

WEEKLY REFLECTION

What does it cost you to follow Christ?

Constrained as he was by the Holy Spirit to visit Jerusalem (Acts 20:22), Paul knew very well that imprisonment and afflictions awaited him there. He was told by the Spirit that suffering awaited him in every city he visited. In Acts 21, the prophet Agabus even comes down from Judea to visit him at the house of Philip the evangelist. (v.10) Agabus takes Paul's belt and binds his own hands and feet with it as a gesture of what the Holy Spirit has told him, that Paul would be thusly bound by the Jews at Jerusalem and delivered into the hands of the Gentiles. (v.11) Still, Paul perseveres.

Though Paul suffers, he is also blessed with great friendships in Christ—the elders of the Ephesian church pray and weep with him as he departs from them. (Acts 20:36-37) They embraced and kissed him, and were sorrowful because they knew they would not meet face-to-face again. (v.37-38) In Acts 21, the disciples in Tyre persuade him through the Spirit not to go, as they know the fate that awaits him there. (v.4) At Caesarea, not only the people there but Paul's own travelling companions urge him to refrain from heading towards Jerusalem, because of their great love for him (v.12)—and Paul says to them, "What are you doing, weeping and breaking my heart?" (v.13a) He knows and is blessed by their great love for him, but he is ready and determined to do the will of the Lord. (v.13b)

We are blessed to be in a city so sheltered that we can forget or be ignorant of what goes on outside it. So much so that we forget the brothers and sisters in other parts of the world who are undergoing intense persecution and suffering for Christ's sake. As the world is increasingly drawn into conflict, will you count the cost and stand with them?

QUESTIONS

QUESTION ONE:

Who are your closest friends, and how did you meet and get to know them? What's your go-to method for finding and making friends, and how has it changed over the years?

QUESTION TWO:

In Acts 21, Paul's friends have an accurate sense of the danger that awaits him in Jerusalem. Out of their deep love for him, they urge him not to go. Yet contrary to their advice, Paul feels "constrained by the Spirit" (Acts 20:22) to walk directly into that hardship.

Living as we do in a city and culture that highly values career, stability, comfort, and safety, how can we discern the difference between "wise advice" meant to protect us, and a "calling from God" which might require us to step out in faith, into uncertainty, sacrifice, or suffering?

QUESTION THREE:

What does it cost you to follow Christ? As you reflect on this question, consider educating yourself and your group on the suffering and persecution that brothers and sisters in Christ face in other parts of the world.

Some resources are *Open Doors*

(<https://www.opendoors.org.hk/en-US/resources/pray/>),

particularly the "Pray by Country" section that allows you to learn more about the status of Christian persecution in the 50 countries where Christians face the most extreme persecution.

QUESTIONS

QUESTION THREE (CONT'D):

Global Christian Relief (<https://globalchristianrelief.org/act/pray/>) shares stories and testimonies of persecuted brothers and sisters around the world. They provide monthly “Prayer Force Alert” guides and periodically share stories of those on the frontlines, with prayer items included.

Similar to Global Christian Relief, *The Voice of the Martyrs* has set up a dedicated website (<https://www.icommittoprayer.com/>) where brothers and sisters can share prayer requests and gather to pray for the persecuted Church worldwide.

International Christian Concern (<https://persecution.org/letters/>) has put together a free letter-writing packet for members of the Church worldwide to write to fellow believers who are in prison for their faith.