



OpenDoors®

STAND ONE WITH THEM

STOP THE VIOLENCE BY PRAYING
TO OUR POWERFUL GOD

PREACHING RESOURCE

Introduction

ABOUT PERSECUTION

Led from the front, gives context about persecution and why we are praying together today.

SUGGESTED PREACHING OUTLINE

Welcome to the International Day of Prayer for the Persecuted Church. Also known as the 'All Hallow Tide', when churches remember the martyrs and saints of the Christian faith. Around the world, some 100,000 congregations will be joining with us in celebrating the International Day of Prayer for the Persecuted Church. And this year our focus is on the displaced.

Today, 365 million Christians face persecution for their faith.

Believers may be rejected, abused, imprisoned, or even killed – simply for following Jesus. In some countries, like North Korea, Somalia, and Afghanistan, following Jesus is illegal and can be punishable by death.

Persecution is not new – the Church has been persecuted since it was born.

But we believe that God is the God of the impossible! We have seen Him change nations, leaders, gang members, and terrorists, and turn even the coldest hearts to Himself. Think Paul turning to Christ! That's why we are coming together to pray today for our persecuted brothers and sisters—those who share our faith but not our freedom.

As the Church, the global body of Christ, we are ONE with those who face persecution for their faith. When one part suffers, we all suffer. Through prayer, we remember our suffering brothers and sisters and ask God to strengthen them, to keep following Jesus in some of the darkest places in the world.

You can use the following pages as an outline for a prayer-focused sermon to compliment your time of prayer.

BIBLE VERSE

ISAIAH 58:6-9

6 “Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen:
to loose the chains of injustice
and untie the cords of the yoke,
to set the oppressed free
and break every yoke?

7 Is it not to share your food with the hungry
and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter—
when you see the naked, to clothe them,
and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood?

8 Then your light will break forth like the dawn,
and your healing will quickly appear;
then your righteousness will go before you,
and the glory of the Lord will be your rear guard.

9 Then you will call, and the Lord will answer;
you will cry for help, and He will say: Here am I.

VIDEO

*Content warning strong themes

To help us see, to understand, to pray; giving us a glimpse into the path of our persecuted brothers and sisters in Sub-Saharan Africa. **Let us see them and hear their voices.**

What they say is hard to hear, but they are our family, and we choose to listen.

Play IDOP video.

OR QUOTES

Used where video is not possible

Delivered by different members of the congregation.

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Magdalene

"Life has become so difficult for me. If I sit, I keep crying. If I lay down at night, everything that happened, I see it happen again. Like a movie, it all flashes in front of my eyes. Again, and again. The way they killed that boy. The moment when I saw that baby, still crying, in the fire."

Pastor Elisha

"They took my Bible, they took everything. They opened the Bible, and they [defecated] on the Bible. And they even videoed it and posted it. It pained me too much."

Mafulul

"By 5p.m., the attackers came. They started shooting everywhere. My wife had just finished cooking. Immediately they started killing the women and children. They shot the ones who ran. They macheted the ones who stopped. It was then they killed my wife.

"She carried our 9-month-old son on her back. When I went to the river, I found her on the ground. She was shot in the stomach. The bullet went through her body into our son on her back.

"I saw them there. I cried. I cried. It was so hard. I turned and saw my brothers' wife with two of their children. All of them dead on the ground. 20 people were killed instantly, and about 45 were injured."

Powerful. Painful. Hard to hear. Yet today, we choose to watch and pray in the hour of their Gethsemane, that they will not be overwhelmed. And neither, by the grace of God, will we.

**END VIDEO /
QUOTATIONS**

THE CONTEXT

There are more Christians in Africa than in anywhere else in the world. And yet, according to recent research from Open Doors, **95 percent of the Christians killed in 2023 for their faith were murdered in Sub-Saharan Africa – and that is a conservative estimate. The vast majority were killed in Nigeria.**

The violence is driving many from their homes: 34.5 million in Sub-Saharan Africa. And of these, more than 16 million are Christians.

That could be you and me, if we happened to live there rather than here.

Many of them are driven from their homes and off their ancestral land because of their faith in Jesus.

Islamist terror groups, such as al-Qaeda, al-Shabaab, and Boko Haram are active. Islamist insurgency is the root cause of the violence and mass displacement.

Their aim is to forge an Islamist State, ruled by Islamic law. And they are doing so by force. Their primary target? Christians and non-Muslims. Though they also attack moderate Muslims who do not share their radical ideology.

Burkina Faso has lost **40 per cent** of its territory to these Islamist terror groups. They have destroyed more than **6,000 schools**, depriving a million children of education, laying up trouble for the years to come.

In Nigeria, Christian communities and villages are attacked and overrun by militants. We heard the stories of a few of those they attacked earlier. And it is happening almost daily. **In Nigeria, the Islamist insurgents are moving south, deeper into Christian-majority areas.**

Illia Djadi of Open Doors sums it up, “**In some areas of Nigeria, going to church is like travelling with a one-way ticket. There's no certainty or guarantee of coming back. But people are still going to church.**”

THE IMPACT

The chaos and disruption are impacting the Church, communities, and the world.

A church leader in Burkina Faso was advised to leave because of the rising violence. But he could not abandon his church and his congregation.

His church was attacked in April 2019. Well-armed Islamist insurgents came with a list of targets. His name was top of that list. They tried to force him to convert to Islam. When he refused, they killed him. Along with five other leaders in the church.

In Nigeria, Fulani extremists are targeting Christian communities, burning churches, and forcing villagers off lands that have belonged to them for generations.

Pastor Barnabas in Nigeria is just one of the displaced. His brother and his brother's wife were killed by militants. All he could do was run. And when they caught him too, they set about him with a machete and a stick. Even now, he can barely use one hand.

For almost five years, Barnabas has been living in a camp with his wife and five children. Together, they share a tent affording less floorspace than a double mattress. And they are surrounded by others having to do the same. Barnabas is their pastor and his frustration is palpable:

Barnabas

"The news doesn't care about it," he says, "the government doesn't talk about it. Nobody talks about it. We are remaining in darkness. Tell me: How that would make you feel? Being forgotten, being disregarded?"

"Everything in my home and village was burned," he adds. "I cannot take care of my children. I cannot feed them. They are no longer in school. I have lost everything."

Except his faith.

"I hand over everything to God," he says. "Let the will of God be done in my life."

Working with nothing but his faith, he does all he can to help the believers in his camp.

"I will not lose my confidence in God. And I will always encourage them, no matter what, that they should still believe God, that one day we shall come back to our ancestral homes. The battle belongs to the Lord. Our eyes and our hope are on Him."

Hope. God is the God of hope. And Barnabas clings to Him.

Insecurity and instability are putting the future of the Church at risk and creating a displacement crisis, an education crisis, and a healthcare crisis.

THEIR ABANDONMENT

Across Sub-Saharan Africa, as conflict kills and displaces Christians, many have a strong feeling of being abandoned. Alone.

And yet...

The Church in Africa is among the fastest growing in the world.

And across Nigeria, within sight of communities destroyed by violence, many new churches are springing up. A Church strong, resilient, faith-filled and determined.

“We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed.” – 2 Corinthians 4:8-9

OUR SCRIPTURAL MANDATE

Our Scriptural mandate is clear. God is calling, and we will respond.

Isaiah 58:6-9 calls us to:

Verse 6

- To seek justice until the oppressed are free
- To share our food with the hungry

Verse 7

- To provide shelter for the homeless
- To clothe those who have none
- To not turn away from the body of Christ

Verses 8-9

- To help us as we help others
- To open our eyes, our hearts, and our hands

“You will call, and the Lord will answer; you will cry for help, and He will say: Here am I.” – Isaiah 58:9

CALL TO ACTION

Christians targeted by violence in Sub-Saharan Africa want us to know that they are feeling isolated and alone.

And only when we share their pain will they no longer feel alone.

The ministry of Open Doors has a vision to awaken the global Church to their need.

They have a vision to bridge divisions of culture, language, and geography, to connect the African Church to the global Church.

Their aims are to help the global community acknowledge and act against extreme violence.

To meet the basic needs of Christians driven from their homes by conflict and war.

For every family in Sub-Saharan Africa who has been directly affected by violence to be supported, spiritually, physically, and emotionally.

To support the Church, to help it persevere, be resilient, resourceful, and influential.

It aims to raise a million prayers and signatures on a petition.

Open Doors invites you to sign the petition. And to share that petition. You can visit the Open Doors website for more details and to act.

John Ugbede is the Vice-Chairman of the Christian Association of Nigeria in Benue state. Two million Christians in Benue alone have been driven by conflict into 13 separate camps for the displaced.

He says, "The fact is we are under attack. The fact is millions are displaced from their ancestral homes." And he calls on us to see, to care and to help:

"Rise up to our support. Rise up to tell the world that something is wrong. Rise up for the Church. Stand with them because we are one. We are believers in Christ, the living and risen God. We are one so they should stand with us. Tell everybody, tell the powers that be that the Church is under persecution, and they must be rescued. I believe that if that happens, we will be delivered."

PRAY TOGETHER

Let's join to pray for those who are most persecuted for their faith in Jesus.

Option 1

Break up into smaller groups to pray together, using the prayer resources.

On your digital prayer cards, you will find a guided prayer and prayer points for persecuted Christians in different regions of the world. Take a moment to pray together for these believers using the prompts provided.

Option 2

Pray in small groups or from the front using the prayer points available on the slides.

On the slides, you will find prayer points for persecuted Christians in different regions of the world. Let's take a moment to pray together for them.

CLOSING PRAYER

Led from the front, a concluding prayer to bring the congregation together after a time of small group prayer.

Gracious God and loving Father,

We pray for the violence our persecuted family face to end. Speak to the people of violence and quicken their hearts. Show them a better way. Show them Yourself, Jesus, the Way, the Truth, and the Life. And lead them in Your way.

Father, we pray for political leadership. For hearts of compassion; for the will, the strategy, and the resources to put an end to impunity, and to protect their people.

For international agencies to wake up to the religious dimension of this assault on Africa's Christians.

That they will engage not only with politicians but with the faith leaders who are respected and trusted by the people.

We pray for those in leadership in the Church. Many wonder how to respond. Give them wisdom. Give them guidance. Give them resources.

Father, we pray for our brothers and sisters in Christ. We declare your goodness, and we cry out to You to deliver them from evil.

Protect them, provide for them, and strengthen them in their faith. And help us to do the same.

Comfort the many who mourn. Grant them beauty instead of ashes, the oil of joy instead of mourning. Dress them in a garment of praise instead of despair. Raise them up to be oaks of righteousness, a planting of the Lord for the display of Your splendour.

Help Your beloved body to persevere, to grow in resilience, endurance, and determination. To continue in faithfulness. And help us to do the same.

Help us also to choose to watch and pray and to stand with our brothers and sisters in this their time of trial.

**In Jesus' name,
Amen.**