. In Rome, the blood of the martyrs became the seed of the early Church. Under communism, secret house churches multiplied even as pastors were imprisoned. In times of cultural resistance, faithful disciples stood out all the more clearly. The Church grew deeper, its witness rang louder, and its faith burned brighter.

If the book of Acts were being written today, its pages would not center on the church in the West. They would tell the story of how God is moving in Iran, China, Nigeria, India, and beyond — places where the Gospel advances through fire and faithfulness.

YOUR LINE IN THE STORY

The thread runs unbroken — from the Roman arenas to today’s hidden house churches, from the Reformers’ prisons to believers like Tabitha in Nigeria or Pastor Kumar in India. And now, it stretches forward to you.

You may never face a mob at your door, but you will encounter moments that test your allegiance to Christ. What will you do when faithfulness is costly?

Their story invites you into a larger one: the witness of the global Church, enduring with joy, declaring Christ is worthy. The page is still being written, and your line of the story matters.

Reflect:

1. When you think about persecution in church history, which story challenges you most? Why?
2. How does Jesus’ promise that persecution is certain affect the way you think about following Him today?
3. What would faithfulness look like in your life if opposition came tomorrow?

Chapter 2 — Bless Those Who Hate You

In Scripture, blessing and forgiving go hand in hand. To “bless those who persecute you” means refusing to curse them and instead extending the grace of forgiveness.

Jesus doesn’t just tell us to forgive; He shows us what forgiveness looks like. On the cross, He prayed, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing” (Luke 23:34). And Paul reminds us this is exactly how God has dealt with us: “But God demonstrates His own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8). None of us deserved forgiveness — that’s Paul’s point. When we object, “They don’t deserve it,” Scripture reminds us that neither did we. That is precisely the beauty of the Gospel: God forgave us while we were still His enemies.

Because of this, forgiveness isn’t optional for Christ’s people — it’s the pattern we’ve been given. Paul writes, “Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you” (Ephesians 4:32). He echoes the same truth in Colossians: “Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you” (Colossians 3:13).

Forgiveness is not naïve or sentimental. It flows from the heart of the Gospel. We forgive because we have been forgiven. And when the persecuted church blesses those who curse them, they are living echoes of God’s own mercy to us.

A MODERN WITNESS OF FORGIVENESS



That same spirit is alive today in Nigeria. Suzanne was forced to watch Boko Haram militants kill her father. When she resisted her captors, they shot her in the head and left her for dead. Taken for burial, a thorn prick revealed she was still alive. After months of recovery, her heart was not filled with rage but with prayer: “Right from when the Boko Haram assailant shot me, I only pray for him, saying, ‘Oh God, forgive them. They are all ignorant of their actions.’ If he were here today, I would give him food, water, and a place to rest.”

Her words are almost unthinkable in human terms, yet they mirror the way of Christ. They blessed her persecutor with compassion even as they embodied Paul’s command: “Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse” (Romans 12:14). Forgiveness doesn’t mean pretending evil is acceptable. Suzanne’s forgiveness did not excuse Boko Haram’s violence; it bore witness to Christ’s power to overcome hate.

FORGIVENESS REQUIRES THE SPIRIT’S POWER

As Matt Chandler reminds us in his sermon “Incarnation and Implications” (Village Church, 2011), forgiveness is never about mustering up enough love on our own. “It’s not even possible outside of the Holy Spirit’s work in your heart,” he explains. We forgive because we recognize that we and our offenders share the same root of sinfulness. He continues, “You and whoever has committed the offense against

you are the same tree. You might bear different kinds of fruit, but you're both equally guilty of rebellion against God. ... When you get that you have sinned and you have rebelled, then you're able to, with more empathy, look upon those who have sinned against you with compassion."

And some may say, "I don't feel like forgiving." That is honest — and it highlights Chandler's point. Forgiveness is not about waiting for the right feelings but depending on the Spirit's power. The Spirit changes our hearts even when our emotions resist.

That perspective doesn't just apply to family conflict or personal offenses. It extends even to those who persecute us and try to stamp out the Gospel. When we remember that we share the same sinful root, and that Christ forgave us while we were still His enemies, we find the courage to look on persecutors with compassion instead of hatred. That's the way of Jesus — and it's the witness of the persecuted church today.

YOUR LINE IN THE STORY

Christ forgave you when you least deserved it. Now you are invited to mirror His mercy by extending forgiveness — even toward those who hurt you most.

Reflect:

1. Why is forgiveness so hard for us — especially toward those who wound us deeply?
2. What helps you remember that Christ forgave you "while you were still His enemy"?
3. Who might God be calling you to bless rather than curse this week?



Chapter 3 — Endure with Joy

Peter wrote, “If you suffer for doing good and you endure it, this brings favor with God” (1 Peter 2:20). The apostles lived this, leaving the Sanhedrin “rejoicing that they were counted worthy to be dishonored for the Name” (Acts 5:41). James echoes the same call: “Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything” (James 1:2-4).

Paul demonstrated this perspective from prison, writing to the Philippians with joy that overflowed despite chains on his wrists. For Paul, joy was not denial of hardship but defiant hope in Christ. He could rejoice because he knew the Gospel was advancing and Christ was being exalted, even through his suffering.

EARLY WITNESSES OF JOY

The Church has long carried this testimony. In the second century, Perpetua was said to have entered the arena singing hymns as she faced execution — joy marking even her final steps. To the watching world, her songs seemed foolish; to the family of faith, they were a declaration that death could not quench her hope in Christ. Centuries later, early Methodists in England would echo the same spirit, singing hymns with joy as crowds mocked and jeered. Their steadfastness in song turned ridicule into witness, showing that the joy of Christ cannot be drowned out by hostility.

JOY IN NEPAL: PULMAYA'S STORY



Pulmaya in Nepal knows this same costly path. Once a witch doctor trapped in fear, she came to faith through her grandson's witness and the songs of the Church. Her decision brought rejection: Family turned her away, she was barred from her parents' home, and neighbors excluded her from festivals and meals.

Yet through it all, Pulmaya radiates joy. She testifies, “The Lord gave me the strength. He is keeping me safe. I believe in Him. I will keep my faith in the Lord until my last breath. I live for Him, not for other people.” Each day she listens to her audio Bible, drawing peace from hearing Scripture in her own language: “I forget all the pain that comes my way, and I am encouraged.”

Her joy doesn't deny suffering; it declares that suffering cannot silence the Gospel.

JOY IN NIGERIA: LIATU'S STORY

Liatu from Nigeria also bears this witness. As a child, she fled Boko Haram's attack on her village, separated from her parents and forced to survive on the streets of Cameroon for years. Hunger, loneliness, and rejection pressed her to the edge of despair. She remembers crying every day, even asking God to take her life. But in time, through the encouragement of visiting believers and the promises of Scripture, Liatu found hope again. She now leads others in prayer and discipleship within her camp, testifying, “Jesus has done this for me. He gave me joy and made me a leader, even after all I suffered.” Her scars remain, but so does her song of joy in Christ — a joy that endures beyond loss.

PRACTICING JOY TODAY

How do we learn this same kind of joy? The persecuted church shows us that joy grows in practices of faith:

Worship: singing hymns and praising God even in the darkest night.

Community: finding strength from the fellowship of believers who share in suffering and encourage one another.

The Word: meditating on Scripture, letting God's promises speak louder than fear.

Biblical joy is not a product of willpower but a fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22). It is also forward-looking — joy that anticipates the day when Christ will return and make all things new (Revelation 21:5, Romans 8:18, 1 Peter 1:8-9). This defiant hope sustains believers through suffering, reminding us that every trial is temporary and every sacrifice points to eternal glory.

When Christians like Pulmaya, Liatu, or Perpetua rejoice in loss, they remind us that joy is not circumstantial. It is rooted in Christ — a joy that endures, strengthens, and proclaims to the world that Jesus is worth everything.

YOUR LINE IN THE STORY

Around the world, believers rejoice in prison cells, refugee camps, and burned-out villages. Their story now presses into yours. How will you add your line to this ongoing testimony of joy in Christ?

Reflect:

1. What's the difference between joy and denial? How do you see that in persecuted believers?
2. Where are you tempted to lose joy in your own trials?
3. What practice (worship, Scripture, community) could help you endure with joy this week?



Chapter 4 — Witness Without Fear

From the earliest days of the church, bold proclamation of Christ was met with fierce opposition. The book of Acts is filled with scenes where believers were dragged before authorities, threatened, and punished — yet their voices could not be silenced. In Acts 4, after healing a crippled man, the apostles were brought before the Sanhedrin and commanded to stop speaking about Jesus.

Instead of yielding, they declared with unshakable resolve, *“We cannot stop speaking about what we have seen and heard”* (Acts 4:20).

Jesus had already prepared them for this, saying, *“Do not fear those who kill the body but are not able to kill the soul”* (Matthew 10:28). Most may not see the truth of the Gospel now, but they will. As D. A. Carson reminds us, *“the worst [the persecutors] can do does not match the worst God can do”* (Charles L. Quarles, “Matthew,” in CSB Study Bible: Notes, ed. Edwin A. Blum and Trevin Wax, Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2017, 1517).

John’s Revelation echoes the same courage: *“They conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; for they did not love their lives to the point of death”* (Revelation 12:11).

That conviction has echoed through every generation of the Church. No matter the threats, believers who have encountered the risen Christ cannot keep silent.

RICHARD WURMBRAND’S WITNESS

One modern example is Richard Wurmbrand, a Romanian pastor imprisoned for 14 years under communism. His second imprisonment was especially brutal, yet he and other believers refused to be silent. It was strictly forbidden to preach to other prisoners, but they knew the Gospel could not be locked away. Whenever a brother was caught preaching, he was dragged to the beating room and returned bruised and bloody — only to pick up his sermon where he had left off.

Reflecting on those years, Wurmbrand said, *“A number of us decided to pay the price for the privilege of preaching, so we accepted their terms. It was a deal: we preached and they beat us. We were happy preaching; they were happy beating us—so everyone was happy.”*

PASTOR ANTONIO IN MEXICO



Fearless witness is not confined to the past. In rural Mexico, Pastor Antonio faced threats from those who opposed his ministry. He and his family were driven from their home, their possessions destroyed. Yet he returned to his community to continue preaching Christ. His words capture the heart of fearless witness: *“If I stay quiet, who will tell them about Jesus? If I leave, how will they hear?”* His courage reflects the same Spirit that empowered the apostles.

PRACTICING FEARLESS WITNESS TODAY

Why is fearless witness important today? Because our world is still full of competing voices and false hopes, and silence leaves those around us without the chance to hear of Christ. At the same time, we often feel fearful — afraid of rejection, ridicule, or even losing status, comfort, or safety. Yet the Gospel advances when ordinary believers, despite these fears, speak with courage, just as it has from the first century until now.

How can we embody fearless witness in our own lives? The persecuted church reminds us that courage is not the absence of fear but the presence of faith. Practical steps include:

- Clinging to Scripture: letting God's promises shape our responses more than threats.
- Depending on the Spirit: courage is a gift of God's presence, not our own resolve.
- Speaking with love: fearless witness is not brash or angry, but rooted in compassion for those who oppose us.
- Sharing your story: being ready and comfortable to tell others what Jesus has done in your life, so that your testimony points them to Him.

YOUR LINE IN THE STORY

Around the world, believers risk everything to proclaim Christ. Their stories call us out of silence and into boldness. How will you speak of Jesus when pressure comes? How will you bear witness in your workplace, neighborhood, or school? The persecuted church shows us the way: with open hands, courageous hearts, and words that cannot be silenced.

Reflect:

1. What fears most often keep you silent about your faith?
2. How does the boldness of persecuted believers encourage you?
3. Where might God be calling you to take a risk in speaking for Christ?



Chapter 5 — Pursue Unity and Love Above All

When hostility rises, it is tempting to close ranks and lash out at those who oppose us. But Jesus pointed us in a different direction. On the night before His death, unity and love were on His heart. He prayed not only for His disciples but for all who would one day believe—for us: *“My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one ... so that the world may believe that you have sent me”* (John 17:20–21).

Unity was central to His prayer. And He tied it directly to our witness. Division undermines the Gospel; unity under pressure displays its power. And that unity is always rooted in love.

THE WITNESS OF THE PERSECUTED CHURCH

From the start, the church showed this unity under fire. Outsiders in Rome marveled, *“See how they love one another ... and how they are ready to die for each other.”* During the Decian persecution, Cyprian of Carthage warned believers that division from within was a greater danger than persecution from without. Fidelity to Jesus, he said, meant fidelity to one another.

That same spirit appeared in a small village in Central Africa, where a local pastor invited all the churches in his area to a special unity service. Nineteen came. After the joyful worship ended, he approached one of our partners and said, *“We invited 20 pastors and their churches, but only 19 came. I want to ask forgiveness for our lack of unity.”* The partner smiled and replied, *“Where I come from, if 19 out of 20 pastors came together for anything, we’d call that revival.”*

The humility of that moment still lingers. Their hunger for unity put many of us to shame—and reflected the kind of love Jesus prayed for in John 17, the love that makes the gospel visible to the world.

In North Korea, Minho’s story echoes the same truth. Arrested for his faith, he endured brutal treatment and pressure to betray others. What sustained him was knowing that believers worldwide were praying for him. He later testified that prayer was the most effective weapon against fear, and that the unity of the global church gave him courage to keep believing.

THE CALL TO LOVE

Francis Chan, reflecting on Jesus’ prayer in John 17, writes: *“It seems outrageous that a church so divided could become perfectly one, but nothing is more outrageous than the cross. ... He wants our unity to impact the world.”*

Persecution reveals what matters most. The call of Jesus is not to win arguments but to love. And in Scripture, love and unity are inseparable. This call is both inward—toward fellow believers, binding us in unity—and outward—toward those who oppose us, showing them the grace of Christ. Paul reminds us: *“If I ... have a faith that can move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing”* (1 Corinthians 13:2). Elsewhere he writes, *“Above all, put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity”* (Colossians 3:14).

The persecuted church teaches us that love is strength. It keeps us from collapsing into fear or rage. And it creates a resilient unity the world cannot ignore.

OUR FRACTURED MOMENT

Here in the West, our divisions are often about ideology, politics, or preference. But the damage is real. Every insult, every fracture, every refusal to forgive weakens our witness. When the world sees only fighting, the credibility of our message fades.

Persecution—whether harsh or subtle—tests us. Will we mirror the rage of our culture, or walk the way of Jesus: the way of unity and love?

FOLLOWING THE WAY OF CHRIST

Unity and love do not mean uniformity or compromise on truth. They mean holding Christ at the center and treating one another as brothers and sisters first, even when disagreements remain.

Unity is not optional. Jesus prayed for it, He purchased it with His blood, and He intends to use it for His glory in the world.

The persecuted church shows us how to live this out. When all else is stripped away, Christ is enough. And when Christ is enough, love and unity flow naturally—even in the hardest places.

YOUR LINE IN THE STORY

The call now comes to us. How will you pursue unity and love in a divided world? How will you embody the prayer of Jesus, showing that He was sent by the Father? The persecuted church has shown the way. Now it is our turn to live it.

Reflect:

1. Why do unity and love matter so much to Jesus' mission in John 17?
2. How do divisions in the church today weaken our witness?
3. What is one way you can actively pursue unity and love this week?



Conclusion — Christ Is Worth It

The persecuted church reminds us that opposition is not the end of the story. It is the place where God does some of His deepest work. From Nigeria to Nepal, from Mexico to the Middle East, believers show us that hostility can become a platform for courage, forgiveness, and joy.

Billy Graham put it simply: *"We can take persecution because we know the purpose behind it. The purpose is to glorify God."* That's the anchor. Every insult, every exclusion, every act of violence aimed at God's people becomes an opportunity to lift high the name of Jesus.

The question for us is not if opposition will come, but how we will respond when it does. Will we meet hatred with blessing? Will we endure with joy? Will we bear witness without fear? These are not abstract ideals. They are the everyday choices of believers around the world who declare with their lives: Jesus is worthy.

And their story is meant to shape ours. You may not face prison or mobs at your door, but you will face moments where faithfulness costs you something. In those moments, remember that you are not alone. You are part of a family that spans the centuries and the continents — a family that has always carried the Gospel forward in the face of opposition.

**So let us take courage, not
shrinking back, but pressing on
with love, hope, and boldness.
For the purpose behind it all is
clear: to glorify God.**



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