

# Persecution, What We Need to Know

by Shane Idleman

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*Shane Idleman's sermon emphasizes the reality of persecution in the Christian life and the importance of understanding God's true plan amidst trials and suffering.*

**Duration:** 56:39

**Scripture:** Matthew 5:10

**Topics:** "Suffering And Persecution", "Spiritual Growth"

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## Description

This sermon emphasizes the importance of embracing persecution and fully surrendering to God. It challenges listeners to understand that God's plan may not always be comfortable or easy, but it is essential to trust in His sovereignty. The message highlights the need for boldness, prayer, and spiritual growth in the face of opposition, encouraging believers to stand firm in their faith and reflect God's love and truth amidst challenges.

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## Transcript

The message is persecution, what you need to know. Does God have a wonderful plan for our life? People answer yes, people answer no. You've seen best-selling books written on this topic.

Does God have a wonderful plan for your life? And this is actually a new concept. This is a sobering sermon this morning, but it's one we need to hear. This idea that God has a wonderful plan for our life is actually a new concept.

If you go back to the early church and New Testament writings, you'll see that it wasn't always a wonderful plan. What do you say to the Pakistan family who lost their two kids in a mob riot? Or the disciples, 11 of them of the 12 were killed? Or the parent who loses two sons in the course of 10 years? What do you tell them? Well, God has a wonderful plan for your life. We have to be careful because, on one hand, we do believe in the blessings of God.

I pray for the blessings of God. I hope that God has a wonderful plan. It's how we define that word wonderful.

But we have to get away from what we think wonderful means. Blessings, big house, lots of money, the cars in the driveway, a wonderful life, carefree life, a life in Vegas one weekend and San Diego the next. God wants a wonderful life, but be very careful in this area.

Because God does not promise a wonderful life. He promises that He'll be with us through the storm. And we have to look to God's word for this.

Ray Comfort said, The preacher promises a bed of roses for those who come to Christ, but those who are in Christ are evidently sitting on a painful bed of thorns. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who was killed in Germany under Hitler because he would not renounce his faith, said, When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die. When Christ calls you, the call is come and die.

Pick up your cross, follow me, deny yourself. See, if you don't have that in order, life will be very challenging. Because what you thought was Christianity turns out to be anything but what you thought.

And I believe this is why many people fall away sometimes, is it gets difficult, it gets challenging. And this is why I'm careful on the concept of the rapture, is we're telling generations of people and our kids, don't worry, when it gets hard, you're out of here. And we're not preparing people for battle.

We're not preparing them for, well, what about if Jesus delays? Go tell the people who are being beheaded right now, that you'll be out of here when it gets, well, that doesn't apply to us, it applies to us in America. So we have to be careful, that's the rapture and post-tribulation, mid-tribulation, the tribulation, eschatology, amillennialism, all these big theological words really mean we don't really know. We know that Jesus is coming, we know that it's going to get difficult, and we know we're called to watch and wait.

Now, with that said, we have to be careful when we talk to others, but also when we understand Christianity for ourselves. What does it mean? And I'll be the first to tell you this sermon was not comfortable for me. I wish it meant a carefree life.

I wish it meant my kids will never walk away from the Lord. I wish it meant I will never have challenges and difficulties, and the more I love God, the more blessings I'll have. I wish the closer I follow Christ, the less persecution I would have.

But what I want is not really reality. What if promotional material for the Navy SEALs read like this? Limited time to be stationed on Coronado Island. Free luau, snorkeling, and cruises, and nightly excursions, all paid for by the United States Navy.

How many would jump at that opportunity? And within five minutes, five minutes of meeting their drill sergeant, they would be on a bus back home. They're not prepared. They're not ready.

But those who you prepare, who are ready, who are prepared mentally, physically, are able to get through the difficulties. Here's the key. Our relationship with God does not hinge on trials, difficulties, and persecutions.

It hinges on who he is. As you're going through, remember who he is. That's how you get through life, is you remember who God is.

And we all need a good reminder. We all do, because you look at Facebook, you look at what's going on in America, you look at what's going on in some of our personal lives, you wonder, this is not what I signed up for. Correct, but it's what Jesus died for.

I mean, if we think about this, these songs sometimes bring me to tears. The cross, what it cost him. And then he says, because it cost me everything, here's what you need to do.

You need to carry your cross. You need to deny yourself and follow me. Lose your life.

Now, I didn't do a Greek study on all of that, but that tells me that's not easy. That's not comfortable. That's not what I signed up for.

But it's the most fulfilling life that we will ever know, because once you die to self, he carries you, he guides you. It's, Lord, it's not my life, it's your life. He pays the bills.

He opens doors, he closes doors. He mends relationships, he mends marriages as you submit to him. He is our foundation in the midst of the storm.

He is our peace in the midst of fear. He is our comfort in the midst of anxiety. And as much as I want a wonderful place for my children, which you all do, it would be advantageous for you to talk to some believers in these persecuted countries and watching their children being beat and ridiculed and watching family members die in front of their eyes, and it will put things quickly in perspective.

Because why this is so important is the storm is coming somehow. If you're going through a storm right now, you know. If you haven't, you probably just got out of one or you're going into one.

Storms are coming. That's why Jesus said, The wise man, I will liken to the man who built his house on the rock, which built his house on me and on what? Basically, obedience to his word. When he built his house, when the rains came, the wind beat upon that house, the floods came, it did not fall because it was founded upon the rock.

But when the same storm came to the same house with the same atmosphere, that house fell, and great was its fall because it was not grounded and founded. Here's why I'm passionate in this area. I've seen so many people, so many people, when they think Jesus is a butler or a genie in a bottle, as soon as he doesn't deliver, I'm out of here.

But that's why it's so important to explain the gospel, the good news, so when they understand I'm a sinner, the wages of sin is death, I was on my way to hell without Christ. I'm lost for eternity. Can I not give him my life but the life of my family as well? Like Nathan Hill, when the American Revolution took place, he said, I only regret that I have but one life to give to my country.

How much more should we say that about Christ? So you have to have the right perspective, and I'm not up here pointing fingers. I'm up here sitting down there because sometimes I want, and there's nothing wrong, maybe I should throw a disclaimer in there. It's okay to want the blessings of God.

What do you think I pray over my children? Braying havoc, braying storms of destruction over these kids. Of course not. Lord, bless these children.

But I understand the strongest people in their faith have been through trials. And the hardest thing a parent will ever realize or do is to let the child go in that storm. We'll cry, we'll throw a fit, we'll try to protect them.

But once they see the storm and they run to their Savior, they hold on tighter. Those who have been forgiven much, love much. And it's a very delicate balancing act because we want to protect our children, we want to nurture our children.

Who do they hang around with? You don't think I have a checklist? You know, who they're dating? I have no clue. I'm not even thinking about that right now. My wife says, start praying for their husbands.

What? They're little babies. We're building houses behind our house where they can live. Their marriage is not going to happen.

I'm just being honest. I can't pray for them yet, so pray for me. I'm trying, you know, and you can't let those little girls.

My son I can pray for and go get married, but my little girls, it's like, no way. And then you look at the news. You look at the news and you're like, what is going on in this world? We are calling good evil and evil good.

And I immediately thought, I don't know if any of you saw what Ashley Judd said. I had to turn it off. It is so disgusting and deplorable.

And please don't let me go off on this, but I'll come right back. And then to remember, you know, you remember her mom and her sister singing, Grandpa, remember the good old days where men really loved their families and they stayed, where families' marriages were held together, when they bowed their head and prayed. What happened? What happened? The enemy of our soul is coming in and causing division.

And just because, and I don't like it, and please, Trump supporters, don't get upset, but I don't like when people say, well, now we're going to have peace, or now everything's going to be okay. Not necessarily. Not necessarily.

You just stirred the hornet's nest. And it's a good thing sometimes, but be prepared. Are you prepared? We don't even know what persecution is.

Well, they're mean to me on Facebook. Welcome to my world on a daily basis. But be prepared, because what we're seeing now is the embers.

Unless God brings revival, this won't just all go away. You don't have that many hundreds of thousands of marchers just go away. We have to be ready for these things.

And God ascribes to Himself names that He gave Israel. Do you know that God gave Israel names for Himself? It wasn't just Elohim, or El, or Ella, and the plural, and all these different things. It wasn't just Elohim.

He said, I am Jehovah Jireh. I am your provider. I am El Shaddai, all-powerful.

I am Jehovah Shalom, your peace. I am Jehovah Rapha, your shepherd. I am Jehovah Nissi, your victory and your strength.

I am Jehovah Sikkanu, your righteousness. I am Jehovah Shammah, which means He is there. In the darkest times, He would use this, I am Jehovah Shammah, I am there in your darkest times.

When this boy was dying in the video we saw, when all these things, He is there. See, we thumbs up, He's gone, no, He's right there. He's right there, don't hold tight to that anchor.

Hold, don't let loose on Him. He's always there. He's an ever-present help in time of need.

And actually, I don't realize how important He is until I go through those things. When everybody deserts you, and everybody wants to persecute you, everybody's coming against you, it's Christ I have to hold on to. That's why I say, I don't know how some of you get through life without Christ at the center.

See, He's just right now, He's just in the back room for life, for hell, what do they call that? Get out of hell free card. I just grab Him when I need Him. I've got a difficulty.

Now I'm through it, now go back. I'll get you later. But He's everything.

He has to be everything to you. And we want God to remove the pain, don't we? Get rid of the pain. God, get rid of the pain.

But pain often has a purpose. And just this week, I wrote it down. I wrote it down yesterday.

I was listening to the radio, and there's a very, I don't know what the right word is, peculiar disease or something, I don't even know what they call it, where people can actually not feel pain. And as I'm listening, I'm going, that would be awesome. God, why only a few people? Why didn't I get that disease? Or why not feel pain? I mean, think how many fights you could win, guys.

You know, it just, but then my joy, or just my thoughts turned instantly when they were interviewing the mom or talking to the mom. She said her prayer every single day for her daughter is, Lord, please let my daughter feel pain. Because as a result, she's had to have some amputation take place.

She's had scars and fingers missing and things because you don't know that's a burner. You don't know that's a knife. You don't know that's a nail on the ground that you're walking around with for days and now you've got an infection.

There's no pain. See, it's through the pain that we experience the power of Christ. If I didn't experience the pain, I wouldn't understand the joy.

If I didn't understand the pain, I wouldn't understand the freedom. Now, we don't want to bring on pain. But it's through these difficulties, often, that we know God in all these ways.

I mean, do you truly know Him as your peace and your victory and your provider and He's always there? Do you truly know Him? And I asked Alyssa if I could say this and she said yes. And so, thank you for allowing me to just open my heart a little bit. But me and Morgan were privileged to meet her many years ago.

Morgan was one of her teachers and she was born blind. Alyssa was playing the piano. And I'm just amazed at where that anointing for worship, just what you can tell from that pain, from things we take for granted.

I think I'm having a bad day. It's like, but through that pain, through that relationship, through that not being able to see, but seeing, I wonder how many, I have a feeling she sees God a lot more clearly than many of us because it's through that dependency, it's through that brokenness, it's through that pain that draws us closer to the Father. See, those who walk really close with God, you catch it from now and then, you'll see a tear coming down quite often that you'll see because that relationship, He holds everything together.

And that's what you have to understand when persecution comes. It's ironic. People think if you're not willing to live for Him today, how are you going to die for Him tomorrow? I mean, sometimes we just think,

I'll just turn to Superman when it's time.

No, you won't. You'll turn into a kryptonite. I mean, you'll turn into something that is just not prepared for the persecution that is coming.

I have told you these things so that in me you may have peace. In this world, you will have trouble. But take heart, I have overcome the world.

Jesus said that in John 10, 1633. But I also believe that God has blessed this nation. I believe that God wants to bless.

I believe God wants to protect. I believe He's held off many terrorist attacks. I believe He will continue to do things.

But you will see an element rising up that wants to silence the church. These things that are coming out are not pretty. And there's persecution, let alone what happens in China or in different nations.

We don't even know that here. We haven't experienced it. So again, I want to clarify this.

Please don't understand. God blesses His people. We should pray for, enjoy, and encourage His blessings.

But a wonderful, comfortable life is not always a blessing. I know a lot of miserable people with a wonderful, comfortable life. Miserable.

Look at most of Hollywood. Just absolutely miserable. Why? The presence and the power of God in our lives is what we want.

That's what gets us through. The Lord gives strength to His people. The Lord blesses His people with peace.

Psalms 29. I know many of you right now are probably thinking of Jeremiah where God said, I know the plans I have for you. Plans of peace and not of war, of safety and of hope.

You're like, yeah, but you have to read Scripture in context. He's actually writing to the nation of Israel who were a let away captive. Babylon just captured Israel.

And these people are now slaves in Babylon. And Jeremiah is writing, the context is 70 years, God will release us and free you. There will be hope and peace.

So we can't just tag that verse and say, see God, you're letting me down. Nothing bad is ever supposed to happen. Prosperity, peace, where's it at? Where's it at? No, I'm going with you through the storm.

But I want to go around it. I want to take that road way over there and come around the mountains and miss the hole. He goes, no, I'm going to take you through it.

That's what we have to understand about persecution. So that was the long introduction to Acts 6. Acts 6, 8. Now you understand the setting that Stephen is in. He's the first martyr in the church.

And Stephen, full of faith and power. Full of faith and power. Heart check this morning.

Are you full of faith and power? If not, you can leave here this morning. Full of faith and full of power. He did great wonders and signs among the people.

Then there arose some from what is called the synagogue of the freed men. Disputing with Stephen. Obviously he upset these people.

And they were not able to resist the wisdom and the spirit by which he spoke. Then they secretly induced, which is motivated. They tried to come against Stephen.

So they secretly induced motivated men to say this. We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses and God. And they stirred up the people, the elders and the scribes, and they came upon him and seized him and brought him to the council.

They also set up false witness who said this man who does not cease to speak blasphemous words against the holy place and the law. So these witnesses came and they said Steve is speaking blasphemy. For we have heard him say that Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and change the customs which Moses delivered to us.

And all who sat in the council looked steadfastly at him, and they saw his face as the face of an angel. Isn't that interesting? His continents changed. He looked like he had the face of an angel, this glow.

But the first point I want to pull from here on what you need to know about persecution is those full of faith and full of power will be persecuted. If you're not being persecuted, you might want to check your faith and power level. Because if you're not being persecuted, it's usually because you look just like the person next to you.

Don't want to offend anybody on Facebook. Don't want to offend anybody at work. Don't want to just be a closet secret Christian to not offend anybody.

But those full of faith and power will offend people. Now, another disclaimer. Don't go looking for the fight, right? Shane said I can get rude on Facebook.

No, I didn't. Rude at work. I'm going to tell that boss off tomorrow morning.

Thank God he gave me the boldness. No, that's not what I'm saying. What I'm saying as a believer, if you just live your life, you're just the light that shines and people will not like it.

So when you're full of faith and full of power, you will be persecuted. If you're at work and you're full of faith and full of power, hey, how about this? No, I don't take money under the table and I don't cut bills like that or cut the costs. I got to be honest.

Well, what? Persecution at work. Now, just say this. Just alter the numbers.

Just doctor the numbers. No, I can't do that. Full of faith, it will get you in trouble.

I mean, if you look at, go back to 2008, the big crisis and even before that, big crisis where banks and hedge funds and all these went out of business, often it was because of fudging the numbers. Let's look at these quarter earnings. Let's make this number huge and people of integrity worked and didn't want to say anything.

It's going to hurt my retirement and things. I understand that, but we have to be full of faith and full of power. Here's what this does.

When a person gets upset, they are trying to stop the conviction they are feeling. God's judgment is haunting them. So when you live with faith and with power and you proclaim the message of the gospel, people are convicted.

Romans 2.16 says, God will judge the secret things of man's heart. So if God's the judge, wouldn't it make sense to silence the judge? If I want to keep on with my crime spree, I'm going to get rid of the judge. So that's what we see here.

When you're full of faith and full of the power of the Holy Spirit, because you know when you're full of the Holy Spirit, you can't be quiet all the time. It's like, you ever make rice and just too much water and it starts boiling, the pot, the top. You know, that's how I feel sometimes.

No, that's not right. That's not right. I mean, look at what's going on in D.C. I wanted to say a lot of things.

It's bubbling over. That's not right. That's not right.

And it's just, this thing is just bubbling over, full of faith and power. But be careful. I want to reiterate this.

The truth will offend people, but your attitude should not. I've said that about three times on this year, and I'm going to continue saying it. The truth will offend, but your attitude cannot.

The next point, it begins with an offense. Persecution, what you need to know, begins with an offense. You offended me.

You offended me. Isn't that how it begins? What offends? The truth offends. The nature of God offends.

And if you get more narrow, see, you can actually talk about God and be okay, because your perception of God, but when you try to narrow that down to a moral law giver, to Jesus is the only way, the only truth, to living a certain way, now you're going to offend. And we've read before, Philippians 2.9, that God has highly exalted Jesus Christ. What does exalt mean? Rank and power and status.

So God has taken Jesus, given him rank and power of a status. He is over everything, over all of creation. He is in charge.

He's already defeated. So what happens is, when you begin to acknowledge that rank and that power, those who don't want to acknowledge it get upset, get offended. You upset me.

And what we do as Christians sometimes is we go, oh gosh, I'm sorry, I should have said that. And it's okay to apologize when something needs to be apologized for, but the majority of the time, we are not going to be able to apologize for God's word. Because here's what they want you to say, I'm sorry, I was wrong, what was I thinking? I take that back.

Yeah, that's right. And you can stop that offense real quick if you backpedal. Why do they say renounce Christ and embrace communism? Renounce Christ and embrace whatever it is.

Why? They want that demonic realm wants the Christ in you to bow to them. That's what it's about, removing that conviction. This is where you'll hear the scoffing voices.

Have you ever heard the scoffing voices? You know, you believe in this? You guys are so foolish. How can you believe in a Bible written by men and put together by men with an agenda? And a big fish swallowed somebody? You guys, come on. How can you believe this? Don't you know science proves evolution? Haven't you grown up yet? Haven't you figured it out? You don't let your kids do what? They can't watch R-rated movies at 10? What is wrong with you parents? These mocking voices, they have to mock and put down and twist and continue to throw darts at you.

That makes them feel better because Satan is the father of lies, the accuser of the brethren. So he throws out these things, assaulting. That's why when these little kids, you've got to prepare them because they're held in daddy's arms too and mommy cuddles them at four and this and then they go and oh and all this and Juana's and VBS and oh this and maybe homeschool.

Oh my goodness, there you go. And then now they get into the real world and they're like oh my gosh and these mocking voices and they're like oh, I'm not prepared for this and oh gosh, I guess we are stupid and I didn't know, why do we? And they're not prepared. So they walk into a university and a college professor begins to chastise them and ridicule them and they feel stupid and foolish and they begin to walk away from Christ because they didn't have the foundation.

You should be able to teach your 18 year old to walk in front of the professor and say no, that's ludicrous. Here's why and defend the faith because they're filled with the Holy Spirit of God. That's what we should instill and that's why kids are walking away often is they're not prepared.

Christianity has been painted this certain picture. And also many kids walk away because they don't like the Christ they see in us. That's the most convicting point of the day.

My concern with this whole topic is the truth that we once cling to like a man who clings to a life preserver who's drowning and the God we once cling to and the Savior we once cling to. When things are easy, you begin to walk away from that. Unless you're a very disciplined person and you can go with the highs and lows, most people walk away from that.

And it's that persecution that will bring you back. Because when the Bible talks about he who has the love of the world doesn't have the love of the Father in him. The more you can love the things of the world and get all fired up about the things of the world, slowly the things of God fade away.

And persecution can bring us back. The goal of persecution, which we know, but it bears repeating here with Stephen, is to silence the message and the messenger. They want to just silence.

That's why they're persecuting. And it works. That's why they keep doing it.

It works. You know, we like to highlight these martyrs who died, you know, burning in flames. I can name some for you, but we forget about all the people who rejected Christ and were spared their life and then went home in misery.

It works. It often works to intimidate the messenger and the message. So what's the fourth point? The battle plan.

When persecution comes, the battle plan is what Stephen did. Truth, love, and power are the battle plan. And they were not able to resist the wisdom by which he spoke.

The Bible says they were not able to resist the wisdom by which Stephen spoke. Now some of you might have caught that I forgot something in that sentence. They were not able to resist the wisdom and the spirit by which he spoke.

So you can't just come at somebody with wisdom and the truth and not the spiritual power of it. Or said another way, come with the wisdom but also the fruit of the spirit. So I can bring wisdom and also love, joy, peace, contentment, long-suffering, gentleness, kindness, self-control.

Self-control. You know what that is, don't you? Right, you're getting ready to type up something on Facebook. Delete.

Man. Delete. Madonna, you're going to do what? I'm going to write an article and I'm going to get to the New York Times.

You just, you know, self-control. So they saw the wisdom of Stephen and they saw being filled with the spirit, the boldness of Stephen. And here's the key.

Wisdom will confound them and love will soften them. See, if you confound them, like, okay, and they just, okay, he caught us there, he caught us there, he caught us here. We don't know what to say and you also love them, that's a package.

But if you come and arrogantly argue, I personally, I've never seen somebody go, you know what Shane, you've really made me thinking. You're very prideful and arrogant and loud in this discussion but now I'm really thinking. Never.

It's always slam the door, they'll leave but you know what, you've got me thinking. If you present it, now, this is hard for all of us because the flesh wants to rise up and really let them have it. Doesn't it? That's why this is important.

The wisdom and the love going into this that he had. But the truth is not always soft. Sometimes the truth is very difficult to hear because this quiet little Stephen that we'll read about in the next week or two said, you stiff-necked people, uncircumcised in heart and ears, you always resist the Holy Spirit as your fathers did, you do also.

Oh wow. That's like saying, that's like saying, you arrogant unbeliever, you're denying God just like your mama did. Those are fighting words, aren't they? You're just like your father, a worthless bum, Christ rejecter.

But he's being truthful. Now, don't say it like that. He probably, you know, but he's saying you stiff-necked, you know, just stiff-necked, pride and arrogance, uncircumcised in your heart, your heart hasn't been rent and torn and broken before God and you're resisting the work of the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit's drawing you, the Holy Spirit's convicting you, the Holy Spirit's wooing you, the Holy Spirit's showing you the plan of salvation and you're rejecting the work of the Holy Spirit just like the fathers did that came before you. The fathers, your fathers actually, can you believe this? They actually killed the prophets. That's why I don't trust a lot of the church.

Most of the church in America will not like these types of sermons. Most of the hate mail I get are from Christians. They don't like this.

You're challenging my lukewarm status. You're challenging how I live. All the marches that went on, their whole argument was we're standing for morality.

Hmm. Just absorb that for a while. And this message isn't soft.

True preaching is not soft. It's heartfelt, but it's convicting. You've got to shoot people straight.

You've got to tell them the truth. When God opens that door, love them and be understanding, but also share the truth. The fifth thing we see is lies are used to discredit and stir up.

Lies are used to discredit and stir up. What we say is twisted. That's how the enemy does.

He's going to, I didn't say that. Oh my gosh, I didn't. The reason I'm bringing up these marches, people might not like it, that's fine, but God gave me a perfect application with what's going on in the news.

This is exactly what we're seeing because everything is a twisted. Everything is, they're upset. Now, I mean, I'm a racist, homophobic person who hates women because stereotyping, and that's what most of you are.

Where does that come from? Twisting millions of dollars meant on false advertising to work people up to twist the truth, to twist everything. It doesn't matter who you're voting for. There's Republicans, Democrats, Independents.

I am a pastor to all people, but the truth is what we're seeing is not good. What we're seeing is an upheaval. Something is taking place.

So lies are used to discredit and stir up. Isn't that what the enemy uses? So if you're, and that's what lies are happening even with what I do. I mean, I told you I shared a few weeks ago, a guy said I'm a wolf in sheep's clothing on her Facebook post.

So I had to find Delete on that one real quick. But Mike's going, are you? No, here's the thing. Here's why he said that.

Because when I was talking about health and fitness, he said that I said that you have to follow the dietary laws in the Old Testament. And of course I'm like, well, can you please send me that part of the sermon clip? Because I didn't catch that one. And of course they don't.

Even this week, they email, you've got to repent. Your whole congregation has to repent. You're leading millions of people astray.

You only talk about Jesus. You never talk about the blood of Christ, the cross of Christ. I'm like, oh, so you caught one sermon for five minutes.

But it's twisting. See, everything's, it's like, no, no, no, I didn't. But when do you stop defending also? Because you're not supposed to run around, defend, defend, defend.

You just let God be your defense. But sometimes there comes a time and a place where you say something. But most things are twisted, aren't they? That's what the enemy does.

He'll just twist it a little bit. And also with the article I wrote, the difference between Roman Catholicism and Christianity, that to date is the most hate mail I've ever received in my life without anything even coming

close. Showing the difference.

Things are twisted. The enemy comes in and twists things. And people get upset.

Then they secretly induce men to say, when we have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses and God. And then they stirred up the people, the elders and the scribes, and they came upon him, seized him, and brought him to the council. They also set up the false witnesses.

So the father of lies tells lies. So be very careful where you get your information from. That's just a word of encouragement for all of you.

Because we like to put down other people. The website says this. Do you know I can find a website that will say John MacArthur's a false teacher, and Billy Graham's a false teacher, and Chuck Swindoll's a false teacher, and Charles Stanley's a false teacher? I can find a website that tells me everything.

That's the thing I want to hear about everything. Be careful. Be careful what you listen to.

Isn't it interesting? We believe what we see. And people can put things together, and it's true. Isn't that how the enemy works? George Bush brought down the Twin Towers.

I mean, I get emails like that. What do you think of this? Could it be? Oh, my word. People.

And people get mad. Come on. Reality check here.

I promise God I'll be honest. I'm not going to sugarcoat these things because we need to be called on the carpet sometimes. We believe so many different things just because it's on the internet.

Do you know anybody can open up an internet page and write a blog? Anybody. So be careful. Be very careful where you get your information up because the enemy will deceive.

I ran into a pastor at a memorial service I've never known before, but he knows of West Side Christian Fellowship. And I'm so glad we talked because his perception of what happened up here during the churches coming together and all just, it's mind-boggling how he gets this, you know, of takeovers and weird things happening and people being pushed out and you did this. I'm like, what? None of that is true.

Zero. So what does the devil like to do? Twist it. Twist it.

Everything is twisted. Isn't that that weird charismatic church up there where people do weird things? I'm like, what? I haven't seen too many weird things. I mean, what do you mean by charismatic? Open for the work of the Spirit? Well, you've got to be careful there.

Yeah, I know. So all these impressions that people have that it's just interesting. The enemy can twist things.

Physical persecution may follow. This is the hardest part. Physical persecution may follow.

What happens is they turn up the heat, don't they? Oh, the words didn't hurt. Now you're not being quiet. Now physically, we have to physically persecute you.

And if you go to some spots in India and these temples they have, and if they even know you're Christian, you are dead. You're killed on the spot. Let alone Syria or Iraq or different.

They know that that's the thing is to eradicate. So it's ramped up often. Physical persecution follows.

And then finally, this will be my closing point, the fruit of persecution. Is there fruit from persecution? Yes, very good fruit. Thank God for the fruit of persecution.

Here's what it does. It renews our relationship with God. It renews.

Many times when people fall away, it's because of comfort. So persecution, the fruit of that can renew our relationship with God. Now I might need to clarify a little bit because we see this and we're going, we don't see that.

When was anybody that you saw beat up and killed here in America? It happens. There's a few. But normally, what is our persecution? Bullies, mocking voices.

Mocking voices. Accusation. It's so funny.

Every time I write an article just about obedience to God's word, I'm called a legalistic Pharisee. Huh. So obedience is legalism, really.

The recent one I got recently, I shared an article about why it's good for most people to not drink. And you would have thought I brought a keg to an AA meeting. Because all these people defending their position.

They're defending it. And I know some of these people and they've got a problem in this issue. And when you call out the problem, they don't want to change.

They get upset. Our persecution in America is going to be those that you see in the streets of Washington. Those close to you.

Those friends who will be mocking voices for now. Offensive, mocking voices. Mocking what you believe.

Trying to put you down. Twist things. That's what we're going to deal with.

But the fruit of that, it renews our relationship with God. We grow spiritually. I don't like this part, but we grow spiritually.

What persecution does, we remove the clutter and the distractions. When I'm getting persecuted, I'm like, let me get rid of the clutter. Let me get rid of the distractions.

Let me sit before you, God, again and renew my prayer life. You get sick and you watch how quick your prayer life becomes very important to you. The doctor says such and such.

Oh, God. You're like, every morning. Oh, God.

Oh, God. Why is that? But that's what persecution and these difficult things, we grow spiritually. You know what? This is not important anymore.

This is not important. We remove the clutter. We remove the distractions.

Also, it adds credibility to the gospel. It adds credibility to the gospel. Your God is the true God.

When you go through things with the right spirit, you add credibility to the gospel. And finally, we reflect God. That's what Stephen and all who sat in the council looking steadfastly at him and saw his face as the

face of an angel.

You look like who you've been with. If you've been on the media and you've been here and you've been to all these things, you will look like that. You can tell when somebody's not looking good, can't you? You see what they look like.

If you're not sure, look at someone who's on a hangover and someone leaving church. There's a difference there. You look like who you've been with.

So the more time you spend... Have you ever heard somebody say there's a glow about you or there's something about you? It permeates everything about you. So you will reflect who you spend time with. Two closing points.

Have you been avoiding persecution? Are you an undercover Christian? Do you lack boldness? If you do, then I encourage you to tell the Lord, I don't want that. I want to be bold for you. I don't want to bring on trouble, but I want to be prepared for it.

I want to be bold. I want to be filled with your spirit. And obviously all this talk without talking about salvation would be pointless, but there's people in here, probably at church this size, that you don't know the Lord.

You've never repented. You've never given your life to God, fully surrendered. So of course you don't know persecution.

You might say, oh, that's not what I want. Listen, God died for you. All you have to do is repent and believe and then He will be with you.

The Bible says repent and believe and the only name that saves and too many people are avoiding this topic. They come to church and they don't want to be shaken out of their comfort zone. So I'm asking, do you truly know Him? Do you truly know Him? Do you truly have a relationship with Him? And then the last group I want to encourage, do you need encouragement? Because many of us just need encouragement, don't we? We see the news.

We see what's going on. Maybe in our own families. Do you ever see your families apart that are dying? They're fighting.

They're arguing. We need encouragement. And I was reading about David this week.

David lost everything in one battle. Did you know that? He went to a small little battle. He came back.

His wives, don't do that anymore. It's wife today. His wives, gotta clarify, his wives and children were gone.

Everything he owned was gone. So he got on his face. The men there of war got on their face.

They want to kill David. But the Bible says something interesting. David strengthened himself in the Lord.

You've got to learn to strengthen yourself. You've got to strengthen yourself. Don't always rely on a sermon.

You know, we go to YouTube, go to this, go to this, go to radio. Sometimes you've got to strengthen yourself. You've got to sit with God.

You've got to sit and look to His Word. You've got to pray and strengthen yourself. Be encouraged.

Because what do you do sometimes when you don't have something to go to? You've got to strengthen yourself. So be encouraged this morning. God is wanting to strengthen us so we're ready to do what He's called us to do.

A wimpy Christian without a backbone, not filled with the Spirit of God, doesn't do anything for God. Wake up, call. If we're not filled with the Spirit of God, we will do nothing for God.

Think about this. When was the last time you ever led anybody to the Lord? When was the last time you were so full with the Spirit you could discern God's will? You saw somebody at a store and you prayed with them, you helped them, you got them to fix their car, whatever it is, you're filled with the Spirit or you're just getting through life with no sense of the Holy Spirit working in your life. God wants to change that.

That's why I always talk about full surrender. That's what it is. It's fully surrendering your life.

We think, okay, there's a full surrender over here for people like Shane. Right? That's for you. And then we got this side over here that's of the world, of the devil.

I don't like this side, but I really like this cozy, comfortable. Cozy, comfortable. I can watch my Broncos and pick up the 12-pack on the way home.

I can show up for church and check it off my calendar. I can call on God sometimes. I can check out Air One for an hour every now and then.

And I'll live in this comfort zone because God is going to send me on the mission field in Uganda. And my life's going to be miserable. But the Bible talks about the fully surrendered life.

How fulfilling it is to know what God has called you to do. And He actually fills you with your spirit and your call to do what He wants you to do. There's passion.

There's purpose. You get up in the morning with a zeal, with an eagerness, with energy. You don't care if it's Monday or Thursday or this center where, okay, I'm happy during this season, but now I'm very depressed.

I don't want to fully surrender everything because it'll cost me. And yes, it will cost you, but God always calls you to do what He wants you to do, the desires He puts in your heart. There's a missionary called Adonai Jetson.

He died many, many years ago. I read his biography. Lost two wives and three children in Burma on the mission field there.

And I start to, who in the world would do that? Who in the world would do that? I mean, isn't that what you think, poor guy? We have to read earlier in his life when he just had religion and going through the motions until he finally surrendered everything to God and God called him. He couldn't do anything but go there. God might call you right here.

Do you know we need godly leaders? Would somebody run for the mayor of Palmdale or Lancaster? Would somebody run for senate? Would somebody become the next attorney? See, we need godly

people. Fill with the Spirit of God so God will call you. We all think, oh, all the fun is over.

Right when marijuana is legal. You know, it's still federally against the law, right? But that's what we think. I talk to people all the time.

They think, I don't want this. I'm never going to be some weird loud guy like you and I don't want to pray and read the Bible all the time. Right, you don't want to because you don't have the right heart.

Once you have the right heart and the Holy Spirit is in you, the Holy Spirit is crying, Abba, Father, you wake up hungry for God. You want more of God. I need more of God.

I'm thirsty for God. He's pouring out water on the dry and barren land. God, I want more of you and more of you.

I never want to go back to this middle ground again. Why was I so miserable in that middle ground? Don't clap. Clap for yourselves.

Clap for yourselves because that's the most important thing we're dealing with in the church is full surrender. Give Him everything. Everything.

Didn't He give you everything? It's the most amazing thing when I think about this. He died for us. He took on the penalty of death and eternity separate from God.

And then we over here like, I'm not going to follow you. Pick up the cross. No way.

I mean, if you saw Calvary, if you saw this in real life and what He went through for you, I guarantee you would be tremendously affected. We wouldn't even know who you are anymore. You would have started this ministry.

You would have been on fire for God. You would have went through the Bible three times, read through it a year. You're so filled with the Spirit of God.

And see, we can't relate sometimes. We sing about it, but we can't. We're still thinking about Ann Alberger.

Shane's still on his health trip this week. I can't tell. Oh, what's going on? I've got problems here and we're not worshipping.

Leonard Ravenhill said that the Cinderella of the church of today is the prayer meeting. Daniel Norris commenting on that statement said, The prayer meeting, if she exists at all, is regulated to a dark corner somewhere in the church on an off night. So there is little expectation that anyone will pay her any attention.

She goes about unnoticed, unloved, and uncelebrated, yet she is the one who keeps the house clean. She prepares the food in secret and makes the house ready for her guests. Day after day she kneels in humility and yet goes unappreciated.

However, when the true prince comes, she is the one he is looking for. And I think what we did the first service, it's time for Cinderella to go to the ball. It's time to focus on prayer.

That's why this is so hard. This is why it's the most difficult thing for me to get people to do, and myself. The most difficult thing is because it's the most important.

The weapons of your warfare are not carnal. You're not going to win with an email or Facebook post. You're not going to preach your children into the kingdom of God.

You're not going to force anybody. The weapons of our warfare are not carnal. But they're mighty, how? Through God.

For the pulling down of strongholds. When you pray heaven down, you are pulling down strongholds. I don't know about you, but I'm praying down strongholds.

Whatever strongholds you have over this church, over families, Lord, we are wanting that to be broken. Pulling down strongholds, casting down every argument. What is an argument? What you're seeing on the streets many times.

Argument, a self-exalted, arrogant stance against God. You are calling down every arrogance, every high thing that acknowledges and exalts itself above God. So when you go into prayer, you go into warfare, how do you know what heart you're not turning? How do you know what prodigal you're not bringing back to the Lord? How do you know what healing is not going to take place? How do you know that God is in heaven saying, if you just pray and seek my face and humble yourself and turn, I will hear your prayers.

Listen, either God is who He says He is, or it's a myth, it's a phony, it's a fantasy, so let's all go home. But if it's true, if this is the words of the living God, and God says, you just stand, you just pray, you just contend, and you pull down strongholds, because now not only am I letting loose, Michael the archangel, but Jesus Christ Himself is interceding and pulling down the strongholds. The enemy has no rule, no reign, and no power in a church that is praying.

He gets a church off focus and praying, and all havoc breaks loose. Everything breaks loose when you miss prayer. Why? Because prayer will humble me.

Everything I was so mad and bitter about, humbled, and I'm humbled in His presence. When I pray, it's like, God, that doesn't even matter anymore. When I was so upset, God, just change my heart.

Like, oh, my kids are growing up. What about your grandkids? Look at what we're leaving them. I had to do a heart check this week and just see, what about if our kids were interviewed? And they said, is your mom, is your dad a praying Christian? Do they really pray and seek God? What do our children see in us? Are we too busy? Are we on the phone all the time? Because there's no way on planet Earth that your children can't watch you praying as they're growing up, and that not affect them deeply.

It does. My mom's here this morning. I still remember her putting that Bible on the ACDC albums and Judas Priest and all that Motley Crue and Metallica and praying.

And I would get so mad, you stop praying. God, I want to have fun tonight. Stop it.

But guess what I ran to when I needed God? I ran to the prayer closet. Folks, what you're hearing in these sermons is just a result of God breaking me in the prayer closet, crying out to God. God, humble me.

Fill me with your Spirit. And the passion that took place. The Word of God came alive.

The focus of my prayer was targeted. And you come out there, you're powerful because you prayed up. The problem is we're too bored.

We're too bored with the things of God. So as the worship team comes up, I'm going to pray that we break that this morning. That we re-again focus on prayer.

What I want to do, two things really, is when we focus on prayer, we're going to focus on our nation, for one. The Bible says pray for your leaders. Pray for Obama's transition, if that's your guy.

Pray for Trump, if that's your guy. Pray for our nation. Pray for our leaders.

I'm wondering how many people didn't pray for our nation the last eight years or ten years or whenever it's convenient, five years. The Bible says pray for your leaders. Pray that God would fill them up.

Pray for your families. Do you have anybody that's walking away from the Lord? Here's all you have to do. Do a quick study.

Look up all the verses on hell and you'll be rocked to your core. You will be brought to tears. And you look at family members or people you know who are on the broad road to destruction, weeping and gnashing of teeth, eternity of outer darkness, and yet we're going to go home and click on the NFL.

God help us. God help us. No wonder we don't see God moving.

Shane, this is hurting good. Good. It's time to hurt.

I'm tired of it all. Go, go. Do a 20-minute sermon.

Just go. And let's not upset anybody. You've got to stir that ground.

You've got to break up the fall of ground. You know what fall of ground is? When a farmer just lets the ground go and it becomes hard. You can't plant anything.

You've got to go and bring in the plow and stir up that fall of ground. Even my heart this morning. Shane, you? Yeah.

Even my heart this morning is even opening up more, saying, God, pour into me all of your Spirit. Bend us in this place. Break us in this place.

Let us be men and women of prayer, petitioning the Father to move on behalf. Because you ask not, you have not. You ask not, you have not.

Do you believe that verse? Yeah, then why don't we do it? I mean, if you read the Bible and you understand, prayer should be the focus, really. Prayer should be the focus of your day. You know how much time Dr. Wong spends in prayer every morning? Three hours.

And we asked him at this pastor's meeting, how do you find time for that? Guess what his answer was. No TV. No, really, how do you? No TV, no media, no things that you Americans like to watch.

No, really, how do you find three hours? I mean, think about it. It's all about prioritizing. I left there with tears in my eyes.

Convicted. Convicted. He said, I just want time with God.

And three hours goes by quick.

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