steadfast



True stories of faith, courage, and the character of God

PERSECUTION.org
INTERNATIONAL CHRISTIAN CONCERN

Blessed is the man who remains *steadfast* under trial, for when he stood the test he will receive the *crown of life* which God has *promised* to those who *love him.*

—James 1:12

Welcome to steadfast

Inside, you'll meet real teenagers from around the world whose faith remains strong even in the face of persecution. You'll also explore devotionals about the character of God and reflect through journal prompts. Whether you're reading on your own or with your youth group, our prayer is that you'll come to know God in a more meaningful way and be encouraged in your own faith through the testimonies of persecuted teens around the world.





steadfast

\ˈsted-ˌfast *adjective*

1. firm in allegiance to a person, belief, or cause : loyal, unswerving
2. firmly fixed in place : immovable

Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good, for his steadfast *love endures forever.*

Have you ever considered what it costs you to follow Jesus?

Where you live probably affects your answer in a pretty big way. Maybe your parents are Christians and some of your friends are too. Maybe you are involved with your youth group at church. Maybe you even attend a Christian school or have gone to Christian summer camps.

In the United States and other countries, you might not feel like there is a heavy cost for being a Christian. But in some parts of the world, believers know that choosing Jesus can come at a high price.

All over the world, both Christian children and adults face opposition because of their faith. This is called "persecution."

In some nations, persecution is more obvious. It looks like attacks on churches, sexual violence, and imprisonment. In other nations, it's much more subtle. It looks like fewer educational opportunities, laws that discriminate against Christians, and cultures that leave religious minorities trapped in poverty.

Regardless of how persecution takes shape, it can take a heavy toll on those who are walking through it – physically, emotionally, and spiritually. Though Jesus promises to walk with us through life's difficulties, He never promises that the difficulties won't come. In fact, He assures us of the opposite: trouble will, indeed, come.



“In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.” (John 16:33)

Through it all, we can rest in the promise that He has already overcome and that our hope is found in Him alone.

In the midst of the violence and discrimination that persecuted Christians face every day, this is the hope that they cling to when the cost feels high.

It’s only through the hope of Jesus that they can remain steadfast in their faith. They have the confidence that Jesus is worth any pain that this life has to offer, because they know that eternity with Jesus is awaiting them.

In the following pages, we’re going to introduce you to four real teenagers who are choosing the path of steadfast faith. They have counted the cost and know that Jesus is worth everything they have to give and more.

As you read their stories, we invite you to pray for each of them and consider what you can learn from them about walking with Jesus in the face of difficulty. The more you read about persecution, the more you’ll learn about God’s character and how He never leaves His children to struggle through it alone.

So, are you ready to journey around the world and discover what it means to remain steadfast?

steadfast

Persecution Around the World

Christians live in every corner of the world, but not all of them can follow Jesus freely. Explore the map below to learn more about the global church and the challenges many believers face because of their faith.

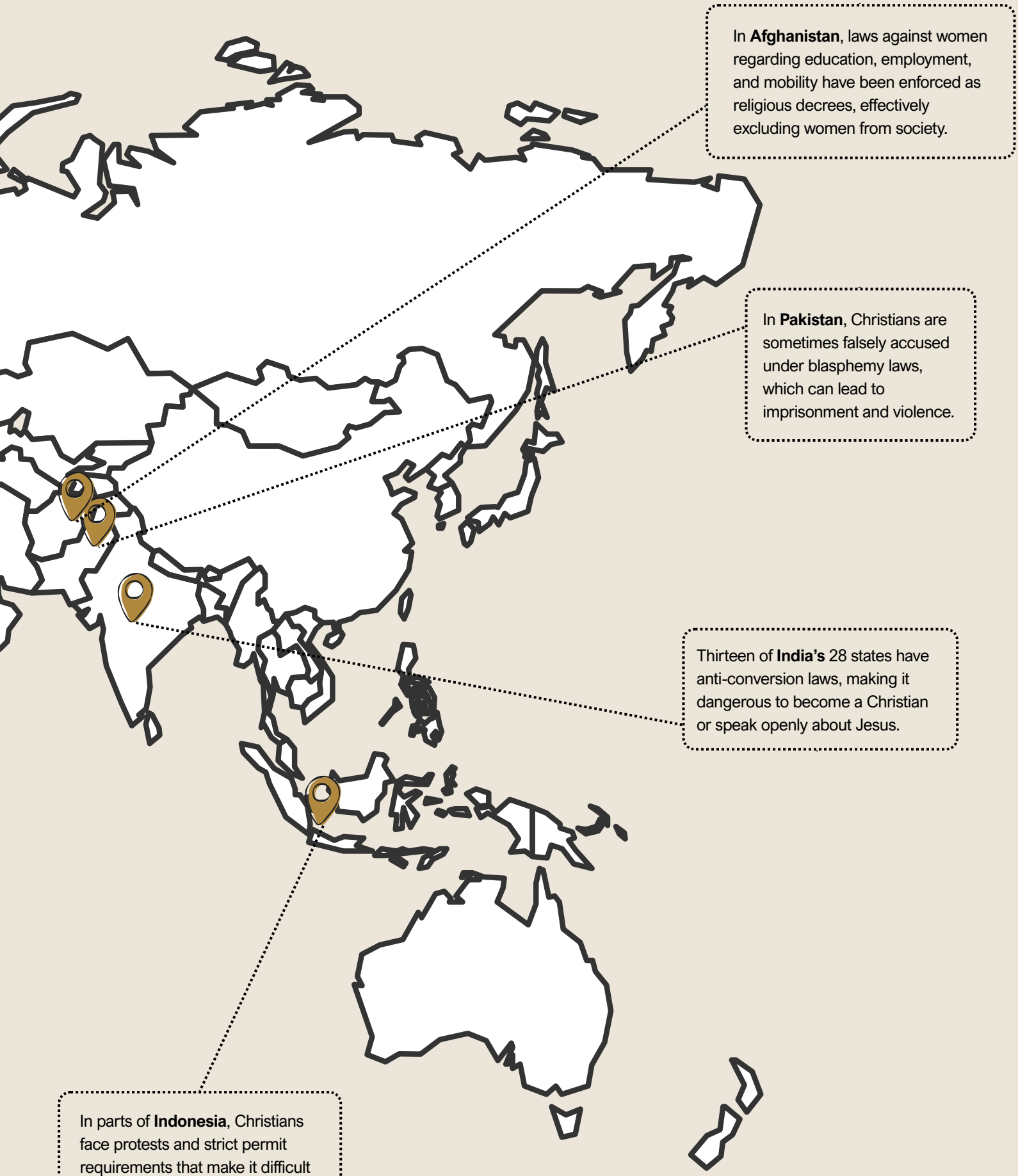


In **Iraq**, extremists often demolish historic Christian sites in an attempt to erase the footprint of Christianity in the Middle East.

In **Cuba**, state security services regularly summon pastors for interrogation, tap phones, and place informants inside congregations to spy on churchgoers.

In **Nigeria**, teenagers who are stuck in poverty and don't have access to a good education sometimes find themselves vulnerable to recruitment from violent groups.

Eritrea is often called the "North Korea of Africa" because the government tightly restricts its citizens and doesn't allow them to worship freely.



In **Afghanistan**, laws against women regarding education, employment, and mobility have been enforced as religious decrees, effectively excluding women from society.

In **Pakistan**, Christians are sometimes falsely accused under blasphemy laws, which can lead to imprisonment and violence.

Thirteen of **India's** 28 states have anti-conversion laws, making it dangerous to become a Christian or speak openly about Jesus.

In parts of **Indonesia**, Christians face protests and strict permit requirements that make it difficult to build church buildings.



Surviving the Unthinkable

Eleven-year-old Esther is one of nine children in her family, which lives in a rural farming village in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. On January 5, the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) attacked her village and started shooting indiscriminately, killing many. The rebels then abducted Esther, along with her mother, father, and three other relatives.

While in the forest, the ADF extremists sexually abused Esther and her mother. While she was eventually rescued, the trauma of this ambush left Esther with both physical and emotional scars.

"It is a pity for me to see that this has happened to us, and more especially my daughter whom these enemies of peace have abused," Esther's father said. "I don't know what to say. I'm praying that the Lord shall forgive them."

Still, despite all of the pain that she has endured, Esther has found strength in the Lord and continues to point others to Jesus. Though it would be easier to sink into despair, she has chosen the path of praise instead.

When Esther was asked if she had any prayer requests to share, she simply said, "It is right for me to praise [His] holy name all the time, and be firm to [His] promises."



africa overview

Across Africa, violent extremist groups have made life dangerous for many Christians. They attack churches, villages, and schools, leaving families grieving the loss of loved ones and forcing many to flee their homes. In these often impoverished communities, these attacks often leave survivors struggling to support themselves financially. Believers across Africa have witnessed unimaginable violence, yet many continue to follow Jesus with remarkable courage. In the midst of heartache, believers turn to God for healing and strength. Their steadfast hope is a powerful reminder that, even in the darkest circumstances, Christ remains faithful and His church continues to endure.

Jehova Rapha

The Lord Who Heals

Flipping to the book of Exodus, you'll find the epic story of the miraculous rescue of the Israelites from Pharaoh's army. When all hope seemed lost, God parted the Red Sea and led His people to safety from the quickly approaching chariots. The women danced and sang with joy for the God who made a way.

Immediately after, they found themselves wandering in a desert with nothing to drink. The only water they could find was bitter, and they were unable to drink it. *Why would God lead us this far only to abandon us?* they grumbled.

Moses cried out to God, and God showed Moses a piece of wood to throw in the water. With that simple act of trust and obedience, the water became drinkable.

Exodus 15:26 reads: *"He said, 'If you listen carefully to the Lord your God and do what is right in his eyes, if you pay attention to his commands and keep all his decrees, I will not bring on you any of the diseases I brought on the Egyptians, for I am* ***the Lord, who heals you.****'"*

Here, at this unlikely place of bitter water, God promised healing and restoration if His children simply walked with Him in obedience. Throughout Scripture, we see that the Lord delights in healing His children. He healed the lame. He made the blind see. He brought the dead to life. The list goes on.
Even greater, He paved the way for spiritual healing. It is only through Jesus that we can be restored from the eternal consequences of sin.

God still heals people today. Sometimes physically, sometimes not. Persecuted believers know that true healing awaits them in eternity, even if their physical bodies carry scars. Whether we are cured from every sickness or pain we encounter in this life, we can place our hope in Jehovah Rapha, the Lord whose healing goes further than skin deep.

journal or discussion questions

What does the name Jehova Rapha (“The Lord Who Heals”) reveal about God’s character?

When you hear the word “healing,” what comes to mind? How is God’s healing sometimes different from what we expect?

Why do you think God sometimes heals immediately, while other times He asks us to trust Him through pain or difficulty?

Is there anyone in your life who could use prayer for healing?

my notes





Adan is a Christian teenager in Pakistan whose life turned upside down in an instant in 2025. After she refused an older man's marriage proposal, he kidnapped her by force, taking away the safety and freedom she had always known.

He created false paperwork claiming that Adan was his wife and that she was no longer a Christian. When Adan's family tried to fight for her return, her kidnapper refused to back down and began threatening them as well.

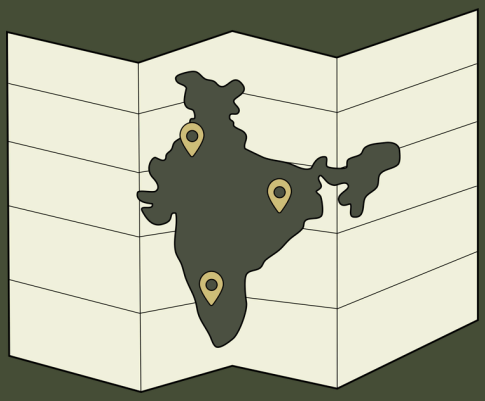
Thankfully, after reviewing all of the evidence, the court accepted a divorce notice to end the forced marriage and Adan was allowed to return home. However, the challenges didn't end there.

Ever since Adan returned home, her captor has been stalking her every move and, at one point, fired gunshots at her family's home. She and her family have been forced to move from place to place to avoid this dangerous man.

"Adan stays silent all day, and at night she wakes up trembling and asks us to pray," Adan's mom said. "[Her kidnapper] keeps threatening us, saying that if he took her once, he can take her again, and this time he won't let her escape."

Eventually Adan and her family were able to relocate to a safe place out of her kidnapper's reach, but they must keep a low profile in order to live safely.

Though Adan and her family must remain hidden for their safety, God sees her exactly where she is and remains close to her in every moment of fear and uncertainty. Even in the places where she cannot be seen by the world, she is never beyond the reach of His care.



south asia overview

In South Asia, many Christians face persecution through laws designed to restrict them from sharing their faith. In some countries, anti-conversion laws make it illegal to share the gospel or even pray with someone who wants to follow Jesus. Elsewhere, blasphemy laws are sometimes misused to target Christians with false accusations, leading to imprisonment, mob violence, or even death. These laws create fear and uncertainty for believers, yet many continue to stand firm. Churches still gather and Christians still faithfully share the hope of Christ, trusting that God's truth is greater than any law meant to silence it.



El Roi

The God Who Sees Me

Toward the beginning of the Bible, in the pages of Genesis, you'll find the story of Abraham, commonly known as the "father of many nations." You may already be familiar with his story, but do you know the story of Hagar? Though her name often goes unshared, their stories are forever linked.

God had promised Abraham and his wife Sarah a child, but it was taking longer than they expected. Sarah took matters into her own hands and suggested that Abraham should instead grow their family through their slave Hagar. When Hagar gave Abraham a child, Sarah grew in bitterness and resentment toward Hagar and began mistreating her to the point that Hagar eventually ran away into the desert.

It all sounds pretty messy, right? Thankfully, the story doesn't end there.

In her moment of deepest desperation, an angel visited Hagar in the desert. The angel instructed her to return to Abraham and Sarah, but also gave her hope, promising her many children.

In response, Genesis 16:13 reads, *"[Hagar] gave this name to the Lord who spoke to her: 'You are **the God who sees me,**' for she said, 'I have now seen the One who sees me.'"*

The Lord did not pull Hagar out of the difficult situation she was facing. In fact, He instructed her to walk right back into it. However, rather than providing her with a quick fix, He came alongside her and reassured her that He was sitting with her in the thick of the struggle.

You can imagine that a runaway slave in the middle of the desert likely felt unseen and unheard, but we serve a God who sees us through our lowest valleys.

Many of our persecuted brothers and sisters know that same feeling. They may be driven from their homes, rejected by their families, or imprisoned for their faith. At times, it can seem as though the world has forgotten them. But El Roi, the God who sees, sees every tear, hears every prayer, and remains faithfully present through it all.

journal or discussion questions

Hagar's circumstances didn't change immediately after she met God, but her perspective did. Have you ever experienced God's peace before your situation changed?

Why would it be encouraging for a persecuted Christian to know that they serve the God who sees them?

How does it encourage you in your own struggles?

Think of someone in your life who may feel overlooked. What is one practical way you can help them feel seen this week?

my notes





When ISIS militants swept across the Middle East in 2014, Behnam was only a teenager. While adolescence is a season of change for anyone, it's hard to imagine the difficulty that comes with fleeing everything you know to escape the threat of terrorists in your own backyard.

Looking back, Behnam recalled, "My father, out of concern for our safety, urged us to flee. We fled to the Kurdistan region on a day we will never forget. We left our homes and churches behind, seeking safety from the brutal terrorism that targeted us as unarmed Christians."

The grief for all that was lost weighed heavily on Behnam's family. "The displacement deeply affected us psychologically as a family," he recalled. "We had to attend counseling sessions for my father and mother…I felt a sense of loss and confusion, just like many other Christians."

As the years ticked by and ISIS eventually retreated from Behnam's city, a sense of security gradually returned. However, they still struggled to make ends meet after losing their home and livelihood. Now a man in his twenties, Behnam has stepped into the role of provider. After hearing his story, fellow Christians assisted him with the resources he needed to develop his own restaurant.

Though he expects persecution to surface again in the future, he said that he works with his "head held high." He said, "Now, my faith is stronger than ever because God saved us from ISIS and kept me steadfast in my faith and beliefs."



middle east overview

For Christians throughout the Middle East, following Jesus often means risking rejection from the people closest to them. In countries where Islam is woven into every aspect of society, choosing Christ is often seen as betraying one's family, community, or even country. Christians are, therefore, pressured to hide their faith or return to their former religion. Some are isolated from friends, disowned by relatives, or denied job opportunities because of their faith. Yet, even in the face of loneliness and rejection, many believers remain steadfast, finding strength in Jesus and encouragement from the global church as they continue to follow Him.

Jehovah Jireh

The Lord Who Provides



Fast forward a few years through Abraham's story, into the pages of Genesis 22, and we find him wrestling with a seemingly impossible request. Abraham had finally received his long-awaited son, Isaac, and God told him to offer him up as a sacrifice.

How could God ask me to do such a thing? Not my beloved boy, Abraham surely thought.

Unsure of God's plan, Abraham chose to act in obedience, knowing that he serves a good Father. Abraham and Isaac trekked up the mountain to set up the altar for the sacrifice. As they walked, Isaac asked his dad where the lamb was for the offering. Abraham responded, "God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my son."

As he bound his own son and placed him on the altar, Abraham lifted the knife above his boy. When all hope for Isaac's rescue seemed lost, the angel of the Lord called out from Heaven, telling Abraham not to hurt his son.

When he lifted his head, Abraham saw a ram that God had provided, caught in a nearby bush, to take the place of his son.

Genesis 22:14 reads, *"So Abraham called that place **The Lord Will Provide**. And to this day it is said, 'On the mountain of the Lord it will be provided.'"*

Abraham learned that God doesn't always provide before the trial. Rather, He often meets us in the middle of our obedience.

Around the world, many Christians are walking a path of costly obedience, choosing to follow Jesus even when it means rejection, imprisonment, or violence. Like Abraham, they don't always know how God will make a way, but they trust the One who does.

While the Lord may not always provide the answer we expect, He always provides exactly what we need to accomplish His purposes and remain faithful to Him.

journal or discussion questions

When have you seen God provide for you in a way you didn't expect?

Have you ever had to obey God without knowing how everything would work out?

Why do you think God asked Abraham to trust Him before showing him the solution?

Many Christians around the world lose their jobs, homes, or even lives because they follow Jesus. What do you think it means to them for God to be their Provider?

my notes





Her Journey to Freedom

By most standards, North Korea is the most difficult country to be a Christian. On top of the crushing poverty that most North Koreans suffer, a Christian in North Korea can be executed for simply owning a Bible, and the punishments often extend to their family members as well. The right to worship freely simply does not exist in North Korea.

Seventeen-year-old Sookyung Kang knew she wanted more than life in North Korea had to offer.

However, she knew the journey to escape North Korea was risky. Her own uncle, a Christian missionary, was imprisoned after the police caught him sharing the gospel.

“He put his life on the line and lived each day as if it was his last,” she shared. “As I started visiting my uncle in prison to bring him food, I started seeing North Korea as it really is.”

In 2011, Kang began her dangerous escape by crossing the North Korean border into China. After a long journey through various countries, Kang finally arrived in South Korea.

As she awaits the day when North Koreans are one day free of the bondage they endure, she hopes to use her freedom to help other North Koreans. “Being able to worship and praise however I wanted in South Korea, I was so thankful for this freedom. My heart was full of gratitude,” she said. “I don’t think I came to South Korea without a purpose.”

Photo credit: Liberty in North Korea



southeast asia overview

In Southeast Asia, following Jesus often means living with the feeling that someone is watching you over your shoulder. In some countries, governments tightly control religious activities, using surveillance and strict laws to monitor churches and limit Christian worship. Believers are often fined, imprisoned, or even executed for their faith. In other places, Christians face hostility from their neighbors or are targeted for telling others about Jesus. Despite these challenges, God continues to build the church in Southeast Asia. Christians gather behind closed doors to worship, trusting that no government or earthly authorities have the power to stop the spread of His Kingdom.



Jehovah Nissi

The Lord is My Banner

Turning back once more to the pages of Exodus, we find the men of Israel ready for battle against the Amalekites. On a nearby hill stood Moses, Aaron, and Hur watching over the warfare.

As the battle began, the strangest thing happened. When Moses held up his hands, the Israelites advanced; but when he lowered them, the Amalekites began to win. As Moses began to grow weary, Aaron and Hur stepped in to support him. They brought him a rock to rest on, and Aaron and Hur each held up one of Moses's arms so that he would not have to carry the burden alone.
With their help, Moses remained steady until sunset, and the Israelites won the battle. Following the miraculous victory, Moses gave all the credit to God.

Exodus 17:15 reads: *"And Moses built an altar and named it* ***'The Lord is my Banner.'"***

When Moses set up this altar, it was a declaration of a victory that only the Lord could have provided. It was a way of expressing gratitude toward the One who provided for them and establishing a place of remembrance for future generations to say: *Look! See what the Lord has done!*

Still today, God is at work, His banner is still raised over His children. Around the world, our persecuted brothers and sisters continue to stand firm in their faith, not because they are strong on their own, but because the Lord goes before them as their victory and their hope.

When you face challenges in your own life, remember that the same God who fought for Israel is with you today. Lift your eyes to Him and let your life act as an altar to the only One who can provide true victory.

journal or discussion questions

Why do you think that God chose the image of a banner to describe Himself?

What is a “battle” that you are facing in your own life, in which you need to lean on the Lord?

Many Christians around the world face oppression because they follow Jesus. How do you think knowing God is their Banner helps them remain faithful?

How can we figuratively “hold up the arms” of persecuted Christians today, like Aaron and Hur helped Moses?

my notes



steadfast to the end

Throughout the pages of history, we see records of brave, young Christians who have paid the ultimate price to follow Jesus. Their incredible testimonies leave behind a legacy of enduring faith under trial. Check out these steadfast believers, both historical and modern, who have left their mark on the history books.



21 Coptic Martyrs

On February 15, 2015, 21 young Christian men in orange jumpsuits were marched by masked militants to a beach in Libya. The men were abducted in the months leading up to their deaths and given multiple opportunities to deny Jesus. They were subjected to beatings and sleep deprivation, yet none of them denied Christ. The militants beheaded the men one at a time in hopes that it would stir enough fear in those who were still living that they would deny their faith. Their plan failed, and each one clung to his faith in Christ.



Deborah Yakubu

On May 12, 2022, a mob of Muslim students in Nigeria stoned Deborah Yakubu to death after the 20-year-old Christian college student was accused of blasphemy due to comments she made about religion on WhatsApp. She believed the conversation was safe since it was on school-related topics. A student who had witnessed the attack shared that Yakubu's last words were, "What do you hope to achieve with this?"



Akash Bashir

On March 15, 2015, 20-year-old Akash was serving as a security volunteer at his church in Pakistan. He was killed when he tackled and pinned down a bomber who was attempting to enter the church. While 21 people were killed in the incident, Akash's brave actions undoubtedly saved the lives of hundreds of worshippers that morning.

reflection



Pancras

As a young boy, Pancras was orphaned and moved with his uncle to Rome in the late third century. While persecution loomed large in the region, he and his uncle both came to faith in Christ. Fourteen-year-old Pancras was soon arrested for his faith and ordered to make sacrifices to the Roman idols, but he refused. Astounded by the teenager's faithful defiance, the authorities offered him rewards to deny Jesus. Faithful unto the end, the young teen was eventually executed for clinging to his faith in the one true God.



Perpetua and Felicity

At the time of her arrest in the early third century in North Africa, Felicity was a young slave who was eight months pregnant. In the dungeon, she met Perpetua, a Christian noblewoman who was also a young mother. The two were both awaiting execution for their faith. Like gladiators, the women boldly walked into the execution amphitheater together singing psalms aloud, knowing they would receive their true reward in Heaven.

ways to pray *for* the persecuted church

Pray for protection for those who face violence for their faith.

Pray for freedom for Christians who are wrongfully imprisoned.

Pray for peace and comfort for those who have lost loved ones due to persecution.

Pray for provision for believers trapped in poverty because of their faith.

ways to pray *like* the persecuted church

Pray for courage in the face of opposition to your faith.

Pray for boldness to share the love of Jesus wherever you go.

Pray for protection over your church and its leaders.

Pray for your family and friends to come to know the goodness of God.

"This, then, is how you should pray: 'Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.'"

–Matthew 6:9-13



You may never encounter the same challenges that the teens in this magazine face, but we all serve the same faithful God. The same God who strengthens believers in persecuted nations is the One who walks with you through your own fears, doubts, and disappointments. While your circumstances might look different, every follower of Jesus is called to stand firm in their faith and reflect His love to the world around them.

As you read these stories, let their example challenge and encourage your own faith. Ask God to grow your faith, deepen your love for His Word, and give you the boldness to follow Jesus wherever He leads. Trusting that He is always with you and worthy of your faithfulness, will you commit to being a *steadfast* follower of Jesus?




Blessed is the man
who remains *steadfast*
under trial, for when he stood the
test he will receive the
crown of life which God
has *promised* to those
who *love him.*
—James 1:12
To learn more about the persecuted
church, visit *www.persecution.org*