

Unshakeable Faith Week Seven

Christians around the world are imprisoned, beaten, and even killed because of their faith in Christ. We hear stories regularly from places like China, North Korea, and Pakistan. Our friend Peter knew by experience that God uses trials to refine our faith. Scripture teaches us this again and again. The Bible also shows us that persecution specifically because of our faith in Christ bonds us with Jesus in a unique way.

But persecution such as that hasn't yet happened in the US. Should we be glad? It's clear that views in America are changing about Christians. All you have to do is turn on the television or go online. We have lost favor with popular culture, and the only thing that is not tolerated in our tolerant society is Christianity. Increasing persecution in various forms could soon find us, right here at home. How will you respond when it comes?

Unshakeable Faith Trait Seven: Prepared to Endure Persecution for the Sake of Christ

Jesus clearly taught Peter and the other apostles that they would suffer because they followed Him. Although He warned them to be on guard, He also promised they wouldn't have to worry about what to say because the Holy Spirit would give them the right words. (See Matthew 10:17-20 and Mark 13:9-11.)

Read John 15:18-21. List all the reasons Jesus gives in this passage that explains why the world will persecute His followers.

After His resurrection, Jesus warned Peter about severe persecution he would personally face. "When you are old you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go" (John 21:18b, NIV). Jesus said this to "indicate the kind of death" Peter would die.

It is generally accepted that Peter died a martyr's death under Nero's persecutions in Rome. Church tradition and the writings of the early church fathers report that Peter was crucified head downward because he felt unworthy to die in the same manner Christ died. But Peter did not let

persecution deter him from following Christ. He joyfully endured beatings and imprisonments and continued to spread the Gospel message.

Read 1 Peter 1:3-9. Use the passage to explain and elaborate on the following statements.

- 1. We can have joy in the midst of trials –***

- 2. Trials are only temporary –***

- 3. God uses our trials for His purposes –***

Scripture clearly shows us that everyone – believer and unbeliever – will experience temptation, trails, and difficulties as the due course of a fallen world. These things aren't wasted in a believer's life because God uses them to refine our faith and shape our character. While trials are common to all humans, only Christians will experience persecution because of their faith in Christ. This kind of suffering is a direct result of obedience to God.

Read 1 Peter 3:13-17. List all the instructions Peter gives about how a Christian should prepare for and respond to persecution.

Read 1 Peter 4:12-19. Write a summary of the attitudes and actions we should have regarding Christian persecution.

Times are changing quickly. Christians in the United States may well begin to suffer persecution for the name of Christ. Ask God to prepare your heart and mind for the possibility. The Bible promises that when we do suffer we will know Christ more fully and more intimately. Do you desire to know Christ more fully?

Let's talk! How do you feel about the possibility of facing persecution? Are you prepared? Are you prepared for persecution?