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“They overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the Word of their testimony; they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death.” Revelation 12:11

Over the last 12 years of ministering in Mozambique, Angola, Romania, Albania and other countries where severe persecution has raged has taught me that it is possible not only to survive persecution - but to thrive in spite of it. The more we build these principles into our lives, the better prepared we will be to triumph amidst tribulation.

## 1. The Sovereignty of God (Psalm 2)

God is all knowing, all powerful and everywhere present. He is sovereign over the affairs of men and His Will will ultimately be done. Those Who fight against God will lose. We may not know the future but we do know Him who holds the future.

*“If we share Christ’s suffering we will also share His glory.”* Romans 8:17

## 2. Bible memorisation (Psalm 1:2-3)

Our most precious possession is the Word of God. Therefore we are urged to *“let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly”*

Col 3:16. Persecutors may be able to confiscate your Bible but they cannot take away the Word of God that is stored up in your heart and mind. Every Christian who has ever suffered imprisonment, especially in solitary confinement, will agree that the Lord used their Scripture memory verses as an inexhaustible source of refreshment, encouragement and strength.

***“Faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the Word of Christ.”*** Romans 10:17

## 3. Prayer is your lifeline (2 Thess 3:1-5)

In the midst of suffering, only the reality of God in our lives will enable us to stand firm. Our personal relationship with the Lord is the root source of our strength and courage. Therefore we need to cultivate our devotional life.

***“After they prayed... they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the Word of God boldly.” Acts 4:31***

#### **4. Fear God and not man (Deut 10:12-13)**

The fear of man is a trap. People-pleasers make traitors (John 5:44). To fear the Lord frees us from the fear of man. There is only one God - but there are many men. It is better to fear the one true God than to be enslaved to the fear of men (Gal 1:10).

***“Do not be afraid of those who kill the body and after that can do no more. But I will show you whom you should fear: Fear Him who, after the killing of the body, has power to throw you into hell. Yes, I tell you, fear Him.” Luke 12:4,5***

#### **5. Stand firm. Do not compromise Principle (Phil 1:27-29)**

Joseph, David and Daniel risked everything by refusing to compromise their principles and their obedience to the plans and purposes of God. As a result they suffered persecution. Yet their faith remained steadfast. They persevered and God raised them up to rule over the land. (Gen 39-41; 1 Sam 18 - 2 Sam 2; Dan 6). We too need to be steadfast and remain faithful to the Word of God.

***“Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming.” Eph 4:14***

#### **6. Exercise your faith (Heb 11:1,32-39)**

By faith God's people can turn stumbling blocks into stepping stones, crisis situations into opportunities, battles into victories (Rom 8:28). We are “more than conquerors” Rom 8:37 and “overcomers” 1 John 5:4 through Christ. Yet, just as we need to exercise our bodies to maintain and increase our physical strength, so too we need to test our faith - putting it under stress and strain in training for godliness. You don't start studying the day the examination begins. Nor do you start training on the day of the race. So too we cannot start strengthening our faith on the day of crisis (1 Tim 4:8).

***“Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last; but we do it to get a crown that will last forever.” 1 Corinthians 9:25***

#### **7. Discipleship training of every member (2 Tim 2:2)**

Hierarchical churches with a clergy/laity division are easily infiltrated, manipulated and

neutralised. Top heavy structures are easily decapitated by merely imprisoning the leaders. However, the churches that have flourished under persecution have invariably been those congregations with lay leadership. When every member is either disciplining others or being disciplined themselves then the church can remain effective - even under persecution. *“Each one reach one, each one bring one, each one teach one”*

is a winning strategy. Evangelism can add to the church, but discipleship can multiply. *“The whole church, taking the whole gospel, to the whole world.”*

***“To prepare God’s people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the Faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. Ephesians 4:12-13***

### **8. Home Bible study groups and prayer cells (Acts 2:42:47)**

In times of state persecution church leaders can be imprisoned and church buildings can be confiscated or closed. However, it is always a far harder task to stamp out home Bible study groups and prayer fellowships. Congregations that depend upon their formal services in the church building are vulnerable. But congregations which consist of a network of prayer and Bible cell groups are far more resilient in times of stress.

***“Greet also the church that meets at their house.” Romans 16:5***

### **9. Evangelise or fossilise (Luke 24:4 7)**

We must never allow persecution to deter us from obeying the Great Commission. Our purpose on earth is to “make disciples... teaching obedience” Matt 28:19. The lifeblood of the persecuted church is zeal to reach the lost for Christ. Every interrogation is an opportunity to witness for Christ.

***“I am not ashamed of the Gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes.” Romans 1:16***

### **10. Pray the Imprecatory Psalms (Acts 13:8-12)**

One of the most striking aspects of persecuted churches is their love for the Psalms. While we tend to pray for peace, the persecuted pray for justice (Rev 6:9- 11).

***“When justice is done, it brings joy to the righteous but terror to evil doers.” Proverbs 21:15***

### **11. Be careful whom you trust (Matthew 24:4-5)**

In times of state persecution churches will be infiltrated by spies and even established members could be recruited (blackmailed into being an informer). Therefore one would need to learn to no longer be too specific in testimonies and prayer requests. Some aspects of the church would

have to be on a “need to know” basis.

***“Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of such things God’s wrath comes on those who are disobedient.”***

***Ephesians 5:6***

## **12. Cultivate a positive attitude of praise and thanksgiving (Phil 4:4-9)**

Knowing the great God we serve and the inevitable victory of His Kingdom (Daniel 2:44) we need to continually count our blessings and rejoice.

***“Be joyful always; pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.”***<sup>1</sup>

***1 Thessalonians 5:16-18***

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