

THE ROAD TO PERSECUTION

All Activity Sheets

KEY WORDS

PERSECUTE

SUFFER, SUSTAIN, PROMISE, RIGHTEOUSNESS

Biblical reference Matthew 5:10-12 and 43-48 plus Luke 23:26-27 and 32-43

LESSON OBJECTIVE

To help the students understand that as Christians we should not be surprised if we're persecuted, that it is a privilege to suffer for Jesus. In turn, God will sustain us with his presence and promises

MEMORY VERSE

"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled" (Matthew 5:6, NIV*).

PREPARE YOURSELF TO TEACH

Do your preadolescents face persecution at times? Some will say yes. It is very difficult to identify religious persecution in a world that makes tolerance one of its greatest virtues. Surprisingly, those who proclaim tolerance more earnestly are those who least tolerate Christians. Christians are often ridiculed and presented with distaste by the media. While preadolescents of this age do not usually suffer physical persecution, they should be able to identify with the other ways Christians are persecuted today.

Preadolescents go through a stage of their lives in which they do not want to be different from their peers. And the simple act of attending church generates some discrepancy with others of their age. Students in this group who express their faith seriously and live in accordance with those values will agree. It is possible that some of them are ridiculed and ostracized for their religious convictions.

The Bible talks a lot about this matter. Jesus was perfect and did not commit any sin, and for this cause he suffered persecution to the point of death. He left us a model for living in deep commitment to God, regardless of cost or consequences.

This lesson also points to the promises of the Beatitudes that God gives to those who experience persecution in his name. Students will learn that the Lord will be with them when they're persecuted.

BIBLICAL COMMENTARY

Read Matthew 5:10-12. The teachings of Jesus about persecution in the Sermon on the Mount disturb most people. The reason is that they do not represent the common thought of our time, nor in the first century of Christianity.

Even so, it represents the heart of Jesus' teachings on how God wants his children to think and live. Not surprisingly, the Sermon on the Mount is described as "the upside down kingdom" or as "Christian counter-culture" because many of Jesus' ideas are directly in opposition to what people think as natural. And it is exactly from there that the power of the kingdom of God is derived. What seems foolish in the eyes of the world, is actually the wisdom of God. Jesus begins his contradictory teaching about persecution by saying that we should not be angry or discouraged when we face the wrath of unbelievers. Rather, we are to rejoice. When we experience persecution, we're part of a long and prestigious line of believers who were attacked and injured by those who did not believe. When we're harassed because of Christ, we can rejoice because we're counted with those who belong to the kingdom of heaven, not the kingdom of earth.

In case this is not enough, the "incomprehensible" teachings continue. In Matthew 5:43-48, he says that rejoicing in persecution is not enough, but that we're called to love and pray for those who persecute us. Loving those who love us is easy, but loving those who hate us is difficult. In reality, it is impossible; as impossible as being "perfect ... as our Father who is in heaven is perfect." It is impossible if we just use our resources and human inclinations. Our natural response to persecution is anger, hatred and revenge. It is only because the Holy Spirit of God fills our hearts with his love and perspective that we can find a way to rejoice in the persecution, and love and pray for our enemies. In other words, it requires being perfect at heart as God is.

Read Luke 23:26-43. Jesus supported his teaching words about persecution by being the best example. Despite his innocence, he experienced enormous mental and physical anguish before his crucifixion. He suffered whipping, ridicule and other abuses. He was mocked by the same people for whom he was lovingly giving his life.

You can read Jesus' response to the persecution in Luke 23:34: "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing." Jesus practiced what he preached! He prayed for those who sent him to a cross of persecution, suffering, and death. In doing so, he made it possible for us to have an authentic relationship with God. He is worthy of our consecrating our lives, even when others persecute us.

The persecution was a real threat to the early Church as well. We read of martyrs killed by lions or by the sword. Similar types of persecution continue today.

The reality is that more Christians have died for their faith in the last 100 years than in the previous 2,000 years. Many countries around the world make Christianity a crime that deserves prison punishment or even death itself. Some of us experience the freedom of a tolerant government.

The issue of persecution is not as far away as we may think. The world will never be a true friend of the Christian; it really cannot. Christians in all countries will always be in conflict with the unconverted and will always feel the sting of opposition, either through hostility expressed in the form of lashes or through words.

The words of the Sermon on the Mount are not easy to digest, especially those that deal with persecution and enemies. But by finding the spiritual strength to overcome despair, caused by persecution and the difficulty of loving our enemies, we'll find that we're approaching the very heart of God.

INTRODUCE THE LESSON

Important words

Tell the group: "The important words and their meanings for today's session are:

Persecution: physical abuse, ridicule, derision or other kinds of suffering that a person experiences from another because of what he or she believes.

Righteous/Righteousness: is to be in a correct relationship with God and obey him because of that relationship. To be fair / righteous in thought, word and actions."

If you are using a mural, write the important words and their meaning on poster board to add to the mural.

Persecution

Ask the group: "What do you think when you hear the word 'persecution'?" Let everyone share who wants to. Listen to the comments, explain the meaning of the word persecution, and tell of some experience that you've had with it.

Ask someone to read Matthew 5:10-12. Say: "When you think about what persecution means, do the words 'rejoice' and 'happiness' come to your mind?" Allow students to answer. That is not what I think at first either; but still, Jesus says that we are to "rejoice and be glad."

Tradition tells us that many of the disciples and early Christians suffered persecution, for example Matthew was dragged to death. John was put in a pot of boiling oil, survived and was banished to the island of Patmos. Peter is said to have been crucified with his head down. James was beheaded. Judas was killed with arrows. Many Christians were covered with pitch and set on fire like torches, which was done as a tribute to the Roman emperor Nero. Others were thrown into the lions' pits. One recent example was a Christian woman was sent to a forced labor camp and was beaten there every day. Another Christian was forced to sit naked for three days in frigid water, while asking him questions about his faith in Christ. In one country, one in five Christians is in prison for believing in Jesus Christ. In another place, Christians are taken prisoners and receive electric shocks, which leads to the death of some of them.

TEACH THE LESSON

From a sermon to suffering

Ask some students to help you read Matthew 5:10-12 and 43-48. Then ask: "In Matthew 5:10, what kind of sufferings is Jesus talking about?" (Sufferings for trying to live rightly for God) Teacher, be sure that preadolescents understand what righteousness and righteous are. If you are using a mural, refer to the important word on the mural.

According to v. 12, what is the reason why we should "rejoice and be glad" when we're persecuted for righteousness' sake? (We can look forward to the reward in heaven; we're part of an immense group of Christians who suffered earlier and suffer in our day.)

According to v. 43-45, how should we treat those who persecute us? (With love, kindness and prayer.)

How reasonable are these instructions? Is it easy to do that? (Accept the students' answers. If you have any experience, you can tell it. Maybe they're suffering from mockery or contempt for their faith. This is the right time to encourage them and challenge them to continue showing love and patience to those who hurt them but do not believe in Jesus.)

How did Jesus treat those who made him suffer? (Jesus asked the Father to forgive them. He did not respond angrily to anyone who insulted him. He forgave the thief who was next to him when he repented. And most importantly, he died for the sins of all mankind.)

How should we treat people who treat us badly? (We need to act as we have been taught throughout Matthew 5. We must follow Jesus' example of loving and forgiving.)

How can suffering become joy? (It is not easy, but it is not impossible either. God is attentive to help us fight with the weapons of Jesus' love. When we're close to God, he gives us thoughts of peace and love towards those who do us wrong.)

Ask the students to complete the student activity sheet questions and then write an article for The Jerusalem Newspaper about the persecution of Jesus and how he acted towards those who made him suffer.

Give the opportunity for the students to ask questions if they're unsure about something. Encourage them to know that although it is not easy to love those who harm us, it is not impossible to treat them as Jesus treated those who persecuted and crucified him.

CONNECT THE LESSON

Review

Distribute Student Activity Sheet #413-A and #413-B. Guide the students in reviewing the lesson.

The road to joy

Distribute Student Activity Sheet #413-C (The road to joy). Explain the instructions and give them time to complete the "Road to Joy" activity. When they're finished, as a group compare whether the answers are right by comparing them directly to the biblical list of the Beatitudes.

PRACTICE THE MEMORY VERSE

[Download Additional Memory Verse Activities PDF](#)

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No doubt the students will have looked forward to this moment with great enthusiasm, especially those who prepared and learned The Beatitudes of Matthew 5:3-12. Ask them to take a seat to start the "contest." Listen to participants carefully and with your Bible open as each student recites the Beatitudes. Accept the version from which the child learned the passage. Choose whoever recites it without mistakes for the first prize. You can designate the parameters to award the prizes. Another idea is to give equal prizes to all who learned the assigned passage very well. Be careful that there are no offended or sad students who did not receive a prize. This can be part of a celebration for finishing this special unit. You can offer cookies, fruit and milk or water to enjoy with the students.

Congratulate those who accepted Jesus. Invite parents; they're a crucial part in the lives of their students. Remember, you're not only teaching the preadolescents, you're also touching the life of each family.

To take home

Print out the Beatitudes on nice paper and give one to each child. Then ask them to color the margins or paste on stickers, glitter, etc. Take the same size poster board and guide them to stick the sheet with the Beatitudes onto the poster board. Instruct them to make two small holes at the top to put yarn to hang it up.

At the conclusion of the session, make sure they take their creation home and read it when others make fun of or do things that sadden them. Also, they should tell their parents what the Beatitudes mean. Assure them that we can live the Christian life with joy.

WRAP-UP

Pray

Ask students to give thanks in prayer:

For what they learned from The Beatitudes.

For the example that Jesus left us.

For the stories learned.

For the treasure and the pearl of great price that we have in the salvation that Jesus gives us.

Because God promises us the kingdom of heaven.

Because if we mourn, God will comfort us.

Because if we're hungry and thirsty for righteousness, God will satisfy us.

Because if we're pure of heart, we'll see God in heaven.

Encourage

Encourage the students to practice The Beatitudes.

Invite

Create interest in attending the next session by telling the students some exciting things they will learn and do in the next unit of lessons. Remind them that this is a good time to invite new members to join the group.