

GoDeeper



CONTINUE THE CONVERSATION WITH YOUR SMALL GROUP, FAMILY, OR IN YOUR PERSONAL BIBLE STUDY TIME.

Paul | Part Two | Pastor Steve Wells | 04.25.2021
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2 Timothy 3:12-15 "12 Yes, and everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution. 13 But evil people and impostors will flourish. They will deceive others and will themselves be deceived. 14 But you must remain faithful to the things you have been taught. You know they are true, for you know you can trust those who taught you. 15 You have been taught the holy Scriptures from childhood, and they have given you the wisdom to receive the salvation that comes by trusting in Christ Jesus. "

As we continue learning about Paul/Saul - chief prosecutor of the church - it is important for us to realize and see that Christian persecution is still active in our world today. This week, as a Family, Small Group, and as a Church let's come together in prayer for the persecuted church and for future martyrs worldwide. Read the article below from Family Research Council written by Arielle Del Turco (<https://www.frc.org/updatearticle/20210114/facts-persecution>).

1. More Christians are murdered in Nigeria than in any other country.

Open Doors found that an estimated 5,678 people were killed in Nigeria from October 2019 to September 2020, making Nigeria the country where Christians endure the most fatal violence. Attacks from Boko Haram, Fulani militant herdsman, and the ISIS affiliate ISWAP are common throughout Middle Belt and northern Nigeria.

Open Doors' CEO David Curry joined Tony Perkins on Washington Watch to discuss the alarming trends detailed in the report. Curry said, "In Nigeria, extremists were already targeting Christian communities. Now those Christian communities are more or less trapped. They have ineffectual government in Nigeria, in Burkina Faso, and in this region. And you're seeing a massive spike in violence there, up to 60 percent worldwide, most of it in Nigeria by Boko Haram or the Fulani herdsman." The near-genocide that is occurring in Nigeria warrants the world's urgent attention, as FRC highlighted in its publication, *The Crisis of Christian Persecution in Nigeria*.

2. COVID-19 has enabled religious persecution through relief discrimination, forced conversion, and as justification for increasing surveillance.

Researchers from Open Doors found that COVID-19 relief discrimination against Christians occurred in Ethiopia, Malaysia, Nigeria, Vietnam, and the Middle East, among other places. Some Christians have been told that they were denied aid from their governments because "your Church or your God should feed you" or "the virus was created and/or spread by the West."

3. Technology is making it easier for governments to control and suppress religious activities.

China is the foremost example of an oppressive regime that utilizes advanced technology to manipulate its citizens' behavior -- including religious practice. However, Iran is rapidly emerging as a surveillance state.

One Iranian Christian named Saghar told Open Doors, "I'm sure that my phone also was tapped by the government. They could sort of record my conversations, and so in our meetings, we would turn off our phones and put it in another room. Because we know that they are able to record any voices and sounds in the room by the phones. And also, I believe that they have a particular team to hack emails, people's emails, Christians' emails, and the private like social medias. And I know that they spend lots of money for this and use the technology to have surveillance on Christians." Curry also pointed to China as a country that is using high-tech tools to make life harder for the countries Christians: "But right now, you've got 100 million Christians in China who are who are being surveilled. They're being tracked. They're being scored in the citizenship score and that it's affecting their ability for the kids to get into the schools."

4. North Korea has held the title of "world's worst persecutor of Christians" for 20 consecutive years.

A tragic consistency over the last two decades is that North Korea remains the world's worst violator of religious freedom. Entering 2021, things are not looking better for the people of North Korea as COVID-19 has presented added challenges.

For more information on the horrific abuses against Christians in North Korea and what the U.S. government can do about it, read FRC's new publication, *North Korea: The World's Foremost Violator of Religious Freedom*.

5. Sudan's new constitution guarantees freedom of religion, but it will take time for the situation of Christians to improve.

Sudan, a longtime violator of religious freedom, takes the 13th spot on the World Watch List. Although marked improvements have occurred over the last two years, Christians wait to see if their Islamic society will fully accept them. For now, Christians in Sudan still face challenges, especially those from a Muslim background.

6. Approximately 91 percent of recorded violent killings of Christians for faith-related reasons took place in Africa.

Although the African continent is home to the world's largest number of Christians, religiously motivated violence is increasing. In sub-Saharan Africa, Christians experienced 30 percent higher levels of violence from Islamist militant groups than the previous year. It is believed this can be attributed to the groups taking advantage of lockdowns and governments rendered weaker from the COVID-19 crisis. FRC's Lela Gilbert has highlighted the sharp rise in violence in Africa in 2020.

The widespread violence in Africa had yet to be effectively countered by African governments. Curry argues, "The Biden administration is going to need to step up and really pressure [Nigerian President] Buhari and these coalitions in Africa to try to take care of this."

7. China jumped to #17 on the World Watch List.

Reflecting the rapidly worsening religious freedom conditions in China, Open Doors now recognizes the country as the 17th most difficult country to be a Christian. Americans may be familiar with the persecution faced by members of house churches, but even state-sanctioned churches face increasing pressure from the Chinese government.

In an interview with Open Doors, Rev. Jonathan Liu, a former pastor of a state-approved Three-Self Movement church in China, said, "In the government-sanctioned churches, the pastors are politicalized and obedient to the CCP. The CCP's lessons and preachings were also spoken or written according to the policies of the Chinese government. The government also keeps a very strong eye on the churches. I felt very oppressed while I worked in the government-sanctioned church."

8. Legal harassment of Christians in Turkey has caused some Christians to consider fleeing.

The rise in religious nationalism in Turkey has placed increasing pressure on Christians in the last few years. While this has made some Christians consider leaving Turkey, others do not have to consider it -- they are being forced to go. Dozens of foreign Christian workers and church leaders have been made to leave Turkey. Due to increasing legal harassment, Turkey rose from #25 from #36 on the World Watch List.

9. In Latin American, drug cartels are the largest threat to religious freedom.

Drug cartels often violently attack Catholic bishops and priests in Columbia, Mexico, and throughout Latin America. Church leaders are typically targeted for condemning corruption and violence, thereby threatening the illicit activities of these criminal enterprises.

10. The world's largest democracy, India, is among the top 10 most difficult countries to be a Christian.

Although India maintains a strong democracy, the Hindu nationalist movement, to which the current Indian prime minister belongs, forwards the poisonous idea that "to be Indian is to be Hindu," leaving little room for those of other faiths. This ideology has inspired mob violence against Christians and others. Meanwhile, Indian Christians also face discrimination from the government.

Open Doors estimates that 150,000 Christians in India were denied aid during the COVID-19 pandemic because of their faith. Curry says, "India has a big challenge. It's the largest democracy in terms of people, but right now, they're having major human rights issues. And it's all around their nationalistic agenda to make India Hindu, completely Hindu, even though there's a lot of pluralism in that country." That is why, Curry said, "they're up in the World Watch List again this year at #10, which is really shocking considering what it takes to get into the top 10."

Overall, this year's World Watch List reminds us of the many diverse challenges faced by fellow believers around the world. As we learn more about the persecuted church, may we be moved to prayer and action on their behalf.

Reflection:

- Have you experienced persecution for your faith? If so, how and how did you respond?
- Have you witnessed someone else being persecuted for their faith?
- Have you heard stories from friends or family members experiencing persecution for their faith in Jesus?
- How can you prepare yourself and your family to stand up when persecuted for your/their faith?