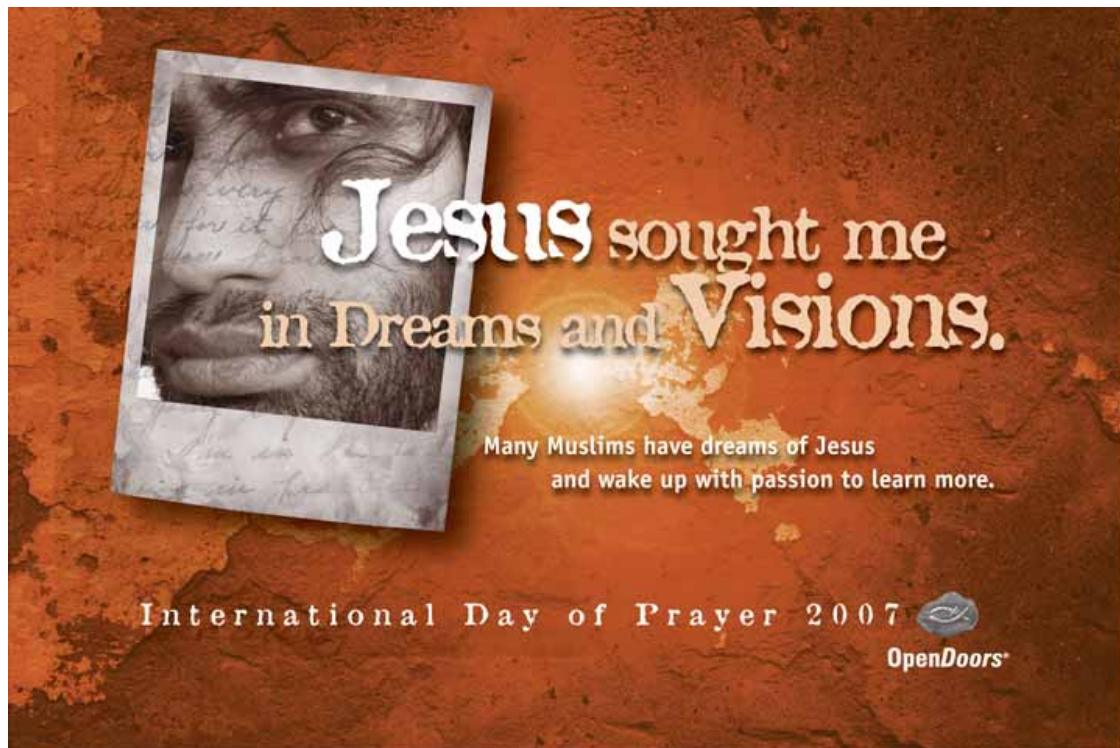




“The Vine”

Growing Together in Christ

Newsletter for New Hope Christian Fellowship



*Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake:
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. – Matthew 5:10*

Remembering the Persecuted Church

From Pastor Dennis

Praise The Lord!

PRAISE is an act of worship (when given to God) or acknowledgment (when given to humans) by which the virtues or deeds of another are recognized and celebrated.

What does praise mean when given from parents to children? Most parenting books teach that we should raise our children with nine-tenths praise and one-tenth correction.

What about praise between husbands and wives? A marriage is good, when husbands and wives constantly praise and encourage one another, rather than criticize each other.

Praise is the means by which we express our thanksgiving and our joy to the Lord. And praise is a natural response. When watching a football game, it is a natural response to celebrate a tremendous play; to shout WOW! The next time you watch a football game with your favorite team playing, try not to express yourself.

When two people are in love, they keep on expressing their love to each other over and over again. They cannot hold back their feelings.

One morning after the worship service a woman came up to her pastor and thanked him for the encouraging sermon he had preached. He answered, "don't thank me, thank the Lord." She said, "Well I thought of that, but it wasn't quite that good." Praise is a natural response.

Praise is our thankful response to God for who he is, and for his goodness, and what he has done. And it is the right and natural thing to do - Psalm 92:1-2 - It is good to give thanks to the Lord, to praise our God most High, to tell about his love in the morning and his faithfulness at night...

God wants whole-hearted praise. We praise him with our whole being. We have to mean what we sing and the words have to be meaningful. One father noticed his daughter

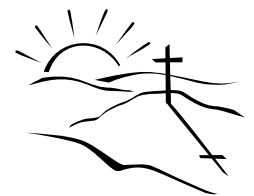
Praise is our thankful response to God for who he is, and for his goodness, and what he has done.

during a recent church service. The congregation starting singing the chorus, "I exalt thee, O Lord ..." As the man joined in, he glanced down at his 5-year-old daughter standing beside him. Her little arms were up in the air and she was singing, "I'm exhausted, oh Lord ..."

On one Palm Sunday, another 5-year-old girl, Stephanie, sat on her mother's lap while they listened to the pastor's sermon. He described Jesus' approach to Jerusalem and how the crowds cried, "Hosanna, Hosanna!" At that, Stephanie perked up and began to sing, "Oh, Hosanna, now don't you cry for me!"

One morning, a 3-year-old daughter, Katherine, helped remind her mother that God wants us to come to Him just as we are. She was dancing and singing around the house as usual, but as mom listened, she noticed her daughter was singing, "I love you, Lord, and I lift my noise!" The words of our praise have to have meaning to us!

Let us praise God every morning - Hebrews 13:15 - Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise... Happy Thanksgiving!



The Vine *Growing Together in Christ*



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From Tammy Tkach



Gratitude or Entitlement

At this time of year, as many of us celebrate Thanksgiving, our thoughts turn to being grateful. Even

those who don't believe in our generous God celebrate Thanksgiving. But what do we as a society think about the rest of the year - perhaps entitlement? It seems as if the idea of deserving the best in life has replaced being grateful for having anything at all.

A poor person is thankful to have a crust of bread. But what about those who aren't really in need? Are they thankful? Or do they think they deserve more and better bread than what they have and disdainfully reject whatever isn't good enough?

The Bible tells the story of a woman who compared herself to a dog begging for crumbs from the table (Matt. 15:22-28). She came to Jesus asking for healing for her daughter. When the disciples asked him to send her away, Jesus said he came to the lost sheep of Israel. Her status as a gentile made her seemingly undeserving of his help. She understood all too well what he was saying and that's when she humbly asked for crumbs from the master's table. She had no sense of entitlement and was grateful for whatever fell her way.

Contrast this to the Pharisees who had nothing but contempt for such people as this woman. They thought their birth status alone made them better than her and as such, they deserved the rights and privileges she was rightfully (in their eyes) denied.

Another example of entitlement is found in Luke 18:9-14. The tax collector who knew he was a sinner humbly prayed, understanding he wasn't worthy of being forgiven and was entitled to nothing. The Pharisee praying next to him proudly beat his chest and knew he deserved only the best.

We see attitudes of entitlement all around us. People sue others at the drop of a hat because they feel they deserve to be compensated for any little injustice, even if it's their own fault. You can find examples of

ridiculous lawsuits at the Stella Awards website. You'll shake your head in amazement.

Those of us who understand that everything we see and have comes from God should be thankful every minute of every day to have air to breathe and food to eat. Life is not something to be taken for granted - it could all be over in a moment. We also understand we don't deserve anything but death. The only reason we are alive and can look forward to being alive forever is the grace of God in Jesus Christ our Savior.

- By Tammy Tkach

India From Page 5

In fact, if a Dalit converts to Christianity, he risks losing whatever little anti-discrimination protection and benefits are offered to Dalits—benefits that, however, can mean a decent chance at life.

Despite the risk, Dalits continue to convert—an estimated 25 million so far. Because of this double discrimination, they often have to practice their faith in secret. As one Dalit teacher told the Wall Street Journal, "If [officials] ever find out I'm a Christian, I will lose my position." He and other Dalit Christians are forced to live a kind of double life: appearing to be a Hindu in public but limiting expressions of their faith to their homes and churches.

The situation in what's called the "largest democracy in the world" reminds us that "democracy" and elections are not enough—there needs to be a commitment to the "first freedom": freedom of religion. There needs to be a recognition that all freedoms grow out of what one of our founders James Madison called "the act of freedom by which each responds to the call of his Creator." And it is time to start reminding India that business-as-usual with us does not include continuing to treat our brothers as "untouchable."

So remember to pray for the Dalits and our persecuted brethren around the world. And this year, resolve with me to pray for the persecuted Church not just on this designated day, but year-round, "without ceasing."

- By Chuck Colson *Breakpoint Commentary*, November 9, 2007 www.breakpoint.org

International Day of Prayer

...For Theirs Is The Kingdom Of God

"Don't Pray Against Persecution, Pray for Perseverance." So urged Pastor Fikret Bocek as he requested prayer for the Church in Turkey in the wake of the torture, mutilation and murder of three Christian men on April 18, 2007. If you have not yet read the letter to the Global Church from the Protestant Church of Smyrna you are (www.assistnews.net/Stories/2007/s07040123.htm) doing yourself a disservice.

I was almost sickened as I read through the details of what happened to these men who were getting together for Bible study that God-ordained morning. I was embarrassed at my own lack of faith as I examined myself in light of what these men endured for the sake of the gospel, and how I live in a bubble among these amber waves of grain.

We in America know nothing of persecution. And shame on us if we western Christians think our trivial trials rise to the level of that which others are not only dying for, but are suffering real, tangible, tortuous consequences for being a follower of Jesus Christ...living in constant fear of physical harm and retribution for their faith. Being ostracized, or considered an outcast, or being left out of the 'in' crowd for your faith is not persecution. Persecution is the fear of losing your life for being willing to call Jesus your God! Persecution is having to go underground because of real and viable threats to your life. Persecution is being listed among terrorist organizations and treated accordingly.

I must confess that I rarely pray for perseverance for myself. I mean, what really do I have in my life that requires real perseverance, the kind that this pastor is boldly requesting prayer for? I don't want anything to come into my life that requires it, to be honest. I must also confess that I often pray (or at least strongly hope) against persecution for myself. I certainly don't want the kind of persecution these three men in Turkey encountered a few weeks ago. Deep down inside, I am ashamed to admit that my faith rises nowhere to the level of Pastor

Bocek or these incredible brothers and sisters in Smyrna. How in the world - I think to myself - can he specifically request that other Christians not pray against persecution, but rather for perseverance? What does that say about the state of my heart as a professing believer in the risen Christ?

I don't want persecution...I want my best life now!

The word tepid is not only defined as lukewarm, but also as lacking in emotional warmth or enthusiasm; halfhearted. Does that not describe to a "T" the western church today? Does that not describe me?

Matt. 5:3-16; Acts 5:40-42) -By Brian Thornton
<http://voiceofthesheep.wordpress.com/category/perseverance/>

Persecution in Burma

Since late September, the crackdown on pro-democracy forces in Burma has brought unwelcome attention to one of the most oppressive regimes on Earth.

For many people, the defining image of the Burmese struggle for human rights has been Buddhist monks in red robes staging demonstrations. Reports about Burma focus on the plight and plans of the estimated 400,000 Buddhist monks in the country. Given the coverage, people might be surprised to learn that Burma not only has a substantial Christian population, but that these Christians have long been the junta's preferred target.

Late last month, French Foreign Minister Bernard Kouchner called on China to use its influence with the Burmese government to promote democratic reform. Aside from the unintentional irony of China promoting democratic reform anywhere, I could only wonder of the French foreign minister, "Where were you when Burma's Christians needed you?" For instance, the *U.K. Telegraph* reported about a Burmese government document describing a plan for eradicating Christianity in that country. The document began with the words "there shall be no home where the Christian religion is practiced." What followed were "point by point instructions on how to drive Christians out of

See Burma on Page 5

Burma From Page 4

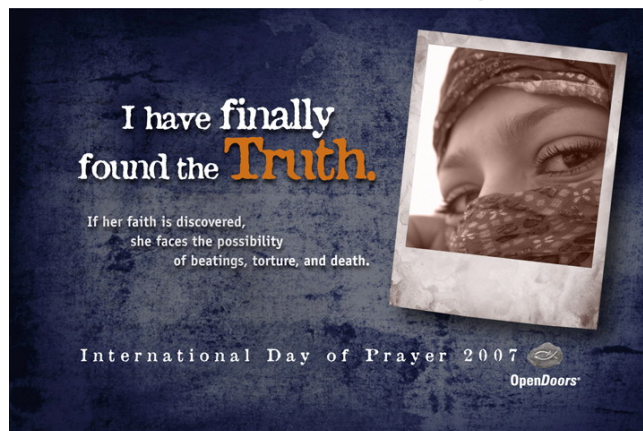
the state." While the junta denied authorship of this specific document, it "made no public attempt to refute or repudiate its contents." It could hardly do otherwise—its persecution of Burma's Christian minority is well-documented. Christian churches have been torn down and replaced by Buddhist pagodas; and Christians have been forced to financially support Buddhist projects and festivals.

It gets worse: Christian children have been removed forcibly from their homes never to be seen again. And members of largely Christian ethnic groups—the Chin, Lachin, and Karen—have been tortured by the Burmese army. Christian women are gang-raped by soldiers, killed, and their mutilated bodies placed on display as a warning to others.

Not surprisingly, the treatment of Burmese Christians does not figure prominently in recent news reports about the Burmese democracy campaign. Actually, their treatment scarcely registers at all.

I say "not surprisingly" because, sadly, the media has a blind spot when it comes to the persecution of Christians. For instance, you can listen to several months' worth of news about Iraq, and, with a few honorable exceptions, never hear about the plight of Iraqi Christians. There was a similar journalistic silence about the treatment of Sudanese Christians by that country's Islamic-led government—until, that is, many of us staged a noisy campaign.

But this is why it is up to Christians to provide a more accurate picture of human rights around the world. Citizen action requires informed citizens, which is why I am telling you about Christians who need your help. Because when we are asked, "Where were you when the persecuted Church needed you?" I want you to be able to say, "Right by their side." - *By Chuck Colson Breakpoint Commentary, November 8, 2007*



India And Religious Persecution

In the past decade India has enjoyed an economic boom fueled, in large part, by trade in services with the United States. Sadly, many Indians, however, have not benefited from the boom, chief among them the Dalits, or, as they used to be called, the "untouchables."

On October 2, Mohandas Gandhi's birthday, 25,000 Dalits from across India set out on a Gandhi-style protest march to New Delhi. They protested their continuing marginalization within Indian society, which is especially intolerable in the midst of unprecedented economic growth. It is difficult for any American to imagine how marginalized the Dalits are. They are considered to be less-than-human by much of Indian society. Because of this, they are relegated to "the most squalid jobs," as Stephanie Giry put it in Foreign Affairs magazine—for example, cleaning human waste.

As one Dalit woman told the BBC, she cleaned toilets because that was the only way she could feed her children. The woman's daughter said that she "tried looking for a job in a school or nursing home, but no one would take" her. "The first question they always ask is your caste-system."

The Indian government has enacted anti-discrimination laws and created programs to compensate for this discrimination. Yet the Dalits' place within the "Hindu religious and social hierarchy" limits the impact of these laws. More than 2,000 years of culture and religion often trump the law.

Little wonder that millions of Dalits have sought to escape that hierarchy by converting to Christianity. According to the Wall Street Journal, the "overwhelming majority" of India's Christians are Dalits. This, in turn, gives their Hindu neighbors and local government two reasons to discriminate against them: their caste and then their Christian faith. See India on Page 3

International Day of Prayer

"I Could Feel Your Prayers In The Cell"

A pastor from a restricted nation told me about the time in prison when he was waiting to be executed at any moment. I asked him how he could handle that situation. He answered, "I could feel your prayers in the cell!"

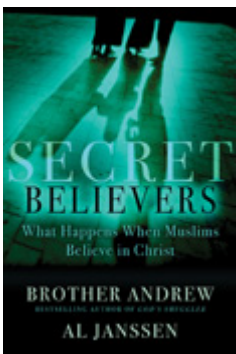
"I knew that Christian brothers and sisters around the world were praying for me right then. Some nights I felt as if there were thousands of brothers and sisters with me in the cell and that we were all celebrating God's grace. That gave me hope during that worst time in my life. Actually I have never felt Christian love in such a strong way."

Dear followers of Christ, when I once again welcome you to take part in the International Day of Prayer for the Persecuted Church (IDOP - Sunday, November, 11) I think that pastor's experience gives us a compelling reason for coming together to pray for those who suffer for the name of Jesus Christ.

We are all part of Christ's body and this is why it is a blessing to be part of this the world's biggest prayer group where we all have an important role.

Imagine Christians in many, many other nations praying together – not only for the persecuted church but with the persecuted church. Surely this is a day pleasing to God himself when his children unite in love and prayer. -*Johan Candelin, Global Co-ordinator, IDOP; Full letter at: <http://www.idop.org/>*

Book Review



Secret Believers

Nowhere else in the world is it harder to be a Christian today than in the Islamic world, where converts from Islam face an automatic death sentence, and all believers face random and often ruthless persecution while the authorities look the other way.

way.

Now *Secret Believers: What happens when Muslims believe in Christ* lays bare the

whole story of the harsh realities that Christians, and those who want to follow Christ, must deal with every day in Muslim countries - and tells the thrilling story of the Christians who meet these challenges with indomitable faith and breathtaking courage.

Brother Andrew, the fearless missionary and author of the international bestseller *God's Smuggler*, and coauthor Al Janssen tell the amazing stories of Muslims who encounter Christ and determine to become Christians, despite ostracism and death threats, and of Christians struggling to become mature in their faith in the midst of a hostile and increasingly violent Muslim society.

Brother Andrew and Janssen, who both work with Open Doors International (an organization dedicated to strengthening the persecuted church) introduce you to Christian missionaries who risk torture and death every day by bearing witness to Christ among Muslims. They recount the interactions of all these people with convinced Muslim believers, converts from Christianity to Islam, and even members of the jihad terror groups such as Hamas, Hezbollah and Islamic Jihad. The stories in *Secret Believers* are all true, although the names have been changed to protect the lives of these intrepid believers.

Amid all these accounts of awe-inspiring Christian heroism, Brother Andrew and Janssen explore forthrightly the question of why Christian communities in the Islamic world remain so small and weak, and how Christians can bear witness to the truth of Jesus Christ to Muslims most effectively.

Issuing a stirring challenge to Western Christians to change their hearts and actions towards Muslims, Brother Andrew and Janssen reveal a daring new plan for more successfully engaging Muslims, and even call for a "new jihad" - of a very different kind from the one Islamic jihadists envision!

Secret Believers is an inspiration and a challenge for Christians - and a guide to how to support their embattled brethren in the Islamic world. - *Book review from the Conservative Book Club*

http://www.conservativebookclub.com/products/BookPage.asp?prod_cd=c7073