

## Day 47 I Feel So Vulnerable!

***“Happy are those who have suffered persecution for the cause of goodness, for the kingdom of Heaven is theirs! “And what happiness will be yours when people blame you and ill-treat you and say all kinds of slanderous things against you for my sake!” (Matthew 5:10-11 PHILLIPS)***

Jesus, in His Sermon on the Mount, is explaining to those willing to listen what a Kingdom life looks like. The Way to the Father is through Jesus. **Jesus came not only to show us the way to the Father, but also reveal to us the Father’s Way. The beatitudes are God’s pathway to a blessed life.** We have to follow Jesus’ instruction, obey His commands, build according to His plan and pattern our lives after Christ; that is the Father’s Way. To see Jesus, is to see the Father. To listen to Jesus, is to hear the Father’s Words. To know Jesus, is to know the Father. Jesus told Philip, when he asked to see the Father, ***“If you had really known me, you would know who my Father is. From now on, you do know him and have seen him!”*** 8 Philip said, ***“Lord, show us the Father, and we will be satisfied.”*** 9 Jesus replied, ***“Have I been with you all this time, Philip, and yet you still don’t know who I am? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father! So why are you asking me to show him to you? 10 Don’t you believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words I speak are not my own, but my Father who lives in me does his work through me. 11 Just believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me. Or at least believe because of the work you have seen me do.”*** (John 14:7-11 NLT)

The Father sent Jesus, and Jesus is sending us. Jesus told the disciples that He is sending them in the same way that the Father sent Him. ***“Again he said, ‘Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I am sending you.’”***(John 20:21 NLT) The Father sent Jesus in the most non-threatening way that anyone could be sent. Jesus was sent as a baby born in a manger. What threat can a baby possibly be to anyone. Babies do not threaten, babies are completely dependent and reliant on the care of others. **Babies are not just dependent, they are completely vulnerable. Our Heavenly Father, in His Omniscient wisdom, sent Jesus in complete vulnerability.** He could have sent Jesus in His Omnipotent power, yet Jesus is clothed in humanity, subjected to vulnerability and exposed to suffering and pain, even the pain of death. The God of the whole universe, wrapped in humble flesh, taking on the form of a servant, and suffering on behalf of the whole world. Compare that to the way of the world.

The world loves winners; they embrace the strong and powerful. They admire the qualities of those who conquer, those who take what they want and show strength. **Weakness, vulnerability, these are not seen as qualities that should be embraced. It is the strong that survives, it is the fittest that stays alive and getting everything that we can, when we can is all we can do!** If you want to get something out of life, then you simply take it. Nobody suffers willingly. We all want to avoid suffering. If we feel bad, we take a pill; if we feel really bad, we go to the doctor; all in an attempt to avoid pain and suffering. Yet, Jesus willingly endures suffering, and that suffering is not due to His own actions, but it is a suffering on behalf of those who actually deserve the punishment. Jesus only did good, and yet was rejected by men and suffered unspeakable things. Jesus was very aware of the reason the Father sent Him, and He was clear about His mission and purpose. ***“Then Jesus began to tell them that the Son of Man must suffer many terrible things and be rejected by the elders, the leading priests, and the teachers of religious law. He would be killed, but three days later he would rise from the dead.”*** (Mark 8:31 NLT)

Jesus openly discussed this with the disciples, and it did not make sense to them. When we consider what Jesus is asking of us, especially when we compare it to what we have heard a great life looks like from the world’s perspective, we also are left confused. Not only are we confused, we think we know

better. **So we try to convince Jesus, through pleading and negotiating, that there must be a better, or if we are honest, an easier way.** No one likes suffering. We are not gluttons for punishment. **But when we see the process of the beatitudes, it inevitably leads to a place of maturity. That place of maturity brings us face to face with the reality of being willing to suffer for Jesus sake.** Not suffer because we are unrighteous and do the wrong things that deserve punishment, but suffer because we do things God's way and are hated for it. Just like Peter, we are left scrambling for another way out, because we did not sign up for suffering, we signed up for glory. Peter was so confident that he was right, and Jesus was confused, that he had the audacity to reprimand Jesus. ***"As he talked about this openly with his disciples, Peter took him aside and began to reprimand him for saying such things. 33 Jesus turned around and looked at his disciples, then reprimanded Peter. 'Get away from me, Satan!' he said. 'You are seeing things merely from a human point of view, not from God's.'"* (Mark 8:31-33 NLT)**

This word "reprimand" means: to assess a penalty; to allege as a crimination; to reprove, chide, censure, rebuke, admonish strongly. Peter was not simply saying, "Oh no, Jesus, don't do it!" He was saying, "Stop that nonsense suffering and dying talk, Jesus, that simply is criminal and wrong." **Before we jump on Pete, just think of your own life. How many times have you tried to negotiate yourself out of the will of God? We talk ourselves out of tithing, "Well, that's Old Testament." We talk ourselves out of serving, "Well, God knows I am too busy." We talk ourselves out of forgiving, "Well, I am processing."** We talk ourselves out of the community of our brothers and sisters, "Well, that church is full of hypocrites." I could continue, but I am sure you are getting my drift. **We need to stop rebuking Jesus, and start obeying Him! Living the way of the cross is not negotiable; it is mandatory for growth and spiritual maturity that leads to the willingness to endure whatever is necessary to fulfill the will of the Father.**

**Just like Peter, we subject ourselves to a rebuke from Jesus because we are actually allowing the enemy of our faith to pit ourselves against ourselves.** How dumb can we get and still breathe? Obviously, pretty foolish if we think we know better than Jesus. **Ask yourself, would you rather be rebuked by Jesus, or would you rather hear, "Well done!"** The Father sent Jesus in a vulnerable way and Jesus is sending us the same. ***"I am sending you like lambs into a pack of wolves. So be as wise as snakes and as innocent as doves."* (Matthew 10:16 CEV)**

How wise is it to send lambs into a pack of wolves? If you were to ask me, I would straight up tell you that is not a very smart thing to do. Wolves don't make great play pals for lambs, they eat 'em. **Why would Jesus send us in such a vulnerable state?** Jesus was completely dependent on the Father. He did not do or say anything that He did not first hear the Father say. Jesus sends us in the same way as the Father sent Him, so that we would be completely dependent on Him and not on ourselves. **It is vulnerability with purpose; it is weakness by design; it is power under control; it is upside down, but it leads to victorious living!**

**Vulnerability should lead all of us to complete dependency on the Father.** Persecution, false accusation, blame and suffering because we do the right things, should propel us constantly into the Father's presence. **The only way that lambs can walk among wolves is for the lambs to stay close to the Shepherd.**

#### **Reflection and Prayer:**

- Thank you for continually praying for others. This week we are focused more on the pain of others than our own. But also know that the Father knows everything you face and He is faithful!
- Take a moment and pray through today's list. (Source: [opendoorsusa.org](http://opendoorsusa.org))

**17 - CHINA:** China has installed more than 415 million facial recognition surveillance cameras that track people's whereabouts.

- **SOURCE OF PERSECUTION** - Communist and post- communist oppression
- **LEADER** - President Xi Jinping
- **TOTAL POPULATION** - 1,424,548,000
- **CHRISTIAN POPULATION** - 97,200,000 (6.8%)
- **MAIN RELIGION** - Agnosticism

#### **WHAT IS LIFE LIKE FOR CHRISTIANS IN CHINA?**

The church in China continues to enjoy strong growth; however, life for Christians is anything but straightforward. The policy of "Sinicizing" the church has been implemented nationwide, as the Communist Party limits whatever it perceives as a threat to its rule and ideology. Thousands of churches have been damaged or closed. In some parts of China, children under the age of 18 aren't allowed to attend church—part of the country's efforts to stunt future growth.

#### **PRAYER POINTS:**

- Ask the Lord to give church leaders wisdom, discernment and guidance as they lead congregations in light of increased restrictions and surveillance.
- Lift up in prayer all who have left their former religion to follow Jesus. Pray they will be protected from harm, strengthened in their faith and empowered in their witness.
- Ask the Lord to open the eyes of those in authority to the unequalled power and beauty of the gospel.

#### **An Awakening in the church:**

"Ruth Zhao" was a performer in the Chinese military's Cultural and Performance Division. She was famous for her performances, winning awards year after year. But recently, everything changed. Ruth's boss told her she had to stop going to church meetings—and that she couldn't be both a military performer and a Christian, since military personnel in China are not allowed to be Christians. Ruth was faced with a life-changing decision: Deny her faith and keep her job, or declare her unchanging love for the Lord and risk everything. Ruth knew she could not deny Jesus. So, she quit her job. Her resignation infuriated her boss. He punished her by stripping her of all awards and accolades, and drastically reduced her retirement benefits. Ruth lost her job, her reputation and her financial security.

She had paid the price of standing strong in her faith in Jesus in China. Ruth is just one of the believers in China whose lives have been completely changed by the persecution against Christians. Restrictions, pressure, warnings, and sometimes surprise raids on churches—these are all part of Christian life for Chinese Christians in 2020. Chinese churches have responded by asking Open Doors to journey with them—they want to understand the biblical foundations of persecution, and they want training and resources. "This is awakening! Thank you so much for this great learning opportunity," one sister shared, after attending training from Open Doors. Her husband had been imprisoned for distributing Bibles in the past, and she had experienced persecution on many occasions. "I used to experience a lot of persecution. While my life has become stable, my spirit has become less alert. It's time for us to prepare, as persecution is escalating in different areas in China. I will pass on my learning to other brothers and sisters."

**18 - MYANMAR:** Myanmar is the scene of the world's longest civil war, which has made Christians increasingly vulnerable to insurgent groups.

- **SOURCE OF PERSECUTION** - Religious nationalism
- **LEADER** - President U Win Myint
- **TOTAL POPULATION** - 54,808,000
- **CHRISTIAN POPULATION** - 4,362,000 (8%)
- **MAIN RELIGION** - Buddhism

#### **WHAT IS LIFE LIKE FOR CHRISTIANS IN MYANMAR?**

Religious nationalism is especially strong in Myanmar and drives much of the persecution of Christians. There is an increasing emphasis on Buddhism, to the exclusion of all other religions. Converts to Christianity often face persecution from their families and communities who aim to stay “Buddhist only.” They make life for Christian families impossible by not allowing them to use community resources, such as water. Churches have been attacked, and in the distribution of COVID-19 government aid, Christians have been deliberately overlooked.

#### **PRAYER POINTS:**

- Pray with those who have left Buddhism to follow Jesus—that God will strengthen, encourage and protect them.
- Ask that all believers in Myanmar will receive and enjoy fruitful fellowship with other Christians.
- Pray that the Lord will intervene and bring a peaceful resolution to the ongoing civil war.
- Pray for protection for church leaders who are often targeted by Buddhist extremists and insurgents. Ask God to guide their steps as they make disciples.

**19 - VIETNAM:** In remote Vietnam, a woman who leaves her tribe’s beliefs to follow Jesus often loses any rights to see her children.

- **SOURCE OF PERSECUTION** - Communist and post- communist oppression
- **LEADER** - President Nguyen Phu Trong
- **TOTAL POPULATION** - 98,360,000
- **CHRISTIAN POPULATION** - 8,924,000 (9.1%)
- **MAIN RELIGION** - Buddhism

#### **WHAT IS LIFE LIKE FOR CHRISTIANS IN VIETNAM?**

In Vietnam, the most intense persecution is reserved for non- traditional Protestants and converts from indigenous religions, especially in the remote areas of central and northern Vietnam. The majority of the population in these areas belong to the country’s ethnic minorities, like the Hmong, and face social exclusion, discrimination and attacks. Homes are sometimes destroyed, forcing Christians to leave their villages. In several cases, Christians fled abroad and claimed asylum only to be sent back due to Vietnamese pressure.

#### **PRAYER POINTS:**

- Pray that local authorities’ suspicion against Christians will ease and be replaced with an appreciation of their value to society.
- Ask God to strengthen believers who are under pressure to renounce their faith as they cling to Jesus and follow Him.
- Pray that young Christians will grow in their love for Jesus, their understanding of the gospel and their appreciation for the Bible, giving them a foundation for life.

**20 - MAURITANIA:** In Mauritania, leaving Islam is illegal; converts can be prosecuted.

- **SOURCE OF PERSECUTION** - Islamic oppression
- **LEADER** - President Mohamed Ould Abdel Aziz
- **TOTAL POPULATION** - 4,784,000
- **CHRISTIAN POPULATION** - 10,800 (0.2%)
- **MAIN RELIGION** - Islam

#### **WHAT IS LIFE LIKE FOR CHRISTIANS IN MAURITANIA?**

Mauritania's restrictive environment makes it impossible for Christians to gather openly. This is especially true for converts from Islam, who face enormous pressure from their families and communities. In Mauritania's tribal culture, leaving Islam is not only seen as religious betrayal, but also as a betrayal of the tribe and family. When anyone leaves Islam, they're isolated and forced to live on their own—a difficult trial in North Africa where survival often relies on community.

#### **PRAYER POINTS:**

- Ask God for strength and protection for all converts. Pray that families will increasingly honor and respect their decision to follow Jesus.
- Pray for comfort and encouragement for isolated Christians who have been excommunicated from their families. Ask God to make a way to meet other believers.
- Pray that opportunities will open up for believers to safely share the gospel with others.

**36 - ETHIOPIA** - In Ethiopia, persecution is often dependent on what kind of Christian you are or where you live. Because of the government's special relationship with the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, other denominations are persecuted by the state and by the Orthodox community. The other major factor for persecution in Ethiopia is Islamic extremism. Particularly in the eastern and southeastern parts of the country, converts to Christianity from Islam can be oppressed by their families and communities, and targeted by Islamic extremists.

**37 - MEXICO** - Christians who are outspoken about the hope of Jesus in the face of drug-trafficking and violence are often targeted by gangs to remove any obstacle in their quest for control. In indigenous communities, anyone who decides to abandon the community's religious beliefs or syncretistic practices often faces rejection and punishment. Finally, there has been an increase in violent and discriminatory acts against Christians by people who believe Christians are bigoted.

**38 - JORDAN** - Compared to Christians living in other Middle Eastern countries, most Christians in Jordan live a safe and stable life, and enjoy a relatively high level of religious freedom. However, Christians still experience discrimination in employment and restrictions against public preaching. Unrecognized churches can face harassment by public authorities, particularly those that actively evangelize. Open testimony of faith by a Christian who converted from Islam can lead to beatings, arrest and even death.