

The Prayer Class

Purpose: *To encourage greater participation and joy in prayer*
The Prayer Class meets in God's Throne Room 24/7

Teacher: Abe Funk

Date: November 2, 2023

Lesson: Pray for Persecuted Churches

Welcome to The Prayer Class:

Father, you have blessed me to live in a time and place where I have been free to live out my discipleship, while many around the world are suffering and dying for their faith. Show me how I can pray for them, encourage them, and support them. With thanksgiving, in Jesus' name, Amen.

Bible Reading: Acts 6:8-15; 7:54-60

Now Stephen, a man full of God's grace and power, did great wonders and miraculous signs among the people. Opposition arose, however, from members of the Synagogue of the Freedmen (as it was called)--Jews of Cyrene and Alexandria as well as the provinces of Cilicia and Asia. These men began to argue with Stephen, but they could not stand up against his wisdom or the Spirit by whom he spoke. Then they secretly persuaded some men to say, "We have heard Stephen speak words of blasphemy against Moses and against God." So they stirred up the people and the elders and the teachers of the law. They seized Stephen and brought him before the Sanhedrin. They produced false witnesses, who testified, "This fellow never stops speaking against this holy place and against the law. For we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and change the customs Moses handed down to us." All who were sitting in the Sanhedrin looked intently at Stephen, and they saw that his face was like the face of an angel.

When they heard this, they were furious and gnashed their teeth at him. But Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, looked up to heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. "Look," he said, "I see heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God." At this they covered their ears and, yelling at the top of their voices, they all rushed at him, dragged him out of the city and began to stone him. Meanwhile, the witnesses laid their clothes at the feet of a young man named Saul. While they were stoning him, Stephen prayed, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." Then he fell on his knees and cried out, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them." When he had said this, he fell asleep.

Key Verse: *While they were stoning him, Stephen prayed, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." Then he fell on his knees and cried out, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them." When he had said this, he fell asleep Acts 7:60.*

Background and Lesson:

What good could possibly come out of this tragic story? Stephen, a shining star in the early church was just beginning what could have been a long and effective life—was cut down in his prime. Can God ever cause the church to survive much less thrive from the blood of its martyrs? But look at the bigger story; Saul, a Jewish zealot supported Stephen's stoning, and he became the future greatest missionary statesman the church ever produced. All the disciples of Jesus met the same fate, except John who died a natural death. Those stories have been repeated thousands of times through church history, and

yet today there are more Christians than at any time in history. Early in his ministry Jesus told his followers, *Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you* Matthew 5:11-12.

Sixty-four years ago, five men between the ages of 27 and 32 were speared to death trying to reach a violent, indigenous tribe in Ecuador with the gospel. They all left behind wives, and four had young children. James “Jim” Elliot and his wife Elisabeth or “Betty” had one daughter, Valerie, together. Jim and his four friends were killed by the very people they were attempting to reach with the gospel. The tribe was fearful of outsiders and had been known to kill any that entered their territory. They were also internally violent. The missionaries chose to go to the Huaorani tribe because they were known to be completely “unreached” by the gospel. A church later grew out of that tragic event.

More than 5,600 Christians were killed for their faith last year, and more than 2,100 churches were attacked or closed according to Open Doors and reported by Christianity Today. That latest report finds Nigeria and Sub-Sahara, Africa, the epicenter of jihadist violence, while China leads efforts to redefine religious rights. More than 124,000 Christians were forcibly displaced from their homes because of their faith, and almost 15,000 became refugees. North Korea is back at No. 1, according to the 2023 World Watch List, the latest annual accounting from Open Doors of the top 50 countries where it is most dangerous and difficult to be a Christian. 350 million Christians live in nations with high levels of persecution and discrimination.

How can we pray for Christians facing persecution? Frans Veerman of Open Doors, managing director of research says, “The biggest threat to Christianity is that persecution brings isolation, and when it keeps going on incessantly it may cause loss of hope...after three decades of research, Open Doors has learned that needed resilience is found by being anchored in the Word of God and in prayer...being courageous as the persecuted church is most often active in spreading the Gospel, and vital and growing against the odds. In short, the truth of 1 Corinthians 12:26, *If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it.*” We can support them by prayer!

Quote: *It’s clear that persecution continues to worsen* –Frans Veerman, Open Doors

Think About This:

Why should I live in freedom when so many of my brothers and sisters in Christ are suffering persecution? Would I be able to join them? How should I prepare?

A Prayer for You:

And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast. To him be the power for ever and ever. Amen 1 Peter 5:10-11.

My Notes and what To Pray for:

Add your prayer requests here: yourself, family, church family, missionaries, & leaders in government

Note: All Scriptures are from the NIV Bible unless otherwise indicated

Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful Colossians 4:2

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