

Day of the
Christian
Martyr

2024



SERMON BUILDER

HOW TO USE THIS RESOURCE

What is Day of the Christian Martyr?

According to church tradition, June 29 marks the martyrdom of the Apostle Paul. This year, Christians around the world will take time on June 29 and throughout that weekend to honor the Lord through the legacy of those who have sacrificed their lives for the advancement of the gospel.

The Voice of the Martyrs invites you and your congregation into fellowship with our Christian brothers and sisters who are persecuted for their bold and faithful witness at any cost.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES ARE AVAILABLE AT vom.org/martyr FOR FREE DOWNLOAD AND USE.

Sermon Builder – What Is It?

The Voice of the Martyrs serves the local church. We strive to resource the local church to the glory of God and the purposes of Christ for the advance of his eternal kingdom. This resource is a tool to help you as you use the Day of the Christian Martyr resources with your congregation. In response to feedback from pastors, we are providing this sermon builder resource to give you a starting place as you lead your congregation's Day of the Christian Martyr focus. It is one option as you preach. Feel free to pull illustrations, content or thoughts as you build your sermon for that day. Be blessed and know that we are praying for you as you lead your church into fellowship with our persecuted Christian brothers and sisters and a greater obedience to the Great Commission.

Sermon Planning — Begin with the End in Mind

WHAT DO I WANT OUR CONGREGATION TO KNOW AS A RESULT OF THIS SERMON?

When biblical disciples live faithfully for Christ, persecution for righteousness' sake is to be expected.

WHAT SHOULD I CHALLENGE OUR CONGREGATION TO PURSUE AS BIBLICAL DISCIPLES?

Are you living, as the Christians in Mosul were, in such a way that those around them readily identified them as “followers of Jesus of Nazareth”? Live faithfully. Expect opposition.

WHY IS VOM TELLING THE STORY OF MARTYRS?

As we learn about persecuted Christians, our brothers and sisters in Christ for all eternity, we can better enter into fellowship with them, pray for them and be inspired in our own joyful obedience, regardless of the price we may pay.

PURSUE GODLINESS — EXPECT OPPOSITION

SERMON OUTLINE

2 Timothy

Paul wrote to young Timothy to encourage his faithfulness as a church leader while paying particular attention to Timothy continuing the ministry of Paul after he would be gone. Paul specifically instructed Timothy to “hold fast to the pattern of sound words” that he heard from Paul (2 Tim. 1:13); “guard the good deposit” (2 Tim. 1:14); “suffer along with [Paul] for the gospel” (2 Tim. 1:8); and especially “entrust [Paul’s teaching] to faithful people who will be competent to teach others also” (2 Tim. 2:2).

However, as in many of Paul’s letters, he is concerned with false teachers (2 Tim. 2:14–3:9) and contending for the sake of the gospel as an effective minister (2 Tim. 1:1–14).

In short, Paul instructs and encourages Timothy in topics that, if adhered to, might lead to a ministry of faithfulness marked by effective enduring service to Christ.

Sermon Introduction

A veteran pastor once asked a small group of men he was discipling, “Do you desire to be successful in your Christian life?”

The men, puzzled by the question, hesitated to answer.

The pastor clarified as he continued, “Or do you want to be utterly faithless as you follow Christ? Do you intend to put action to your desire to live a godly life — or not? Your success is not dependent upon anything greater than a daily commitment to faithfully living a godly life in Christ Jesus.”

Our actions give evidence of our confession. Would others describe us as faithfully living godly lives? Have we counted the cost of our desire to pursue Christ?

Scripture teaches us — and real stories from Christians living today and throughout church history reinforce that teaching — that those who live godly lives will be persecuted. That persecution is always an attempt to silence the witness of Christians and thwart the advance of the gospel.

Today, we will examine a passage of Scripture and examples from the global body of Christ that will help us clearly see an example of overcoming persecution, the expectation of persecution, and how we are equipped for persecution as we commit to living godly lives for Christ Jesus our Lord.

Illustration:

SHOW THE VOICE OF THE MARTYRS' DAY OF THE CHRISTIAN MARTYR VIDEO, AVAILABLE AT [VOM.ORG/MARTYR](https://vom.org/martyr) FOR FREE DOWNLOAD.

Alternate:

DOWNLOAD THE FREE BULLETIN INSERT FOR DAY OF THE CHRISTIAN MARTYR, AVAILABLE AT [VOM.ORG/MARTYR](https://vom.org/martyr), AND SHARE THE STORY OF OUR BROTHERS AND SISTERS PERSECUTED FOR GODLY LIVING IN MOSUL, IRAQ, IN JUNE 2014.

“You, however, have followed my teaching, my conduct, my aim in life, my faith, my patience, my love, my steadfastness, my persecutions and sufferings that happened to me at Antioch, at Iconium, and at Lystra — which persecutions I endured; yet from them all the Lord rescued me. Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, while evil people and impostors will go on from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived” (2 Timothy 3:10–13).

1. Paul's example of godly living and enduring persecution (2 Timothy 3:10–11)

- A. Godly Character: Patience, love, steadfastness (Colossians 3:12–15)
- B. Godly Conduct: Teaching, behavior, conduct (Philippians 1:27)
- C. Godly Purpose: Aim in life (Philippians 3:13–14)
- D. God's Provision: Paul enduring persecution
 1. "From them all (2 Corinthians 11:23–28) the Lord rescued me" (2 Timothy 3:11).
 - a. Rescue in this world — Paul experienced God's rescue from persecution as related in 2 Timothy 3:10–11.
 - Escaped assassination plots (Acts 9:23–25, 29–30)
 - Escaped stoning (Acts 14:5–7, 19)
 - Sustained while imprisoned (2 Timothy 4:13, 21)
 - Endured beatings (Acts 16:23)
 - b. Rescue in eternity — Paul's experience at the end of his life
 - Beheaded in Rome — Did God rescue him then? Absolutely, for the consummation of the promise of eternity with God was realized (Philippians 1:21).

ILLUSTRATION: (ADAPTED FROM ALI AND REBEKAH, *I AM N*)

It was March, the time of year when Mosul's insufferable heat had not yet arrived to bake the Iraqi landscape. In the coolness of the morning, the house was still bathed in darkness. Ali, a small man approaching age fifty, looked at his sleeping wife, Rebekah.

They were rearing three children together—Miriam, nineteen; Gabir, seventeen; and Amira, nine. Life had not been easy—not in Ali’s line of work—but it had been a good life. God had provided, despite the war a decade earlier, despite the persecution they suffered for believing in Jesus, and despite their low income. Through it all, Ali and Rebekah had weathered trials and had become especially close.

They lived a comfortable yet humble life in the home of Ali’s parents. But household peace remained elusive because his Muslim parents were angry he had turned his back on Islam and become a follower of Jesus Christ. And they were especially angry because his family had chosen to follow his steps of faith.

As he did every morning, Ali tacked a handwritten note above the bed. It was a Scripture verse for his wife to start her day: “Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit” (John 12:24).

He walked into the kitchen and, as was his custom, picked up a dog-eared journal he kept near the toaster. Ali looked up as if in thought, then began to write. “I am so full of the Holy Spirit that lives in my heart, that my small body cannot contain the measure of love he has given me.”

Later, his family joined him in prayer. “Heavenly Father,” he said, head bowed at the small table, “we pray that as I go out today fishing for men that the harvest would be bountiful. We pray that in this place that has turned its back on the good news, you will do a mighty work through me. Instead of facing Mecca, may people for the first time face you and welcome you into their lives. We pray that revival would come to Iraq. We pray that grace would come to Iraq. We pray that love would come to Iraq. Amen.”

During the previous three months, Ali had led seven Muslims to Christ. His family also played a role in the men’s spiritual development. Ali knew it was not enough to simply watch a man discreetly pray to ask God for forgiveness, acknowledge him as Lord and Savior, and ask Christ to enter his heart.

As Mosul came to life and the darkness gave way to light, Ali kissed his wife on the forehead. She bade him goodbye. It was the last time she would see him alive.

While Ali was conversing with a man on a street corner later that day, a car swerved to a stop beside him. Two men grabbed him, shoved him inside the vehicle, and raced away. His captors tortured him for three days and three nights, then shot Ali nine times.

His killers never identified themselves. No one ever asked for ransom money; nor was anyone apprehended, which isn't unusual in such situations. The Mosul police are not inclined to find the murderers of a man who preached Jesus. Clearly, they just wanted to stop him from spreading the gospel.

Wearing the traditional black garb of a widow in mourning, Rebekah said, "I never thought I would be living without my husband. He was my best friend."

Forty days later, as Ali's family and church community gathered to celebrate his life, everyone agreed that Ali would never have stopped sharing the gospel. During his years of evangelism, he had planted countless seeds. He had introduced many converts to Jesus; these converts in turn brought others to Jesus. The ripple effect went on and on. Ali was a faithful disciple of Jesus who made disciples just as Jesus commanded in Matthew 28:19: "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations."

"Sometimes God allows us to go through a difficult time when we lose a loved one," Ali's daughter Miriam said at the celebration. "During these times, he teaches us how to grow in our faith."

The aftershock of Ali's death arrived soon. His grieving parents blamed Rebekah for their son's death. "Your support of his preaching this Jesus was responsible for our son's kidnapping and murder," they told her. They forced Rebekah and her children out of their house.

Nearly destitute, the family of four settled into a one-bedroom apartment in a village outside Mosul.

The move separated them from their church community, but Christians who helped the family were surprised by their sense of peace, acceptance, and stability. Gabor worked after school to help support the family. Miriam attended a public university.

But Rebekah's challenges were not over.

After the ISIS invasion of Mosul — and just two years after her husband was martyred — Rebekah and her three children had to flee their home. They climbed into their small vehicle and drove to safety in Erbil, Kurdistan. However, the family hadn't had time to plan or pack, and they had nowhere to go once they arrived in Erbil. They followed a group of Mosul refugees to evangelical churches but learned they were already overcrowded with displaced people.

Rebekah contacted a front-line worker, who was also a close friend of her family. He arranged for her to stay in the offices of a Christian ministry in the city. Rebekah and her three children lost much more than their home; her oldest daughter was unable to take her final exam at the university, meaning she wouldn't receive credit for her work.

Rebekah has carried on, despite her losses. At times she has been overcome with grief over the loss of her husband. On one such occasion, tears filled her eyes when she talked about Ali. However, a smile spread across her face when she described his passion for the Lord.

"I am stronger now in my faith," she said. "Sometimes women want to cling to their husbands. But to love truly is to let them go and let them do what God needs them to do. I have no regrets. Ali died 100 percent for Jesus. The only thing he left us was his heart."

2. Paul's exhortation that biblical disciples who live godly lives should expect persecution (2 Timothy 3:12) — *"Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted."*

- A. "All" — from the Greek word *pas* (Strong's G3956) meaning "all, every, the whole." The Latin form of this word is *totus*, which means "entire" or "total." All, as Paul uses in this verse, truly indicates each and every one in totality.
- B. "who desire to live a godly life in Christ" — there is a condition placed on all.
 - 1. "who desire to live" means active, ongoing living (rather than a one-time event), and desire, *theló* (see Strong's G2309), means "intention." (There is a close tie to the Greek word *pístis* [Strong's G4102] and *theló*).
 - 2. "in Christ" is the only source of godly living (see Galatians 2:20).
 - 3. Therefore, the condition indicates that ongoing godly living (in faith) that flows out of our intentions will result in all being persecuted.

- C. “will be persecuted” — Paul uses the Greek verb *diōkō* (Strong’s G1377), meaning “to harass, trouble, molest another.” It is to suffer persecution on account of something.
1. Persecution is a result of the activity of one’s faith — “all who desire to live a godly life in Christ will be persecuted.”
 2. For persecution to occur, there must be a persecutor.
 - a. In verse 13, Paul mentions “evil people and imposters,” whom he describes as “deceiving and being deceived.” Their intention is undoubtedly to thwart the witness of those living godly lives in Christ.
 - b. Paul’s life bears witness to the reality of a persecutor (2 Timothy 3:11; Acts 16:16–24.)
 3. The goal of persecution is to silence the witness of the biblical disciple (Acts 5:27–28).

ILLUSTRATION (ADAPTED FROM BARIS’ STORY, *I AM N*)

Baris, who lives in Turkiye (Turkey), faces the same type of Islamic extremism that our Christian brothers and sisters in Mosul faced in June of 2014.

When Baris took his wife aside to tell her he’d become a Christian, her response was immediate — and steely. She demanded a divorce, packed what she’d need to start a new life, and took their sons.

Devastated, Baris didn’t want to lose his family, but how could he turn his back on God? Was the sacrifice of his family the cost of following Christ?

When he told his brother about his conversion, his brother asked Baris to join him at a doctor’s office the next day.

Fine, thought Baris, only expecting a half-hour visit. *Maybe I’ll even get a chance to share my faith.*

But there was no sharing. Baris was immediately admitted to a psychiatric hospital and medicated with psychotropic drugs. It took weeks for Baris to convince doctors that leaving Islam for Christianity didn't mean he was crazy, and they should release him. Later, his wife would use his stay in the psychiatric hospital as evidence that he was unfit to parent his sons.

Telling his parents about his new faith was equally disastrous. Baris' father exploded in anger, threatening to disown him.

"You can even kill me, and I won't change my mind," Baris replied, after which his mother fainted.

Despite being ridiculed and abused by his own family, Baris still has his faith in Christ . . . and purpose. Baris serves the Lord by connecting local Christians with Turks who are searching for truth. He and his team distribute Bibles, and Baris visits new believers and people who have questions about Christianity.

But in spite of the danger and sacrifice, Baris persists. Every day he rises with hope. Hope he can lead one more person to Jesus . . . and hope he'll one day hug his sons again.

Quote:

"Not all of us are called to die a martyr's death, but all of us are called to have the same spirit of self-sacrifice and love to the very end as these martyrs had."

—Richard Wurmbrand, *The Midnight Bride*

Conclusion:

Every biblical disciple who lives a godly life in Christ will experience some type of persecution from those opposed to the advance of the gospel. Therefore, we each have a decision to make to count the cost and faithfully and boldly live for Christ.

May God strengthen us as we walk by faith and not by sight, inspired by those Christians we have met today who faithfully served Christ, even though it cost them their lives.

CORPORATE PRAYER EXAMPLE AS CONGREGATIONAL RESPONSE

A Prayer of Thanks

We thank you, O God, for the saints of all ages;

For those who in times of darkness kept
the lamp of faith burning;

For the great souls who saw visions of
larger truth and dared to declare it;

For the multitude of quiet and gracious souls
whose presence has purified and sanctified the world;

And for those known and loved by us,
who have passed from this earthly fellowship
into the fuller light of life with you.

Anonymous

(from *Martyrs' Prayers: Seeking God in the Midst of Suffering*. Reader Hill, 2018.
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