

Persecution

for righteousness' sake

I believe it is coming. I believe that Christians will soon face some forms of persecution in America that have been foreign to our country in its relatively short history. Persecution is not foreign to the history of Christianity and there's a lot of meat in the Word to help us prepare our children and grandchildren to be faithful and steadfast. I want mine to be around the throne one day. I am praying that, as we study, we will be stronger, bolder and better able to prepare those precious souls we influence for the tough times they, as Christians, very well may face. May we all study and apply these divine truths, realizing that, even if we or our children should face the ultimate persecution—even if we should be called upon to die for our Lord—we will be victorious and truly successful if our families can gather around the throne!

"Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven"
(Matthew 5:10)

SEPTEMBER – Joseph: Who Looked at the Big Picture

1. Speed-read through Genesis 1-36, taking the time only to highlight or make note of the passages in which someone was persecuted because of righteousness. Obviously Abel's death would be the first example.
2. Slow down for the study of Joseph that begins in chapter 37. Make a list consisting of each time that Joseph was mistreated or treated "unfairly".
3. Place an "F" beside the times when the mistreatment was at the hands of his family and an "O" for the times it was at the hands of "outsiders" or "others". Let's think about the difference in these two sources of persecution. Which is most hurtful? Why?
4. Highlight Genesis 41:51. What kinds of things from God can make us "forget" the difficult things about persecution? Make a note of something in your life or the life of a loved one that has eased the pain of ridicule, exclusion or resistance.
5. Highlight Genesis 50:16-21 and answer the following questions:
 - a. What was the last thing on the mind of Jacob when he died? How can you, as a parent relate to this last request?
 - b. What dream was being fulfilled in verse 18?
 - c. Are persecutors of God's people going to bow one day? Prove your answer Biblically.
 - d. How do we know from this passage that God can use persecution to advance His cause? Challenge yourself to cite at least three more times in Scripture where this kind of advancement occurred.
 - e. Compare verse 21 to Romans 12: 17-21.

Practical Challenge: Find an enemy for whom you can do good. Choose one good deed to do for someone who is a persecutor to you or who is unkind to you. Send a "happy" card, take a plate of cookies or bake a loaf of bread. Do SOMETHING kind for an enemy before the month is up.

October – Job: Who Never Knew Why

1. Read the following article from the Apologetics Press website by Eric Lyons as introductory material: <http://bit.ly/1f4KD4G>.
2. Read the book of Job and list every question he verbalized throughout the book. The podcast will be a discussion of the unanswered questions in the book and postulations about why they were unanswered in Job's lifetime.
3. Review chapter 42:1-6 and God's response to his submission in 42:10-15.
4. Conclude with reading this article by Wayne Jackson: <http://bit.ly/1IANtJk>.

Practical Challenge: Make a note of something negative that has occurred in your life for which you do not know the reason. Beside this note write the actual words of Romans 8:28. Pray for the "good" from this negative experience.

November – Joshua: Who Paid for the Sins of Brethren

1. Read Numbers 7-15. From chapter 7, list all the things that were offered to God in the raising of the tabernacle. Notice how real the majesty of God seemed to these people in the good times.
2. From chapters 9 and 10, highlight the verses that chronicled proof that God WAS with Israel.
3. From chapter 11, highlight the question that the Lord hated. With which interrogative word or "question word" does this indictment against Moses begin? List five indictments against God or his church, which begin with that same word, that people use today to criticize or indict the plans of God. Postulate about exactly how the people in Numbers 11 could ask this question in view of all the majesty displayed in the previous chapters. Is criticism of good leaders a form of persecution to those leaders? How does this form of persecution occur in the body today?
4. Chapter 12 shows the spirit of criticism coming into the leadership and dividing God's people. Choose two verses from this chapter that you believe best show God's displeasure with jealousy and division among the leaders of His people. What was the spirit of Moses, against whom the attack was leveled? Pray for your congregational leaders today that they may have this spirit.
5. How heated did the persecution of Caleb and Joshua get according to 14:10. According to chapter 14, who were the people actually speaking against?
6. What price did innocent Caleb and Joshua (and Moses) have to pay for the faithless spirits of those within the camp? Are there situations in which God's faithful people today pay for the sins of the "congregation"? (Good podcast discussion. Really reflect on the severity of this punishment endured by the innocents in Numbers 14.)

7. Now read Joshua 1-14. In chapter one, highlight every reference to courage. In what ways does enduring persecution give us courage? In what ways did the endurance of the forty years enable Joshua to do this job of conquering Canaan?

8. Finally, read the last two chapters of Joshua. Make two columns in your notebook. In the first write all the statements God made to strengthen Joshua in chapter one. For the second column, find similar statements, when possible, from the last two chapters of the book. Jot those beside their corresponding statements from chapter one. There are some from the last two chapters that are very much like those of the first chapter. What do these parting reminders from Joshua to the people tell us about His dependency through all the conquest on the initial admonition of the Lord from chapter one?

Practical Challenge: What is your favorite admonition from scripture that helps you "conquer" the evil forces and endure the trials of your life? Copy this passage and place it in a conspicuous place at home or work or in your car. Read it daily for at least a week.

December – David: Persecuted by One in Authority

1. Read I Samuel 17. Who was the verbal persecutor in that chapter? Think of five other accounts in scripture in which the persecutor was a family member. Notice David's procedure was just to go ahead and do God's will.
2. Read chapter 18. What was the implied reason for Saul's persecution of David from this chapter. List two ways that Saul mistreated David from this chapter.
3. Read chapters 19-22. List the people Saul killed or attempted to kill in these passages. Is it true that we may sometimes be persecuted because of our alliances with people who are primary targets of persecution? Read Luke 22 and make note of the man who "was called on the carpet" in this chapter for His association? How did he fail when persecuted?
4. Read chapters 23-24. How did David respond to extreme doses of persecution by God's anointed?
5. Read chapter 25. What kind of persecution had Abigail endured for years? Note the verses that show the following characteristics of this persecuted wife: a.) generosity b.) humility c.) good judge of character d.) respect for God e.) trust in God f.) wisdom, and g.) quick resolve. How might these characteristics help Christians today who face possible harm from those in authority?
6. Finally, complete the book of I Samuel. Then read Psalms 3,5,6,7,13,17,21,23,25,27,31,34 and 35. In each of these psalms highlight any references to enemies or persecution. Let's discuss, once again the rightness (or not) of David's prayers for the hurt of his enemies. Let's contrast this, on the podcast, with his treatment of Saul.
7. Finally, read Psalm 37. Make a list of recommendations from this chapter of things we can do to guard our hearts from discouragement or our souls from leaving the faith when we face persecution.

Practical Challenge: Pray for your enemies (specifically, by name) daily, this month.

January – Elijah: Persecuted for Speaking Truth, but Fearless

1. Read I Kings 16 through II Kings 2. As you read, list the references in the following categories: a.) Elijah as a rebuker of the king. b.) Elijah as a mighty man of prayer c.) Elijah as a disheartened mortal d.) Elijah, as a mortal who made mistakes e.) Elijah, a man honored by God, and f.) Elijah in his glorious victory.
2. Now, take each of those categories and see how many of them apply to John the Baptist in the New Testament. Read Matthew 17:9-13. Find the passages that show John the Baptist in these same categories.
3. While studying these two men, notice any similarities in dress, familiarity with desert places, strong rebuke of current evils, appeal to repentance to all strata of people, exposure of the wrath of a king, continued influence after death, and fruitful work.
4. Read James 5, noting every reference to patience, suffering, prayer and Elijah. Why did James say he was a man of like "passions" or having a "nature" like ours. Make a list of ways we can and should, like Elijah, be more vocal about sin in our country, but even more specifically, among God's people. (Remember, the church is the spiritual Israel.) We do not, like Elijah, have a direct revelation from God, but are there ways in which we need to be more vocal using His revealed Word in our circles of influence today?

Practical Challenge: Build up your courage and take the opportunity to speak with someone about adhering to the Will of God. We are so politically correct that we find it difficult to ever speak to people about "sin in the camp." Perhaps it is a young woman whom you can encourage to dress more modestly. Perhaps it is a sister who needs to think about attending faithfully. Perhaps it is your teenager who really needs a talk about respect. Perhaps it is a family member who is not setting a good moral example before your children. Perhaps it is someone who has come to you for advice and she needs to hear the plain truth from you, even though it won't be easy to say. Surely there is someone who needs to see a bit of Elijah in you. Remember, as Elijah was forced to remember his own fallibility, so must you remember yours. Pray for your own strength, but don't let your imperfections stop you this month from speaking with someone who needs spiritual help.

February – Nehemiah: Persecution of a Wall-Builder

1. Read the book of Nehemiah, listing the various references to persecutions in the following categories: a.) reproach because the Lord's kingdom looked bad b.) mocking by enemies c.) anger and threats d.) financial distress e.) deceit f.) false accusation g.) treason h.) forsaking true doctrine from within, and i.) outsiders bringing temptation very close to God's people.
2. Now go back and make note of Nehemiah's response in each case.
3. Finally, see if you can find a New Testament passage that instructs us in reacting to each of these scenarios. Let's talk about modern day examples on the podcast. The devil is still working in these same ways today.

Practical Challenge: We see, almost daily, those in positions of prominence mocking those of us who believe homosexuality is sinful, fornication in all forms is unrighteous, that we can know truth, even that God exists. Find one of these mocking quotes and save it in your notebook. Let's share some of these up-to-date and appropriate responses on the podcast.

March – Jeremiah: That Fire in His Bones (that got him in trouble!)

For the study of Jeremiah, I could not achieve the intended results as well as Wayne Jackson has done in this excellent article: <http://bit.ly/1NmKhSD>. We will study it as we study this great man of God, Jeremiah.

1. Read down through the section of the article that lists the chronology of the book. Then read the passages as brother Jackson lists them chronologically in that section of the article (as follows):
 - Josiah (1:1-19; 2:1-6; 30; 7:1-10:25; 18:1-20:18)
 - Josiah or Jehoiakim (11:1-17:27)
 - Jehoiakim (25-26; 35-36; 45-48)
 - Jehoiachin (31:15-27)
 - Zedekiah (21-24; 27-34; 37-39; 49-51)
 - Gedaliah (& Egypt) (40-44)
2. Now read the rest of the article. Go back and specifically read each verse listed in the section entitled "The Persecution". List these verses and beside them note how Jeremiah reacted in each one of these situations where information is given.
3. In your notebook list the "Practical Lessons" from this article. Find at least one passage outside of the book of Jeremiah that substantiates each of these lessons.

Practical Challenge: Think of a preacher or elder you know who, though not persecuted to the extent that Jeremiah was, has been persecuted in some way for righteousness' sake. Write him a letter of encouragement and pray for him.

April – Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego: Decisions that Incited Harsh Persecution

1. Read Daniel 1-6. Notice from the first verse of the book how Daniel got into Babylon. Which chapters in Jeremiah give us the prophecies of Jeremiah during the reign of this king? Who, in reality, put Daniel into Babylon? Who really put Nebuchadnezzar in power over His servants?
2. Find and highlight three very brave decisions from these six chapters. Two of these decisions had almost certain life-threatening consequences.
3. The reason for Daniel's strong appeal to Melzar, the steward, in chapter one is given in verse 8. Make a list of topics about which we should teach our children and grandchildren a resolve of heart BEFORE the temptation occurs in their lives. Who had a similar resolve in Numbers 14:24? Ezra 7:10? Bravery is conceived of a prepared spirit.
4. How did Daniel come into power in chapter two? Do those in leadership positions in the kingdoms of this world have a greater chance of facing persecution for righteousness' sake than those who are relatively unknown. Why or why not?
5. Chapter three is one of the most amazing accounts of bravery in the pages of the Bible. Notice that Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego were not the ones who made a "big deal" out of their refusal to bow down. They just didn't bow. What are some things that might be expected of people in the workplace or at school that we simply abstain from doing because we are Christians? List some of these things.
6. I love 3:16! They did not have to have a conference to decide what they were going to do. Take the time to read the following scriptures and make a list of statements from them that show a steely resolve not to compromise: Genesis 39, Exodus 10, I Kings 22, Esther 4, Acts 5. Write your favorite of these statements on a card and post on your refrigerator.
7. How do we know that Daniel, in chapter 6, was respectful even in His disobedience? Can we disobey civil authorities in cases that require it and do so with respect? Explain.

8. Hebrews 11 mentions heroes of faith who stopped the mouths of lions. Surely Daniel is memorialized in this chapter. List all the names mentioned in Hebrews 11 and what great sacrifice(s) was made for righteousness' sake by each.
9. Finally read this article by Wayne Jackson: <http://bit.ly/1P2xJk2>. Notice the latter part of the article which postulates that the Roman world in which Christianity was born was a generally tolerant society. But Christianity was too much for the Romans to tolerate; thus, the great Roman persecution. What part did resolve play in the early persecutions and how can we prepare our children to stand even when persecution is at hand.

Practical Challenge: Scan the internet and find the difficult ethical dilemmas in which Christians may find themselves due to the 2015 Supreme Court ruling legalizing gay marriage. Examples include judges who are now asked to issue licenses to same sex couples, jewelers who are called upon to sell them wedding rings, bakers who are called upon to bake the wedding cakes, wedding florists, and caterers. It may not be long before a minister among us is asked to perform a gay wedding and faces a lawsuit for refusal. Christian universities are having to decide how they will respond to a gay married couple seeking enrollment. These issues are real. Spend a while in prayer this month for resolve for our brethren for whom this persecution becomes real and personal.

May – Jesus Christ: The Ultimate Persecution

1. Read the gospel of Matthew. Pause at each of the following passages and categorize the content (teaching or account) under one or more of the following categories. Here are the passages:

Matthew 2:1-9

Matthew 4:1-11

Matthew 5:10-12

Matthew 5:43-48

Matthew 8:20

Matthew 9:3

Matthew 9:11

Matthew 9:34

Matthew 10:14-42

Matthew 11:18-19

Matthew 12:1-8

Matthew 12:10-13

Matthew 12:14

Matthew 12:22-30

Matthew 12:31-32

Matthew 12:38-45

Matthew 13:56-58

Matthew 14:3-11

Matthew 15:1-20

Matthew 16:1-5

Matthew 17:22

Matthew 18:1-7

Matthew 18:21-22

Matthew 18:23-25

Matthew 19:3-9

Matthew 19:29

Matthew 20:18-19

Matthew 20:20-29

Matthew 21:15-16

Matthew 21:33-46

Matthew 22:1-10

Matthew 22:15-21

Matthew 22:23-33

Matthew 22:34-40

Matthew 23:14

Matthew 23:29-39

Matthew 24:9-13

Matthew 24:15-28

Matthew 24:48-51

Matthew 26:2-5

Matthew 26:6-9

Matthew 26:14-16

Matthew 26:21-25

Matthew 26:34

Matthew 26:36-44

Matthew 26: 47, 50, 55, 57

Matthew 26:48-50

Matthew 26:58

Matthew 26:64, 65

Matthew 26:67

Matthew 26:68

Matthew 26:69-75

Matthew 27:1, 2

Matthew 27:9, 10

Matthew 27:11-14

Matthew 27:20

Matthew 27:22-23, 25

Matthew 27:26

Matthew 27:27, 28

Matthew 27:34-36

Matthew 27:39-44

Matthew 27:49

Matthew 28:12-15

2. Here are the categories. List each passage above in one (or more) of the following categories:

Testing	Rejection
Attempted Murder	Physical Harm or Threat of Such
Direct Temptation from Satan	False Accusations
Imprisonment	Conspiring Against
Temptation to Sin	Killing
Great Inflicted Tribulation	Refusal to Forgive
Evil Speaking	Treason or Betrayal
Mocking or Reviling	Desertion
Homelessness	Rioting Against Innocent(s)
Prejudice	

3. Listen to the following audio lessons detailing the "trials" of Jesus.

<http://www.westhuntsville.org/Audio/Uploaded/04112014-Meeting.mp3>

<http://www.westhuntsville.org/Audio/Uploaded/04122014-Meeting.mp3>

<http://www.westhuntsville.org/Audio/Uploaded/04132014-Sunday-AM.mp3>

<http://www.westhuntsville.org/Audio/Uploaded/04132014-Bible-Class.mp3>

<http://www.westhuntsville.org/Audio/Uploaded/04132014-Sunday-PM.mp3>

Practical Challenge: Choose one of the categories of persecution you have suffered and, in some way, have overcome. Praise God for the deliverance in one of your prayer times this month.

June – Peter: Who Conquered the Coward Inside

1. Read the following passages:

Matthew 16: 13-19

John 6: 66-69

Mark 8:27-38

Matthew 26:31-35

Mark 14:27-31

Luke 22:31-34

John 13:36-38

Peter's resolve to stand by His Lord seems great. What events, changes and temptations can erode the resolve of God's people?

2. Now read:

Matthew 26:58-75

Luke 22:39-62

Mark 14:32-72

John 18:1-27

Peter had a really bad night. He should have been praying when he was sleeping, and it went downhill from there. List some ways in which prayer, even unbeknownst to us, may be preparing us for persecution.

From these scriptures, we know that Peter followed from afar to see "the end". Metaphorically, is it a mistake to try to follow Jesus "from afar"? List some ways that people try to do that today? How does close-up following help us to be faithful even in persecution? (Let's talk about involvement on the podcast.)

3. Now read:

Mark 16:1-8

Luke 24:1-12

John 20:1-10

John 21

It was a Sunday morning and an empty tomb that made all the difference for Peter. Imagine how Peter must have felt between the Friday night denial and the Sunday morning discovery! But that Sunday morning revolutionized His world; both his faith and his boldness. Do a word study and see if you can find the meanings of the original Greek word(s) for love in verses 15-17. Let's discuss this a bit on the podcast.

4. Now read Acts 2-5. Make two lists from these passages. First make a list of every form of persecution hurled at Peter in these chapters. Then make a list of every bold response statement made by Peter in these three chapters.
5. Google "death of Peter" and see if you can find a quote by at least one early historian (like Tertullian or Clement of Rome) describing the manner of Peter's death.

Practical Challenge: If you have children and grandchildren, take their individual names before the Father. If they are not Christians pray that you will have wisdom to say and do things that will help them to turn; to be on the side of righteousness in an unrighteous culture. If they are Christians or safe children, pray for each soul, that God will help them be strong and bold in the coming days of persecution, no matter how difficult their lives may become.

July – Paul: Persecutor and Persecuted

1. Paul, the persecutor—Read Acts 7:1-8:4. List characteristics of the persecutor who held the garments and list characteristics of the martyr.

Read Acts 9:1-31, Acts 22, and Acts 26. Within these chapters are details about the time in Saul's life when he "switched teams". Look for clues in the Scriptures about why Paul would have been such a fierce persecutor. Look for a clue regarding his education. Look for another regarding his citizenship. Look for a clue regarding his Jewish sect. Read these scriptures about what Paul would have learned as a Jewish boy: Deut. 6:4-9 and Deut. 6:20-25. Think about persecutors of those who believe in and profess to follow Christ today. Are there background factors that influence Muslims to persecute those in "Christendom,"...factors that could make them be able to do so with a clear conscience? Read Acts 23:1.

2. Read Acts 13-28 highlighting every instance of persecution that Paul endured.
3. Read the book of 2 Corinthians. Pretend you are presenting a lesson to women to advise them about how to prepare their hearts for coming persecution. Try to take ten pieces of advice from this book (You may want to do more.) that would appropriately strengthen and comfort women who were facing persecution for righteousness' sake. Example: From chapter one, you might choose "Set your hope in God, that He will deliver you" (verse 10).
4. Make a list of Paul's trials and persecutions from chapter 11.
5. In the year following Paul's release from prison, a great fire burned the city of Rome. The emperor Nero blamed Christians for this fire and thus began another wave of persecution toward the people of God. Paul suffered in this renewed persecution, was brought back to Rome and imprisoned. Google "Nero and the burning of Rome" and read about one of the greatest persecutors of Christians in history. Then read the book of 2 Timothy, written by Paul after this final imprisonment. This book tugs at the heartstrings of any Christian who has come to love Paul from even a casual study of his life and work. He, the one who once hated the Christ is now "ready to be offered" for His sake. What simple things did Paul request in chapter three from his cell?

Practical Challenge: Choose a missionary to whom you can send a card or an email of encouragement. Include an encouraging passage from 2 Corinthians or 2 Timothy in the card.

August – I Peter: The Epistle of Suffering

Many postulate that this epistle was written during the persecution of Nero. It is often called "The Epistle of Suffering" or the "Job" of the New Testament. Read the epistle. Let's make lists as we study this letter:

- List four things that describe our inheritance from 1:4
- List three things that will be found in our trials when Jesus comes from 1:7
- List the things we should put aside from 2:1
- List three characteristics of the living stone, Jesus, from 2:4
- List four characteristics of Christians from 2:9
- From verses 14-18 of chapter two, list the civil relationships in which Christians were to be submissive
- From 2:21-24, list the characteristics of Jesus in suffering from which we are to learn
- In chapters one and two, Jesus is likened to three things. List them
- List three things from 3:3 that we are not to emphasize as we try to bring lost husbands to the Lord
- From 3:1-4, list three things that WILL help us bring lost husbands to the Lord
- From 3:8-11, list the characteristics of brethren that foster unity (being of the same mind)
- From 3:12, list the three "physical parts" of God and what they do
- In chapter 3, verses 14-26 and 4:16-19, we are given at least six clear instructions in reacting to persecution for righteousness' sake. List them
- From 3:22, list those who have been made subject to the persecuted Christ
- List the sins of the Gentiles from 4:3
- From 4:7-11, list the attributes we must develop in view of the end of all things being at hand
- Three or four reasons to be glad when we suffer are given in verses 13 and 14 of chapter four. List them
- We should NOT ever suffer for what four things in verse 15?
- Peter describes himself in what four ways in 1:1 and 5:1?
- In verses 2-4 of chapter five, Peter gives the elders three "don'ts" and five "do's". Make these two lists
- List three things we are to "do" or "be" with regard to the "roaring lion" from 5:8-9
- List four things God will do for His suffering saints in 5:10

Practical Challenge: Choose ONE of the following projects to help those who are enduring difficulties at the present time:

- a.) Send a small donation to the Jacksonville church of Christ, whose elders oversee the Polishing the Pulpit Conference in Sevierville, TN which occurs later this month. Send a note letting them know that your check is to help someone who is discouraged to attend the conference. (329 Nisbet St NW, Jacksonville, AL 36265)
- b.) Have the ladies of your congregation put together a care package for one of your missionary families and send it during this month. Ask ahead of time what kinds of things the family would enjoy, especially things that might be difficult to obtain.
- c.) Find some sister who may be suffering from loneliness due to a spouse who has committed sin and left her alone. Take her to lunch or dinner and let her know that you're praying for her.
- d.) Reach out to a family member who has been unkind to you. Invite this person into your home and show hospitality to this "enemy".
- e.) Write each of your elders to thank them for the jobs they are doing in protecting the body from false teachers and other who would make it more difficult for Christians to persevere to the goal.
- f.) Have a series of family devotionals, along with your husband, in which you teach your children the accounts of Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. Have your children memorize the words, "But Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself," from Daniel 1:8.