

## WHEN YOU ARE FAITHFUL

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Woodland Church

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*“This is what you must write to the angel of the church in Smyrna: I am the first and the last. I died, but now I am alive! Listen to what I say. I know how much you suffer and how poor you are, but you are rich. I also know the cruel things being said about you by people who claim to be God’s people. But they are really not. They are a group that belongs to Satan. Don’t worry about what you will suffer. The devil will throw some of you into jail, and you will be tested and made to suffer for ten days. But if you are faithful until you die, I will reward you with a glorious life.” (Revelation 2:8–10, CEV)*

*“Yes, and everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution.” (2 Timothy 3:12, NLT)*

*“I believe it to be a grave mistake to present Christianity as something charming and popular with no offense in it.” -Dorothy Sayers*

### THREE SOURCES OF PERSECUTION

#### 1. SATAN 2. HYPOCRITES 3. ENEMIES OF THE GOSPEL

The greatest criticism of the Church today is that no one wants to persecute it: because there is nothing very much to persecute it about.

*-George F. MacLeod, Leadership, Vol. 2, no. 4.*

### GOD GIVES POWER TO DISCERN, DEFEAT, AND DWELL ETERNALLY.

#### 1. JESUS KNOWS WHAT I AM FACING.

*“I know about your suffering and your poverty...” (Revelation 2:9a, NLT)*

#### 2. JESUS KNOWS MY PERSECUTORS.

*“I know the blasphemy of those opposing you.” (Revelation 2:9b, NLT)*

“God assumed from the beginning that the wise of the world would view Christians as fools and he has not been disappointed. If I have brought any message today, it is this: Have the courage to have your wisdom regarded as stupidity. Be fools for Christ. And have the courage to suffer the contempt of the sophisticated world.” -Justice Antonin Scalia

### 3. JESUS SAYS TO ME, “DO NOT BE AFRAID.”

“Don’t be afraid of what you are about to suffer.” (Revelation 2:10, NLT)

“I will never fail you. I will never abandon you.” So we can say with confidence, “The LORD is my helper, so I will have no fear. What can mere people do to me?” (Hebrews 13:5–6, NLT)

### 4. JESUS TELLS ME, “BE FAITHFUL.”

“You remain faithful even when facing death, ...” (Revelation 2:10, NLT)

“In a huge swath of territory from Nigeria east and north to Iran and Pakistan, millions of Christians live in fear of losing their property or their lives simply because they are Christians. In the Assyrian Triangle of Iraq, the campaign of church-burning, clergy-killing, and terror has all but decimated the historically oldest Christian communities.”

The rabbi agrees with Pope Benedict's view that (quoting Benedict) "We might have to part with the notion of a popular church. It is possible that we are on the verge of a new era .... [in which the church] will continue only in the form of small and seemingly insignificant groups, which yet will oppose evil with all their strength and bring Good into this world." -Rabbi Yitzchok Alderstein, “Are Christians the New Jews?”, *Patheos*, 2013-02-13

## GROWTHWORK

“Realism is idealism that has been through the fire and got purified; cynicism is idealism that has been through the fire and got burned.” -Warren Wiersbe

### 1. DON'T BE SHOCKED.

“Dear friends, don’t be surprised or shocked that you are going through testing that is like walking through fire.” (1 Peter 4:12, CEV)

## 2. **DON'T BE ASHAMED.**

*“But it is no shame to suffer for being a Christian. Praise God for the privilege of being called by his name!” (1 Peter 4:16, NLT)*

## 3. **REMINDE MYSELF OF HOW GOD BLESSED ME WHEN I WAS HIS ENEMY.**

*“For since our friendship with God was restored by the death of his Son while we were still his enemies, we will certainly be saved through the life of his Son. So now we can rejoice in our wonderful new relationship with God because our Lord Jesus Christ has made us friends of God.” (Romans 5:10–11, NLT)*

## 4. **PREPARE TO BE BLESSED.**

*“God blesses those who are persecuted for doing right, for the Kingdom of Heaven is theirs. “God blesses you when people mock you and persecute you and lie about you and say all sorts of evil things against you because you are my followers.” (Matthew 5:10–11, NLT)*

## 5. **BLESS YOUR ENEMIES.**

*“Bless those who persecute you. Don't curse them; pray that God will bless them.” (Romans 12:14, NLT)*

The Christians in Pakistan comprise only 2.5 percent of the total population, a mere "fly on the wall" in this officially Islamic nation. (Ninety-seven percent of Pakistanis are Muslims.) The Rev. Munawar K. Rumalshah, a Christian leader in the northern city of Peshawar, reports on the government-endorsed "social and economic suffocation of the Christian community" in Pakistan. Pakistan's anti-blasphemy laws pose a constant threat for Christians. In addition, Rumalshah said that in his province alone local mobs have publically urinated on Bibles and closed four churches. However, despite this overt hatred towards Christians, Rumalshah isn't bitter. Instead, he works for better relationships with his Muslim neighbors. He views the persecution as an opportunity to display Christ's love to others, even militant Muslims like al-Qaeda members.

Rumalshah summarized how his church responds to persecution: "We clean the wounds of those who hate us and those who would kill us."

*-Douglas LeBlanc, "We Clean the Wounds of Those Who Hate Us," The Living Church News Service (3-8-11)*

**6. UNITE WITH THE PERSECUTED CHURCH.**

**7. BEAR THEIR BURDENS IN PRAYER AND GENEROSITY.**