

God's Design for Your Persecution

By Marco Scouvert



Christian persecution is any intentional hostility, opposition, or ill-treatment aimed at followers of Christ because they are seeking to obey the Lord Jesus by proclaiming his gospel, promoting his righteous ways, and/or conducting godly lives (Matthew 5:10-11; 2 Timothy 3:12). In the future it seems that unless God does something supernatural to change the direction of the United States true Christians will increasingly face persecution and experience suffering for the sake of Jesus, the

gospel, and righteousness. Recent events in our country have helpfully caused many believers to ask themselves if they are ready and willing to pay a price for faithfully following Jesus.

How should we think about persecution? And how are we to respond when we face persecution for Jesus?

First, recognize God's sovereign purpose to advance the gospel through persecution.

During his Roman imprisonment the Apostle Paul sent communication to believers in the city of Philippi. Because of their loving concern for him and the gospel he updated them early in the letter on how he was doing and how his evangelistic work was going. His words were remarkable: "I want you to know brothers, that what has happened to me has *really served to advance* the gospel . . ." (Philippians 1:12, emphasis mine).

Not only did Paul's imprisonment not hinder the gospel, it was actually the means by which it was making progress. Yes, there were obstacles to the advance of Christ's kingdom in Rome, but Paul's imprisonment was like a machete that was clearing the way for it to move forward! The efforts of Satan, through demonic and human enemies of Christ, to extinguish the fire of the gospel never work. They are like attempting to put out a grease fire by pouring water on it. Not only do they not quench it, but they unintentionally serve as God's sovereign instruments to spread it even further.

Second, redeem the unique opportunities that persecution gives you to proclaim Christ.

After stating that his imprisonment has served to advance the gospel, Paul goes on to describe two ways this has happened. The first is in verse 13: "... so that [with the result that] it has become known throughout the whole imperial guard and to all the rest that my imprisonment is for Christ."

Paul's imprisonment gave him unique access to people who otherwise would not have heard the gospel from someone like him, like imperial guards who would have been chained to him as part of a daily rotation. This gave Paul the opportunity to explain to them why he was in chains. He took full advantage, making sure to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ and to share the story of how he was converted from a persecutor of the church to a preacher of the faith he once sought to destroy.

The Wheaton five

On January 2nd, 1956, five American missionaries — Jim Elliot, Nate Saint, Roger Youderian, Ed McCully, and Peter Fleming — sought to contact and share the gospel with the Auca Indians in the jungle of Ecuador. The tribe was isolated and known for their aggression toward foreigners. Four days passed until they finally had initial communication with a few Aucas, which was peaceful. But two days after that a larger group from the tribe suddenly attacked and murdered the men. In the days that followed, their unexpected deaths made headlines across news outlets in the United States and instantly became well-known among followers of Jesus.

The event's reputation further grew about three years later when Jim's Elliot's wife, Elisabeth, and Nate Saint's sister, Rachel, chose to live and work among the Aucas for Christ. Their work led to a group of believers and the Bible being translated into the tribe's language. How did the courageous sacrifice of the men who died, and the fearless love of Elisabeth Elliot and Rachel Saint who lived among the Aucas, affect other believers? "Many Evangelicals credit their own entry into Christian [missionary] service to the example of the five men. Many more have been inspired by retellings of the story in numerous books, articles, radio and television programs, films, and websites."¹

How about you?

If a social media platform deletes your post or cancels your account for declaring the truth, if your employer puts you on leave without pay or fires you because you refuse to use the preferred pronouns of someone who says they've "transitioned," if your peers ridicule you because you are unwilling to engage in drunkenness or sexually immoral activity, if your neighbors scorn you for speaking out in support of God's good design for sexuality and gender, or if your family members despise you because you respectfully and lovingly tell them their beliefs are wrong, be certain and confident of this: *God intends to advance the gospel through your suffering.*

It may not be completely clear to us in the moment of persecution how such an experience will actually serve to advance the gospel. It may appear to be the opposite. And that will tempt us to be frustrated, get upset, be discouraged, or feel defeated. But as believers, we must live by faith and not by sight. We need to be confident that Jesus is building his church just as he said he would, and a primary way he does that is through the persecution we suffer.

And when you are persecuted, try hard not to focus on the mistreatment that you are receiving, or how you've been hurt, or what it's cost you. Instead, pray for divine opportunities to proclaim Christ that you would not have otherwise had to people you would not have otherwise encountered. Then be sensitive to the Spirit's leading, looking out for those chances. And make the most of them as God allows by boldly opening your mouth for Jesus.

¹ <https://www2.wheaton.edu/bcg/archives/exhibits/Ecuador1956/01Introduction.htm>, accessed September 28, 2025.