

Proclaiming the Gospel Amid Persecution

Where: Seoul, Korea

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When investigating persecution due to faith, it is clear there are other vulnerabilities which compound the violations of freedom of religion and belief. The degree of persecution against believers is severe, and those being persecuted are in a very vulnerable position. This is true for men who face poverty or ethnic, political, or tribal conflict. For women and girls, cultural traditions and gender disparities also compound the religious persecution they face; being persecuted for religious reasons is particularly severe.

Martha and Irene, can you help bring this from a global perspective to the specific context of your country? What examples of religious persecution of women and girls do you have?

Thank you, Emma. I am Martha, from Bangladesh, and I represent South Asia. As an example, a very educated woman and her husband lived in a Western country. When she came to faith in Jesus Christ and her husband found out, he moved them to an Asian country. He then abandoned her and their child on the street. After waiting for about 20 hours, she went to the police. Two days later, her husband was contacted and said he had returned to his hometown and wanted nothing to do with a Christian wife.

I also want to tell you about an underage woman. When she came to faith in Jesus, her Muslim family locked her in their home for two years and did not allow her to study. When she went to court to officially change her religious identity, lawyers in the courtroom ridiculed her. One asked, "How much money did you receive to become a Christian?" She felt very ashamed.

I will be speaking on Africa, specifically about countries where Christians are a minority. The vulnerability for women and girls arises because they are easy targets. Girls are normally kidnapped on their way to school. They are forced to convert to Islam and are subsequently forced to marry. At that age, they are forced to give birth to children for the perpetrators. Women also face rape and sexual violence; they are subjected to being raped by multiple men. For these women and girls, all their dignity is stripped away. This occurs in countries like Nigeria, Sudan, and the DRC, to name a few.

Thank you. In your examples, we hear about specific ways in which women and girls are targeted. From global research, we know that men and women are persecuted in ways designed to destroy their societal strengths. For men, this is mainly their role as provider and leader. For women, it is their role in the family and their perceived sexual purity. As we hear these stories, our hearts break. But we would do these women a disservice if we do not grapple with how the enemy is being strategic. If we think that one event of persecution is meant to break only one person, we are misguided. The enemy's strategy is to break the church by breaking relationships within it. So, let's think more holistically about the impact of these tactics.

Martha, thinking of these stories, how have you seen the church respond when the women come home?

When this violence happens in a family because of faith, it is very difficult to speak about. We come from a culture of shame and honour. The woman thinks she will be blamed again because of her faith and that her family will be shamed. She may face more rejection if she speaks about it, even in the church. There is a fear of experiencing further shame, so she feels it is better to keep it a secret and bear the suffering alone.

Despite being persecuted for their faith, when they come back to the church, they are not accepted. When these women are raped, they often return pregnant. Their husbands and families cannot accept them back, and the church also rejects them. The church lacks the structures to integrate them back into the community. They go through stigma, discrimination, and rejection, becoming outcasts in society.

This is very striking to hear. These women have been persecuted for their faith, yet when they turn to the church, it is not a safe place to recover. It is as if women and girls who are targeted become an enemy of the church. It is as if the church thinks the blood of Christ is not strong enough to cleanse them. However, we do have examples of churches that make things much better. This happens when the church has the courage to step outside of cultural norms and find a resilient response—solutions that place responsibility on the persecutor and allow our persecuted sister or brother to be restored.

Martha and Irene, have you seen examples of a resilient response from the church?

Culturally speaking, the church wants to be perfect. There is very little room for 'messy' people. The church does not want to become vulnerable. In our context, some faith-based organisations deal with these issues. They provide food, shelter, and work, but I have found very few instances of the church as a body of Christ opening its doors to these people. These organisations try to provide eternal peace and acceptance for vulnerable people, helping them recover and feel accepted, which is what is needed.

I believe the church's role should be to integrate persecuted women and children back into the community without judging them. The church should not be for perfect people; it needs to become a rescue place for everyone who needs help. We must be mindful of those going through shame so that we do not inflict more of it upon them. The church should be prepared to respond with care groups to help restore the dignity of young girls and women, helping them heal and return to daily life.

As a concluding remark, the enemy wins when we allow the intended shame of persecution to bring division and rejection into the church. Instead, it is our responsibility to restore those who have gone through persecution with love and acceptance, in the knowledge that their vulnerability and identity are safe in Christ. This is where healing occurs. This is not only true for women but also for the men and children of our church. Let us all stand to pray for the persecuted women globally.

Father, we pray. Lord Jesus Christ, grant your mercy upon your people. We pray this in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Brothers and sisters, I greet you in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, who paid the penalty for sin with his own life. I would like to say that persecution is not a death sentence. The only thing that has a death sentence is sin.

I have to give credit to my dear sisters; they were very kind and polite in sharing their testimonies, which are the reality of what these women and young ladies go through. Friends, it is horror and hell when a village or a family attacks these girls and women, kidnaps them, and rapes them repeatedly. What they endure is beyond imagination. Then there is the stigma: these girls come back with 'Boko Haram babies', and those children grow up with that label.

I also want to say that these women and ladies deserve our highest respect. They are warriors of the faith. Friends, this is not just happening in some corner of the world. It is happening from Somalia

right across to the western coast of Africa, in Asia, and in many other countries, across all these conflict zones.

We have been talking about revival and repentance. There is one sin that we have to repent of: the sin of violence and abuse. When Abel was murdered by his brother Cain, God came to Cain and held him accountable, asking, "Where is your brother Abel? His blood is crying out to me." And the blood of millions, of hundreds of thousands, is crying out to God globally. And one wonders: where is the church? Where are the people of God?

Currently, 35 of these conflicts are in Africa. This is out of 121 conflicts recorded globally in 2024 alone. More than 55 countries are affected, and 22 of them are in Africa. Friends, in Africa alone, there are more than 45 million displaced people. Globally, in 2024, there are almost 21 million displaced people. It is great that we pray for the conflict in Gaza, Palestine, and Ukraine, but we need to know that there are more than 121 crises happening globally. Many of the conflicts in Africa are due to extremist groups and the scramble for the continent's resources. Out of the 45 million displaced people in Africa, 16 million are Christians. Our brothers and sisters are living in the most horrific realities, and the largest percentage of victims are women, girls, and young children.

The blood of our persecuted brothers and sisters is crying out to the Lord. When I read the Bible, I see how men of God like Nehemiah responded to sad news. When he heard about the state of Jerusalem, he fell on his knees, mourned, and broke down before God. He entered into a state of repentance and confessed the sins of his family, his people, and his nation. The man of God Ezra did the same in Ezra chapter 9. When he heard of the unfaithfulness of God's people, he tore his clothes, fell before God, and was broken. He prayed, "I am too ashamed to lift my head to you, O God, because our sins are higher than our heads."

We cry for a revival of repentance in the church and in our nations. This situation will not be resolved except by prayer and fasting. That is our responsibility. The churches in Africa, together with partners like Open Doors, have started a movement called 'Rise Up Africa'. It is a call for the people of God everywhere to rise up and pray for our brothers and sisters not only in Africa but in the 55-plus nations across the globe experiencing conflict. We must speak about it, not hide it away as if it will solve itself.

Join us. Stand in solidarity with our brothers and sisters who are going through some of the biggest trials in the history of the church, especially in Africa over the last 2,000 years. There is a card on your seat; please fill in your name to commit to praying and hand it to an usher. You can also get more information by scanning the QR code.

Jesus said, "I will build my church." Please, join us in this movement. Thank you.

Dear beloved brothers and sisters, I am Ji Seong-ho. I was born in North Korea, where I lived for 24 years before defecting in 2006 to find freedom. As I came here today, I prayed, and I brought with me the hearts of the Christians imprisoned in North Korea's political prison camps and those who pray in secret in the underground churches. I came here today wondering if God saved me and sent me to the Republic of Korea for this very moment.

I am missing my left arm and leg. When I was 14, living in a coal mining village in Hoeryong, North Hamgyong Province, I fell from a freight train, and a 60-tonne carriage crushed my arm and leg. I was taken to the hospital bleeding heavily, but there was no anaesthesia and no antibiotics. For three and a half hours, I was wide awake, enduring the pain of a saw cutting through my leg and

listening to the sound of a surgical scalpel stitching my flesh. I survived. I believe God saved me to tell the world about the orphans and widows in North Korea.

When I returned home, my leg became infected and gave off a foul stench, and my fever rose above 40 degrees. Everyone thought I would die, but I survived. God saved me. He saved me so that I could come to the land of the Republic of Korea and tell the entire world about the 25 million suffering souls in North Korea.

My grandmother starved to death. She was just skin and bones. As she was dying, she said, "Just give me one bowl of white rice." I could not grant her that wish. We did not have a single grain of rice. Now, I have served as a Member of Parliament in the Republic of Korea and work as the governor of North Hamgyong Province in exile. God tells me to work for the suffering people of North Korea, and so I work with all my strength.

My father was arrested during our family's defection and was tortured to death by North Korea's State Security Department. My mother defected to try and get me a prosthetic leg but was sold into human trafficking in China. She later escaped and came to the Republic of Korea. But we survived, and we were reunited in South Korea. My younger brother, who escaped with me on crutches, also survived and lives with me in South Korea. God saved us.

God is telling the Christians living in South Korea that there are people suffering unimaginable pain. He is saying that right now, there is a soul dying in a political prison camp. There are underground believers who cannot read the Bible even if they want to, who have no church in which to pray, and who cannot sing praises because of the surveillance. We must know the reality that over 200,000 North Korean women have been trafficked in China, and that in North Korea today, there are homeless children like I was, children without limbs, eating from rubbish heaps.

We must pray. We must pray for the land closest to us, North Korea, and we must spread the gospel to them. We must pray for the homeless children, for the orphans and widows, and for those in political prison camps. It is frustrating to have to convey so much in such a short time. But what is important is the fact that when God is with us, the unification of this nation and the spread of the gospel in North Korea will soon be achieved. When you join us and pray with us, God will bring unification like a thief in the night.

I survived, and I have a responsibility to save the 25 million souls in North Korea. That responsibility is not mine alone; it is a responsibility for all of us. The duty to spread the gospel is also a responsibility we must share. God is saying, "There are people in the land of North Korea." Thank you for joining us.

Hallelujah. First, all glory to God. I would like to speak about the release of missionaries detained in North Korea and the gospel-led unification of the Korean peninsula. To save time, I will read from my presentation.

The issue of Korean unification is a national problem that South and North Korea must solve independently, but it is also an international issue linked to the interests of the four surrounding powers: the US, China, Japan, and Russia. Furthermore, it is a spiritual issue connected to the expansion of God's redemptive kingdom. The division of the Korean peninsula is threefold: territory, political systems, and people. Seventy years have passed, and in three years, we will mark 70 years since the disappearance of the surface church in North Korea. Just as the Babylonian exiles returned after 70 years to rebuild the temple, we must pray for the history of the North Korean church to be restored.

For the past 80 years, we have tried both military and diplomatic approaches to unification, but both have failed. Over the last 55 years, despite 667 rounds of inter-Korean negotiations and 238 agreements, we remain today in a relationship of two hostile states. A third way must now be sought: gospel unification, where North and South become one in Jesus Christ.

Currently, three South Korean missionaries are detained in North Korea. In 2017, Kim Hak-song, a missionary from our Peace Korea organisation who was serving as an agricultural professor at Pyongyang University of Science and Technology, was detained. At that time, a total of nine foreigners were detained in North Korea. As a small NGO, our only option was to cry out to God in prayer. Amazingly, God responded with His word from Jeremiah 33:2-3: "Thus says the Lord who made the earth, the Lord who formed it to establish it—the Lord is his name: 'Call to me and I will answer you, and will tell you great and hidden things that you have not known.'"

God led us to pray for the release of the detained individuals with the Korean church. One by one they were released, and a year later, our missionary Kim Hak-song was freed with others. We give glory and thanks to God once more. However, it is tragic that South Korean missionaries Kim Jung-wook, Kim Kuk-gi, and Choi Chun-gil, as well as Chinese-Korean missionary Jang Moon-seok, have not been released for over 10 years.

Therefore, alongside prayer, we have engaged in public diplomacy for their repatriation. In the autumn of 2019, God allowed us to meet with American evangelical leaders, opening a path for US-Korea cooperation on this issue. We have visited the White House and met with the US State Department's Office of International Religious Freedom, which resulted in the detained missionaries' cases being included in the State Department's annual report and in a UN report on torture. God also enabled us to visit the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association and agree with Franklin Graham to work together for the release of the missionaries and the evangelisation of North Korea.

God has worked without rest. In February 2024, the World Evangelical Alliance (WEA) contacted us. While discussing the direction of North Korean evangelism, the issue of the detained missionaries came up. The WEA took swift follow-up action, and as a result, the issue was adopted into the UN Human Rights Council's Universal Periodic Review, becoming an international matter that requires monitoring of North Korea's compliance. We thank the WEA once again.

Since the 1990s, missions to North Korea have mainly been conducted in four ways. The problem has been the lack of missionary work targeting North Korea's elite. A model example is Billy Graham's visits in 1992 and 1994, where he preached the gospel to Kim Il-sung. Franklin Graham told me that his father was received very favourably. Our future mission work must continue to evolve, combining existing methods with a top-down approach to achieve a bloodless gospel unification.

Our purpose is not to shame, blame, harm, or overthrow North Korea. At this point, nearly 70 years after the church was destroyed, our purpose is to share the love of Jesus Christ—the way, the truth, and the life—with our 25 million brothers and sisters living in North Korea. God has promised to do a new thing: "Behold, I am doing a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?" I believe that when the 5,000 Korean Christian leaders and the leaders from 146 nations attending this WEA General Assembly cry out with one heart, the Lord who acts will do a new thing and He alone will receive glory from all nations. Shalom, thank you.

It has been a dramatic morning for all of us. We have people here from places where violence has taken place, including a delegation of pastors from Ukraine. Brothers and sisters, from Ukraine, all the way across Africa and the Middle East, we have representatives who came from war zones. They not only represent people in deep conflict, but they also represent men and women who have

faced shame, who cannot return to their homes, and who are not being accepted into the church. They want to find a home and be loved by Jesus. Let us stand with them and cry out to the Lord to bring peace to their nations.

Let us pray. Father, we ask that you proclaim the gospel. As we bring the love of Jesus to the nations, give us all strength. We pray for those who are in prison and for those who cannot go home; may your presence be with them. Heavenly Father, we pray that the gospel will be truth, love, and light for each person. We thank you, Father, for this morning. May we treasure these testimonies in our hearts and learn to pray for each one of them. We thank you, in Jesus' name. Amen.

Invitation for Further Contribution

Your voice is still a vital part of this global conversation. We invite you to add your reflections, insights, and questions to this discussion by visiting the following link: <https://weafeedback.com/tuesday-28/>

1. Scroll down to the Panel session titles,
2. When ready, select 'Start Recording' and provide your input (responding to the questions below.
3. When done, select 'Stop'
4. No need to provide personal details
5. When ready, select 'Send'.

To engage with the report and contextualise the content for your ministry, access Spock.chat (if you have not yet registered, click here - <https://app.spock.chat/conference/wea>) It is highly recommended that you personalise your AI before engaging with the reports. To do so, select the **'Personalise your AI'** agent in the Menu Bar and follow the instructions.