

CHINA



China has long been a state of religious persecution. With 1.4 billion people and growing, the Chinese government demands religious groups support the Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) ideology while simultaneously restricting access to their religious sites, even inhibit-

ing their ability to gather. Over the years, the pressure for people of faith to adhere to the CCP and their atheistic mind-set has only intensified. Many people are unable to practice or worship in accordance with their conscience and faith.

While certain groups are recognized by the government—like Buddhism, Taoism, Catholicism, Protestantism, and Muslims, for example—China is officially an atheist state. China's Christian community has grown, and with it so has CCP persecution, in particular abuse and imprisonment for Protestant house churches across the country. Authorities in China also use repressive measures seeking to eradicate distinct ethnoreligious identities, such as Uyghur Muslims and Tibetan Buddhists. They are harshly repressed for their faith and culture, including forced labor or assimilation, mass surveillance, and/or forced interfaith marriages.

For example, Chinese authorities seek not only to suppress the practice of these faiths, but also the destruction of their culture as well. Many Uyghur families endure separation and birth prevention measures so that their faith and heritage will not survive. To date, over one million Uyghurs have been subjected to reeducation camps, censorship, and specific religious persecution. That number continues to grow.

For Tibetan Buddhists, the CCP restricts access to their religious sites while also destroying religious symbols and places of worship. Tibetan Buddhists, like Uyghurs, are also subject to "reeducation centers." In these centers, individuals are indoctrinated with political propaganda and unable to practice or speak of their faith. Further, religious leaders—like Buddhist monks and nuns who refuse to denounce their faith leader (the Dalai Lama)—are often detained and tortured.

For Chinese Christians and people of different religions, worship and gathering is not only disallowed but also punished. Imagine not being able to gather with your friends or at church to pray. To worship. To express words of hope from holy texts. To share your beliefs. In China, people of a variety of faiths are forced to live in fear, constantly living under harsh surveillance and enduring threats and abuse. For ethnic minorities, like Uyghurs Muslims and Tibetan Buddhists, this fear is even greater as it is not only their faith that is under attack, but also their ethnic identities.

So, what are some ways you can pray for these persecuted groups this month?



FEBRUARY SCRIPTURE

2 Corinthians 1:3-4 (ESV)

3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, 4 who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.

PRAYER

Lord God, we praise You because You are in control. We praise You because You care for **ALL** people, from **ALL** parts of the world, including China. We know this is true because You have made each of us in Your image. Lord, we lift up our fellow Christians suffering on account of their faith in Jesus Christ. Build a hedge of protection around them. Lord, we ask You now to strengthen the Uyghur Muslim community in China. We ask that You would protect these families from abuse and hatred, condemnation, and imprisonment. We pray that You would drive out fear and replace it with hope. And Lord God, we pray also for Buddhist families in Tibet who are being persecuted by Chinese authorities for what they believe. We pray for the families who have been separated and are unable to practice their faith freely in these communities. Encourage their hearts today and give them strength for tomorrow.

Please help us, Lord, as Your children, to stand against violence and oppression in **ALL** forms and against **ALL** people. Soften our hearts to remember our fellow Christians and those of other faiths face persecution in China each day at the hands of the government. Open up ways for us to use our voices, vocations, and resources to stand with all the persecuted in China so that despite the distance, we may remember those who are hurting and seek to advocate on their behalf. May we use the comfort we have been given through your Son to comfort those in China who are in affliction, in whatever way we are able, by prayer or deed.

In Jesus' name. Amen.

