



OpenDoors

Serving persecuted **Christians** worldwide

the
DNA
of a
PERSECUTED
CHRISTIAN

OUR INHERITED STRANDS
OF IDENTITY FROM CHRIST



LOVING YOUR ENEMIES

"Through [Jesus] we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we boast in the hope of the glory of God. Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope." Romans 5:2-4

**SMALL GROUP
INSPIRATIONAL GUIDE**

ISSUE FIVE



LOVING YOUR ENEMIES

In this six part series, **'The DNA of a Persecuted Christian'**, we are looking at the strands of identity, which we have inherited from Jesus, that enable our persecuted brothers and sisters to live for Him in spite of hardship and suffering. As you hear some of their stories, we hope that you will learn more about the persecuted Church and will continue to pray with us for them. We trust that this series not only broadens your insight into the lives of our persecuted family, but also shows you more clearly the inheritance, or DNA, that the body of Christ, whether free or persecuted, shares. (For more on this series see p. 4.)

EXAMINING OUR FAITH

Jesus gave us some radical commands during his ministry on earth, and one of those was to love our enemies.

In a sermon on loving your enemies, Martin Luther King Jr, while imprisoned for suggesting that African Americans and other Americans should have equal civil rights, said, *"Hate is just as injurious to the person who hates. Like an unchecked cancer, hate corrodes the personality and eats away its vital unity... Returning hate for hate multiplies hate, adding deeper darkness to a night already devoid of stars. Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that... love is the only force capable of transforming an enemy into a friend... Love transforms with redemptive power."*

Loving those who love us is easy, even non-Christians can do that. But when we love our enemies and *"pray for those who persecute us"* (Matthew 5:44), then we show those around us that Jesus is Lord of our lives. Persecuted Christians understand this and even though at times it's difficult to apply, they're learning to love their enemies and pray for those who persecute them in some of the harshest conditions by continually allowing God to work in their lives.



READ Matthew 5:43-48

What does Jesus say about how we should treat our enemies?

According to Jesus, what should be our motivation for loving our enemies?

READ Takoosh's story on p. 3

What stands out to you about this story?

Today, how can you pray for those who may not like you, have hurt you or wronged you?



TAKOOSH'S STORY

Takoosh Hovsepian was married to Pastor Haik and they served their local community together. One day, 48-year-old Pastor Haik did not come home. After twelve days, Takoosh and her children found out that the Iranian government had brutally murdered him. Haik and three other pastors had refused to sign an official declaration that they would not evangelise among Muslims.

Takoosh and Haik knew that following Jesus in Iran was very dangerous and could cost them their lives. On various occasions, Pastor Haik had stated that he was willing to go to the limit for his faith and for the Church. His wife reflects, "Haik repeatedly said, *'We don't have to be afraid. We must trust in God.'* But in my heart, I was afraid. Haik was full of love for people, even for his Muslim neighbours. They were welcomed at the church; they knew that he would help them even in times of difficulty."

Haik's death took its toll on Takoosh. She says, "I only had hatred in my heart, hatred for my enemies who had murdered Haik. I was not able to forgive them. I prayed with my lips, 'God, give me the strength to forgive,' but before I prayed, in my imagination I saw myself throwing mud at them. But one day a miracle happened. God taught me how I could forgive my enemies. I was asking for something which on the deepest level I did not want to ask for. But gradually, in a process of ups and downs, which took months, God gave me the strength to pray more and more with my heart for those who had murdered my husband. God answered this prayer.

"Then I was no longer praying only with my lips, but from the depths of my heart. I had learned not only to trust in God and to lean on Him, but also how I can forgive my enemies." She says: "I've learned a lesson at God's University about how to love your enemies."

PRAYER

Today, pray for your enemies, whether it be an acquaintance, colleague, or member of Islamic State. No matter who you may consider to be an enemy, pray that they would come to hallow Jesus' name and treasure Him above all else. Ask God to show you how you can show the love of Christ to them today.

Pray that God would open up the hearts and eyes of those who persecute our brothers and sisters to see that it is Jesus who they are persecuting when they persecute them. May God forgive them and reveal to them the truth of the Gospel.

Pray that in the midst of persecution, our persecuted brothers and sisters will grow stronger in their relationship with God and each other. May God work in their hearts to forgive their persecutors, like he did with Takoosh. And may they be a testimony to their persecutors of God's unfailing love.





WHAT THIS SERIES IS ALL ABOUT

So what is the **'The DNA of a persecuted Christian'** series all about? As Christians, one of our core beliefs is that we are all part of one body, the Church, and we are all united under Jesus, the head of the body.

As 1 Corinthians 12:12-14 says, *"For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in one Spirit we were all baptised into one body – Jews or Greeks, slaves or free – and all were made to drink of one Spirit. For the body does not consist of one member but of many."*

We all share the same DNA then – adopted children of God who were once dead in our sins, but now are alive in Christ. And because we are all part of the body of Christ, we believe that the persecuted Church is also part of the **DNA** of every Christian.

As Christians living in 'safer' places in the world, we have a lot to learn from the persecuted Church. Though we live in places where we aren't violently persecuted for our faith, we too face situations in life where we feel afraid, sometimes because of our faith. For many persecuted Christians, danger is never far away and they often fear the consequences of their faith being exposed. But God gives them and us comfort in our fears and teaches us not to be afraid. Persecuted Christians know all too well what it is to face their fears head on with endurance, humility, and boldness.

This is why prayer is so important and it's something that the persecuted Church partakes in daily. As you read about the different characteristics that make up the DNA of persecuted Christians, and, really, the DNA of all Christians, pray for their situation, pray for their safety, and pray for those who persecute them.

Through their stories we can learn to love our enemies, pray for those who persecute us, and endure through hard times: these are all things that persecuted Christians often experience in a very different way to us. And as you go through this series, we hope and pray that you will gain a deeper insight not just into the DNA of persecuted Christians, but the whole body of Christ's DNA. We are, after all, ONE body.



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