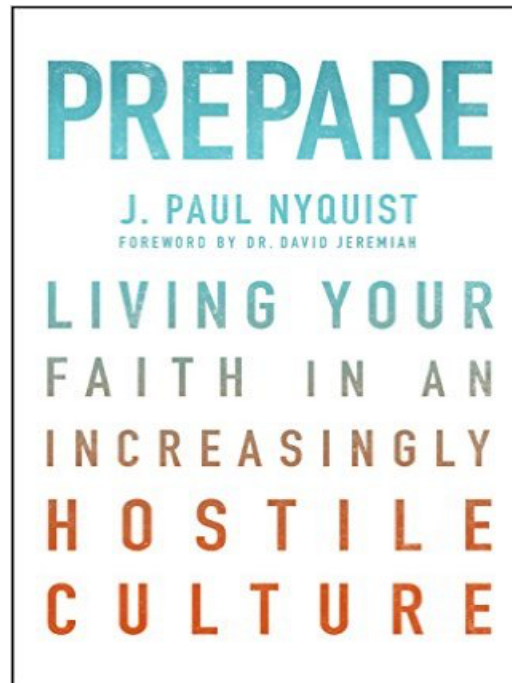


## Book Review: Prepare – Living Your Faith in an Increasingly Hostile Culture



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As religious freedoms are starting to erode we must prepare for a future that would be hard to imagine a decade ago.

This book will help you understand how to live faithfully in this new America. It includes answers to questions like:

- Are we really “persecuted”?
- What does the bible say about persecution?
- How should I then live?

The book is divided into three sections: **The New Reality** is about how culture is changing in America. **Understanding Persecution** provides a counterintuitive biblical perspective. Lastly, **Reasons for Hope** offers the encouragement we all need to be prepared for the growing reality of persecution coming to this country.

## **Part One: The New Reality**

The premise is that an epic change in our culture is coming with a spiritual climate shift we have never seen in this country.

Three viewpoints are noted to highlight these coming changes:

John S. Dickerson makes four observations:

1. The US broader host culture is changing faster than most of us realize
2. The change includes pro-homosexuality and anti-Christian reaction
3. The rate of change will accelerate as the two older generations pass away taking their traditional views and votes
4. These changes will reach an intensity where they directly affect the church and our lives as evangelicals

Dr. Erwin Lutzer writes:

“We have crossed an invisible line and there are no signs we can turn back. Our Judeo-Christian heritage that gave us the freedoms we have enjoyed is for the most part gone, and in its place is an intolerant form of humanism that can boast of one victory after another. The “cultural war” we used to speak about appears to be over and we have lost.”

Billy Graham notes today is troubling. “Our society is caught up in a powerful windstorm that has already caused massive destruction with the full impact yet to come. ... The word has dramatically changed.”

America has changed and some of the most vivid examples are the hostility for the Bible and prayer at public schools. There is a growing hostility towards Christians, Christianity and the Bible. The stories are not isolated but are part of a growing national trend on how followers of Jesus are facing hostility, rejection and marginalization. The trends point to increased opposition including genuine persecution.

The nation is not going back in culture or to the values it once held. The immediate future for believers is to learn how to live righteously in this new environment and not pine for the old days.

**Part Two: Understanding Persecution - 5 Counterintuitive Biblical Principles**

1. The persecution of believers is normal and not strange.
2. Persecution means your blessed not cursed.
3. Believers can expect to be exposed and not protected.
4. God calls us to respond to our persecution with compassion not anger.
5. We will be rewarded not forgotten.

**1. The persecution of believers is normal and not strange.**

Jesus makes this point clear in scripture. John 15:18-27

*“If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first. If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you. Remember what I told you: ‘A servant is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also. If they obeyed my teaching, they will obey yours also. They will treat you this way because of my name, for they do not know the one who sent me. If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not be guilty of sin; but now they have no excuse for their sin. Whoever hates me hates my Father as well. If I had not done among them the works no one else did, they would not be guilty of sin. As it is, they have seen, and yet they have hated both me and my Father. But this is to fulfill what is written in their Law: ‘They hated me without reason.’ “When the Advocate comes, whom I will send to you from the Father—the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father—he will testify about me. And you also must testify, for you have been with me from the beginning.*

3 reasons the world hates us:

- A. Christians are different
- B. We bear Christ’s name
- C. We expose their sin

**2. Persecution means your blessed not cursed.**

The New Testament gives two ways persecution brings blessings:

- A. Persecution allows us to know Christ more  
Knowing Christ is life’s highest ambition. As we know Him, we share in his righteousness. As we suffer, we share in “the power of his resurrection”. We experience His strength. We understand what it means to be carried along in difficult circumstances in ways we can’t explain or comprehend. As we suffer, we know Him more and more.

**B. Suffering produces spiritual fortitude perfecting our character**

We are to greet trials with joy as it develops spiritual fortitude. Since we are sinners saved by grace, when we come to faith in Christ we each have plenty of pieces of our character missing. We each have thousands of character points to be added or refined. God's encouraging truth says that he has ways He accomplishes that work in our lives. One way – a key way – is through trials. When they come, if we stay under the trials – not dodging a painful situation or seeking an easy exit but pursuing the maximum spiritual benefit they offer – God uses them in the perfecting process. A rough edge of our character softens. A missing virtue is added. Slowly, but surely, God's perfecting work takes shape in our lives. In God's economy, persecution means we are blessed and not cursed.

James 1:2-4

*Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.*

**3. Believers can expect to be exposed and not protected.**

When we suffer unjustly we expect others to defend us. As a general principle, we should not rely on family or government to defend us when persecution comes because often they will not.

When we face unjust persecution in the future, we would like to believe a large crowd of people will encourage and protect us. We would like the government to defend us from unfair punishment. We hope our family would support us in painful circumstances. We are sure lifelong friends would stand boldly in our corner.

In some cases, that may well happen. But we can't expect it all to happen. We can expect to be exposed not protected. Others deserting us will put intense pressure on us to defect from faith when persecution comes. We will so yearn to regain lost relationships, we will even ponder abandoning Jesus. The readers of the book of Hebrews considered this when they faced persecution. It is easy to criticize them from a distance, but we soon may find ourselves in their shoes. All alone.

**4. God calls us to respond to our persecution with compassion not anger.**

Christ left us a model to follow. He commands us to love our enemies. Paul encourages us to bless our enemies.

Romans 12:14 says *"Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse."*

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Peter reinforces the teaching of Jesus and Paul in 1 Peter 3:14-17:

*But even if you should suffer for what is right, you are blessed. “Do not fear their threats; do not be frightened. But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander. For it is better, if it is God’s will, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil.*

In these passages, we see three commands to help us face hostility in a godly manner:

- A. Be strong (do not fear their threats)
- B. Be ready (always be prepared to make a defense)
- C. Be faithful (better to suffer for good than do evil)

Our attitude in responding is critical. We need to check our arrogance and anger at the door. God wants us to be His witnesses – not His prosecuting attorneys. Meekness and humility must undergird every word we speak.

We should all be reminded of the regular persecution found in the book of Acts. Persecution starts in Chapter 4 and goes through the closing words in Chapter 28. The opposition included beatings, arrests, stonings, riots and martyrdom. If we look carefully, we see five major theological themes on persecution in Acts.

- i. Persecution is part of God’s plan.
- ii. Persecution is the rejection of God’s agents.
- iii. The persecuted stand in continuity with God’s prophets.
- iv. Persecution is an integral consequence of following Jesus.
- v. Persecution is the occasion of divine triumph.

The most powerful apologetic is the faithful lives of God’s people, demonstrating love, hope and faith in the midst of a hostile world.

### 5. We will be rewarded not forgotten.

The New Testament overflows with teaching on eternal rewards. At the judgment – or *bema* – seat, each man’s work will be fully and fairly evaluated by Christ himself to reveal its value.

Scripture mentions a variety of rewards. Some bestow privilege such as authority in the millennial Kingdom (Matthew 25:14-30). Others bring honor, such as the crowns

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mentioned repeatedly in the New Testament (1 Peter 5:1-4). Because these are given by our glorious redeemer, all rewards are worthy of our pursuit.

We also see that in the Beatitudes portion of the Sermon on the Mount Jesus says, *“Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.”* Matthew 5:11-12

The promise of reward from God comes with a condition. He promises to significantly reward us, but the promise carries a requirement of perseverance through persecution. We will be rewarded *if* we faithfully endure. Rewards received at the judgement seat far exceed the level of our suffering, for our generous God gives out of His riches.

### Part Three: Reasons for Hope

- A. Scripture shows how each member of the Trinity provides gracious help and enablement to believers when they face opposition.

God the Father helps us in persecution through giving confidence He is in sovereign control of whatever happens to us. While our enemies may think they are calling the shots, we know God rules over all. Nothing happens to us outside of His will.

The Son helps us as we are reminded that He became the incarnate and dwelt among us. He suffered and died for us providing a model to following suffering.

Suffering is our calling In Christ.

Suffering has an example in Christ.

Suffering means following in the steps of Christ.

Peter makes two main points about Jesus' response to suffering. *First*, Jesus never retaliated. He did not return insults, threats or attacks. *Secondly*, Jesus kept entrusting judgment to His Father. God will set all records straight with His perfect and impartial judgment.

The Holy Spirit helps us with persecution as He empowers the work we do and intercedes for us in prayer. Paul says “the Spirit helps us” in our weakness. When we can't find words, the Spirit puts His arm around us and communicates with the Father on our behalf.

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B. The persecuted church around the world is an example and an encouragement for us.

*Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that the family of believers throughout the world is undergoing the same kind of sufferings.* 1 Peter 5:9

Both direct and indirect persecution have brought many positive outcomes for the church. First, it has strengthened the faith of believers and resulted in growth. Second, the persecution has inadvertently advertised the Gospel leading to nonbelievers questioning truth.

*Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? As it is written: "For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered." No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

Romans 8:35-39

Do not be discouraged by the narrow and thorny path. See it as an opportunity to do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with God.

C. Persecution often precedes revival.

During the inevitable ebb following a revival, man returns to sinful patterns, society suffers, and the righteous beg God for a fresh influx of His Spirit. God's grace then brings another spiritual awakening bringing refreshment for a nation. America seems to be in an ebb right now with a propensity for ungodliness and growing biblical illiteracy. We desperately need a fresh wave of God's spirit but we may suffer before that happens.

D. What to do before the attacks come

Persecution is coming like the next storm undoubtedly will. We must spiritually prepare for what appears inevitable.

- I. Be *watchful* staying alert so we are not caught unaware.
- II. Be *faithful* in the call God has made on us.
- III. Be *prudent* understanding some of our rights and comforts will change.

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**Persecution provide us with the valuable opportunity to take our commitment to Christ to a new level. It gives us the chance to demonstrate to a watching and hostile world what true discipleship looks like. It also supplies the life-shaping tools God skillfully uses to mold us into Christ's image. We may not have a choice as to whether it is the next chapter in our lives but we can help write how our story ends.**