Bible Study on the Persecuted Church

On Sunday, we will hear first-hand about the Christ-followers in Pakistan who were the victims of a bombing on Easter Sunday. Bill Curtis, who is a member of Souderton Mennonite Church, will be introducing his friend William Sarfraz of Gawah Mission Pakistan.

Read the story below about a fellow believer who is being persecuted for his faith in Christ and then learn more about what the Bible says about persecution in the study which follows.

Pakistani Christian in Prison for Life Because of His Faith

Imran Ghafur is now more than six years into a life sentence in prison for his Christian faith, and no judge or attorney is willing to hear his appeal. Accused by his neighbor of burning pages of the Quran in 2009, Pakistan’s High Court has repeatedly delayed his appeal, leaving him to languish in prison.

Police arrived at Imran’s house in July 2009 just in time to stop a mob from killing him. Though both he and his father had been beaten viciously by the mob, police arrested Imran, but none of his attackers. Radicals gathered in front of the police station where he was detained, hurled rocks at the building, called for his death and shouted curses, saying, “Christians are dogs, Imran is a dog.”

He was eventually found guilty of blasphemy and sentenced to life in prison. Afterward neighbors told Imran’s family to leave the area because no one in the community would allow them to continue to operate their businesses. They lost both the family’s primary breadwinner and their role in their local Christian community. Voice of The Martyrs (VOM) has been supporting the family and remaining in close contact.

The so-called blasphemy laws which come from section 295 of Pakistan’s Penal Code were originally created in the 1860s to protect all religious faiths and avoid sectarian violence. In recent history, these laws have been used against Christians, non-Muslims and even “offensive” Muslims.

Because of the current anti-Christian sentiment in Pakistan, it came as little surprise when an attorney on Imran’s trial became ill on the same day Imran’s appeal was to be heard in November 2015. It is likely that hardliners used intimidation tactics, as they have done before. It is hard to say how difficult it will be to reschedule a hearing.

On Easter Sunday this year, more than 10,000 radical Islamists gathered in front of Parliament to agitate in favor of the country’s blasphemy laws. Though the government has publicly stated
that they did not concede to any of the demands, Christians, who make up less than 1 percent of the nation, remain hyper aware of the public sentiment about them.

As for Imran, he told family members that he is glad to use his time in prison to study the Word of God. Several years ago, the family told VOM that every day at midnight, Imran prays and sings spiritual songs. Muslim prisoners have even asked for his prayers. Both he and his family are remaining faithful to God and trusting in His will.

The Bible gives at least four reasons why persecution exists.

- John 16:1-3 (No knowledge of God or His Son).
- Psalm 10:2 (An attitude of arrogance).

If persecution should be expected by Christians, then, what should be our response if and when we are persecuted? (Share your answers.)

Read 1 Peter 4:12-17 and then answer the following questions:

1 Peter 4:12-17  
New Living Translation (NLT)

12 Dear friends, don’t be surprised at the fiery trials you are going through, as if something strange were happening to you. 13 Instead, be very glad—for these trials make you partners with Christ in his suffering, so that you will have the wonderful joy of seeing his glory when it is revealed to all the world.

14 If you are insulted because you bear the name of Christ, you will be blessed, for the glorious Spirit of God[a] rests upon you.[b] 15 If you suffer, however, it must not be for murder, stealing, making trouble, or prying into other people’s affairs.

16 But it is no shame to suffer for being a Christian. Praise God for the privilege of being called by his name! 17 For the time has come for judgment, and it must begin with God’s household. And if judgment begins with us, what terrible fate awaits those who have never obeyed God’s Good News?

What does verse 12 suggest should be our response to persecution?

What do verses 13-14 suggest should be our response to persecution?
What do verses 15-16 suggest should be our response to persecution?

What do verses 13-14 suggest should be our response to persecution?

What does verse 19 suggest should be our response to persecution?

In light of what you have read and discussed, what can we do as Christ-followers in North America in response to the persecution of Christians around the world?

Share the following ideas of what each of you can do:

- Pray regularly for those around the world who are suffering persecution.
- Financially support organizations (like Voice of the Martyrs) who keep us informed about those suffering persecution.
- Invite someone (like our guest speaker William Sarfraz) who has been persecuted (or someone who has worked with those who are being or have been persecuted) to speak on the subject in your church.
- Form a group in your church that has as its purpose to study the issue of world persecution and keep the church informed on what is happening.
- When you become aware of a brother or sister in Christ who is being persecuted in some foreign land, write to the State Department asking them to work with the government in that land to seek freedom for that person.

Close in prayer remembering the Christians around the world who are being persecuted for their faith and Peter’s words from 1 Peter 4:12-17 about our response to persecution.