



INTERNATIONAL DAY OF PRAYER FOR THE PERSECUTED CHURCH 2025

WALKING WITH THE PERSECUTED IN MYANMAR

**Suggested
sermon outline**

Guide for Service Leader

The following is a suggested sermon outline for the International Day of Prayer for the Persecuted Church, 2025.

The outline is in the form of a scripted service which has been written to be read aloud and can be adapted to suit the style of the service leader and their congregation.

It incorporates contributions from members of the congregation, group prayer, and, ideally, the playback of a video with audio. If that is not possible, then a description of the key contents of the video can be read.

Headings in bold below give the elements of the service, as well as suggestions as to whether the service leader or members of the congregation are speaking. These are given in **[square brackets]**.

Suggested ***questions to the congregation*** are given in *italics*. If you wish, you could pause to let the congregation discuss these questions.

For the **corporate prayer** at the end, it would be beneficial to display the call and response prayers on a screen or to print them out.

The service, as scripted, should take **less than 30 minutes**. With further interactions, it would take longer.

Service Outline

SCRIPTURE AND INTRODUCTION

2 Corinthians 4:8-9

We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed.

Welcome to the International Day of Prayer for the Persecuted Church 2025.

Today, around one hundred thousand congregations are gathering around the world for the International Day of Prayer for the Persecuted Church. We are called to see, to care, to pray. Our focus this year is on Myanmar, the country formerly known as Burma.

Myanmar was in the news earlier this year because of a huge and terrible earthquake, which killed thousands and injured thousands more. And civil war within that country has prevented food, clean water and medicine from reaching people in many of the affected areas.

To pray effectively, we must put ourselves in the shoes of our brothers and sisters and walk with them on their journey. If we are to help bear their burden, even for a moment, we must come alongside and stand with them.

Jesus did this for you and for me. He saw, He loved, He came, He bore our burdens. And He calls us to bear one another's burdens and so fulfil His law of love.

VIDEO

Play IDOP video. Pastor Yang.

[OR read quotes from the persecuted, where video playback is not possible]

A military jet swoops in low. A church burns. Flames lick up from bamboo long huts, black smoke pluming the sky from almost every part of the tightly packed little village.

Civilians run, children bouncing on their backs. They run and then they walk, and then they keep walking, beyond weary.

In the forest, they stretch a green tarpaulin under these trees to hide themselves from the fighter planes. A mother cries, her little daughter in her arms.

‘They always attack the Christian churches,’ says Pastor Yang, ‘while they leave the Buddhist monasteries alone.

‘Sometimes we are running, sometimes we are crawling. Sometimes we run for days, a whole week, searching for safety and survival.

‘There are children, innocent babies and mothers. The children are crying. They want to eat, they want to drink – but there's nothing.

‘Humanly speaking,’ he says, ‘sometimes we feel that God is not with us.’

But Pastor Yang is with his people scattered by war. With his long, thin walking stick in hand, he leads them, picking his way carefully along a narrow path through the overgrown bush, scanning ahead for Burmese soldiers, the feared Tatmadaw.

This is the scene today in Myanmar, formerly known as Burma.

CONTEXT

| *How did this happen? How did this rich and beautiful country become a place of scarcity, fear and war?*

Myanmar, once known as ‘the golden land’, is now torn by conflict, with millions displaced and destroyed, many of them Christians, targeted because of their faith.

The conflict began in 1948, right after Burma gained independence from British rule. At the time, ethnic groups wanted federal states with independent governance.

1962, the Burmese military, the Tatmadaw, put an end to democracy; their campaign cry: ‘One people, one religion.’ Those who are Burmese by blood and Buddhist by faith are to be favoured, while other tribes and religions are cast to the margins.

For years, Burma vacillates between military and democracy, while religious nationalism grows – the notion that to be Burmese is to be Buddhist, and nothing else will be tolerated.

In 2021, democracy is again cut short by a military coup. Ethnic groups are attacked by ground and by air. Almost three million are driven from their homes and their livelihoods. Martial law restricts gatherings, and Christians and others who continue to meet risk being attacked as rebels.

Their churches are seen as symbols of defiance – especially churches in states with Christian majorities – Chin, Kachin, Kayah and Karen.

| *For the Christians of Myanmar, what does this look like?*

In January 2024, an airstrike on a church in Kanan village kills 17.

In April, a priest is shot and seriously injured while taking morning service.

The same month, soldiers destroy an entire village in Chin State, along with 400 houses and five churches.

Today, Myanmar has risen to 13th place on the Open Doors World Watch List of the nations most hostile to Christians and Christianity. That's a rise of five places in a single year. And it's due to growing violence and pressure against Christians.

The church in Myanmar is scattered.

Many young Christians join the militias to defend their homelands. Some face conscription into the army, others are taken for forced labour. Still others flee the country.

| *To identify with others in their need means to place ourselves in their shoes.*

| *So what would you do?*

| *Would you fight? Would you flee? Would you submit to slave labour? Would you let the government conscript you to fight your own people? Would you hold on to your faith?*

Let's hear what it's like to be a Christian in Myanmar today. All the names (in this sermon) have been changed to protect them.

QUOTES

[Read by different members of the congregation]

Pastor Mun was forced to flee his hometown in Chin State.

He says, 'We have to leave our homes for safety. Our churches are targeted. Some fled to the cities, while others fled to the nearby villages and jungle.'

Moe Moe was driven out of Kayah State.

'When our churches and houses were shot at and bombed, we had to flee,' she says. 'We've been displaced several times, and it's challenging to be on the run. Every day we must strive for our survival.'

Dan, a young Christian, lived in a Buddhist-majority area, sharing the gospel and helping believers grow in faith.

Then he discovered he was to be conscripted by the military. He says, 'I was shocked and scared. For about two weeks, I couldn't sleep or eat properly. I had to leave my home. I am praying for safety.'

Mei Mei was a Buddhist who accepted Jesus.

It cost her dearly. When her employer found out she'd become a Christian, he beat her in front of her colleagues and sacked her. Her home came with the job: she lost that, too. Despite everything, Mei Mei remains strong in her faith and clings to Jesus Christ, her Saviour.

[Service leader]

| *Would your faith remain strong, like Mei Mei's? Or would you keep quiet about your Christian conviction? What would you do in Mei Mei's shoes?*

It's not just the war. It's not just the earthquake. It's the discrimination.

- Converts from Buddhism can be expelled from their communities.
- Buddhist monks have denied Christians access to water.
- Christian children must receive a Buddhist education and take part in Buddhist rituals.
- Converts can be labelled traitors.
- Women who convert from Buddhism can be forced to marry Buddhist men.
- Kachin women and girls are being trafficked into the sex trade.

THE STORY OF MYINT AND MAY

[Read by a member of the congregation]

Until 2021, Pastor Myint and his wife May lived peacefully with their children in a Buddhist part of central Myanmar. They got on well with the head of the village, befriended the villagers, and did their best to help their community in every way they could. They were accepted and respected.

But some Buddhist leaders grew suspicious of their Christian faith. And when Pastor Myint shared the gospel and a villager decided to follow Christ, the opposition grew.

The new Christian was ridiculed by his family and attacked by his son.

But when other villagers saw the positive change in his life, they became curious to learn more about Jesus. So Pastor Myint and his family built a house and started a fellowship.

That's when things got really tough. The pastor says, 'I became an eyesore to the religious leader and his followers.'

The Buddhist leaders incited open hatred towards Myint and his family. They accused him of being an outsider, a follower of a foreign religion.

With tears in his eyes, Pastor Myint said, 'They turned the richest man in our village against me. They gathered young men and offered them alcohol. They instructed them to kill me and my sons. Thankfully, some villagers told me of their plan.'

Pastor Myint and his family fled. Their home was looted and burned. The youths went on to kill two Burmese villagers who had shown interest in the Christian faith.

Today, Pastor Myint and his family are in a place of safety. But he says, 'I worry about the spiritual well-being of believers displaced by the conflict.'

[Service Leader]

These things are hard to hear. But this morning, you have offered a listening ear. Please now listen to more of the story of Pastor Yang, whom we heard from at the beginning of our service.

THE STORY OF PASTOR YANG

[Read by a member of the congregation]

Pastor Yang is a teacher and youth pastor. After the military coup in 2021, he and his newlywed wife were forced to flee many times, driven from town to town by the fighting.

‘Since the coup, our lives have been incredibly tough,’ he says. ‘We’ve had to live amidst the sounds of gunfire and bombs. All this has deeply traumatised my wife. She was terrified by the explosions at night and developed heart problems. My children are now afraid of loud noises. As a husband and a father, I feel helpless that I can’t make my own family feel safe.’

‘We remember God for small things because we could be killed at any moment. Even when I step out of the house to buy groceries, I pray: “God, help me come back home safely so that I can see my wife and children.”

‘One day, some fellow pastors and I were on our way to a Christian training programme. Soldiers stopped us. They made us kneel on the ground beside the road. They searched us, with their guns pointed at our heads. They questioned us repeatedly regarding the purpose of our travel.

‘I have encountered the military many times during my journeys to meetings. I have to answer their questions wisely, or they could turn suspicious and imprison or kill us.

‘Despite feeling desperate and hopeless at times, we know God is with us,’ he adds. ‘He has kept us safe until now, and we are still able to serve Him. Our family prays together every night, asking God to give us the strength to go through this. We recite Psalm 23 before we go to bed.

‘I hope and believe that one day there will be peace, justice, and freedom in our country,’ he says. ‘It is my dream and prayer that we would have the freedom to share the gospel and to worship freely, and that every person will hear and know Christ.’

THE POWER OF PRAYER

[Service leader]

This is a Day of Prayer, so we will pray.

Prayer is the first faltering step towards love in action.

There is power in prayer. Those who have shared their stories with us know that. They depend on that.

‘We know the prayers of believers all around the world protect us,’ says Pastor Yang.

May, the wife of Pastor Myint, says: ‘We’ve been in the ministry for many years. We’ve seen many people come to Christ. Because of war and persecution, many believers are displaced and have lost connection. Please pray that God will be with them and that they will remain faithful to Jesus.’

Open Doors partner Daisy Htun says, ‘I share with believers that even though things are terrible, we are not alone. There are people around the world praying for us.’

So let us pray.

CORPORATE PRAYER, CALL AND RESPONSE

Thank You for the brothers and sisters whose stories we have heard. We honour their faithful witness and service to You, Lord. We can only pray that You will make us worthy to walk the same path as them.

Amen, Lord. We will walk with them.

We pray for our persecuted Christian family in Myanmar. We pray for those displaced, those in mourning, those who are fearful. Please gather those who are scattered. May they know the reality of Your promise to Moses in Exodus 33:14, 'My presence will go with you, and I will give you rest.'

Amen. Thank you, Lord, for Your presence that goes with us all.

We pray for their persecutors. Turn the men of violence into men of peace. What You did with Saul, You can do with them. May the Sauls of Myanmar become Pauls in Your kingdom.

Amen. May the persecutors come to know the Prince of Peace.

We pray that Your people will be strengthened and encouraged to be salt and light, to demonstrate Your grace, Your provision and Your mercy to their neighbours in need. May many see Your love, Lord, through the love of Your people.

Amen. May Your church in Myanmar be the hands and feet of Jesus.

We pray for Your intervention and Your peace in the midst of bombings and disaster. May the bloodshed cease. May Your kingdom of justice and righteousness reign.

Amen. May the bloodshed cease.

Give the world's leaders compassion, wisdom and the will to intervene and to bring aid to the needy.

Amen. May those You have appointed to lead do so with wisdom and compassion.

We will now hear and share in a prayer from Myanmar.

PRAYER FOR MYANMAR

[Read by a member of the congregation]

Dear Father,

We uphold our country, Myanmar, in prayer. We long for restoration; we long for Your peace to reign.

We long for the day when we can gather freely to worship and praise You, but we also cherish those secret moments where we *are* able to come to You and worship You.

Father, heal our broken hearts, restore our wounded spirits, renew in us Your Holy Spirit, and restore Your joy in us.

Father, help us to cling to You, to trust You and have faith in You.

Father, give us our daily bread and protect us from evil; help us to lead and live our lives according to Your will and in joy.

Father, be with us always. Amen.

CALL TO ACTION

So what more can we do?

Partners of the Christian ministry to the persecuted, Open Doors, are supporting displaced believers through prayer, presence ministry, and by providing emergency aid, such as groceries, house materials, and medicine.

The presence of these partners is received as a sign of comfort and answered prayer.

The practical needs of Christians in Myanmar include food, clothing, shelter, clean water, healthcare, and the opportunity to work and provide for their families.

Their spiritual needs include fellowship, discipleship, prayer, counselling, and trauma debriefing.

Most of all, our brothers and sisters need to be heard. May, the pastor's wife, says Open Doors provided support and a listening ear. 'After we were displaced, no one else bothered to ask us about our welfare. We are so thankful to you for listening to our story and helping us.'

If you would like to find out more, to help you to pray or to provide in practical ways, please go to the Open Doors website: www.opendoors.org.hk

SMALL GROUP PRAYER

Please join with one or two beside you to pray what is on your heart for our brothers and sisters in Myanmar.

IN CLOSING

If you have been challenged today, I'm glad. And I thank you – for choosing to see and to hear, for choosing to care and to pray.

For choosing the hard road of compassion, and choosing to walk that road for a little time with our brothers and sisters in Myanmar, on this International Day of Prayer for the Persecuted Church.

Please continue to hold Pastor Yang, Pastor Myint, Moe Moe, Mei Mei, and the others in your hearts and in your prayers. Thank you.



About Open Doors

"Strengthen what remains and is about to die."

Those were the words given to a young Dutch missionary 70 years ago – and they've shaped a global ministry to the persecuted church ever since.

It was back in 1955 that Andrew van der Bijl went to Communist Poland with a suitcase full of gospel tracts. Behind the Iron Curtain, he found isolated Christians who thought the world had forgotten them, and churches desperately in need of Bibles.

He prayed, opened his Bible and this is what God said: *"Wake up! Strengthen what remains and is about to die."* (Revelation 3:2)

That man became known as Brother Andrew, that verse became his mission – and his trip changed the world.

Brother Andrew founded Open Doors and made countless journeys across Europe, smuggling Bibles in his blue VW Beetle. As the ministry grew, other needs emerged. As well as Bibles, persecuted Christians around the world needed leadership, education, practical support.

Now, in 2025, Open Doors is marking a milestone: seven decades of serving the persecuted church – all thanks to the faithful support of people like you.

Today, we work in more than 70 countries to support Christians who dare to follow Jesus no matter the cost. With your gifts and prayers, millions of persecuted believers know they are not alone.

Thank you for standing with them.

WHAT IS THE PERSECUTED CHURCH?

We define it as: *Christians who live under or who face discrimination, restriction and persecution because of their faith in Jesus.*

Persecution has two forms:

- 1) **Smash** includes violence and even killing.
- 2) **Squeeze** includes pressure, exclusion, discrimination and severe restriction on freedom.

Every year, Open Doors produces the 'World Watch List' of the 50 most dangerous places to follow Jesus.