

THE CHURCH IS PERSECUTED

All Activity Sheets

KEY WORDS

SUFFER GOSPEL DEFEND FAITH

BIBLICAL REFERENCE

Acts 6:8-8:3

LESSON OBJECTIVE

To help the children learn to trust in God when they have to suffer for defending their faith.

MEMORY VERSE

“Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation” (Mark 16:15, NIV*).

PREPARE YOURSELF TO TEACH

As elementary children develop more friendships at school and in their neighborhoods, they become more sensitive to what others think of them. This makes them more susceptible to the influence of their peers, so they easily feel hurt when they reject or treat them badly.

In particular, they find it difficult to tolerate ridicule and rejection for doing the right thing. If they are not advised appropriately, they may stray from what they have been taught and adopt the behavior of others, with the sole reason of being accepted. This story will encourage them to know that they are not alone when they suffer for loving and serving God. Assure them that God is always with them and understands them when they face persecution. Christians around the world are facing increasing hostility, so this may be one of the most important lessons you teach. Encourage your children to be faithful witnesses of Christ wherever they are.

BIBLICAL COMMENTARY

Acts 6:8-8:3. The church in Jerusalem grew rapidly. There were men there filled with the grace and power of God, and one of them

was Stephen. He was one of the leaders of the first Christians who, according to verse 8, “did great wonders and signs among the people.”

Unfortunately, some people opposed his ministry, and continually argued against him. We know that it was the Holy Spirit who gave Stephen the wisdom to speak with authority, to the point that his opponents could not find an answer to his arguments.

Then some of them bribed certain people to raise false testimony against Stephen, falsely accusing him.

As the situation worsened, they brought him before the council. When the high priest questioned him, Stephen reminded them of what God had done in the past.

Starting from Abraham, he preached the greatness of God and His revelation of love through His Son Jesus, whom they had crucified, saying that he was now seated at the right hand of God. Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, preached to them with power and confronted them with reality. They had rejected and crucified the Savior of the world, the one true Messiah, just as their ancestors had persecuted and killed the prophets that God had sent them.

This outraged his opponents so much that they gnashed their teeth against him. They then condemned him unjustly and stoned him. That trial, according to Jewish law, was illegal because the Sanhedrin had no right to sentence someone to death. It was the uncontrollable anger they felt that led them to lash out against Stephen and kill him.

Even with his last breath of life, Stephen prayed to Jesus and said, “Lord, do not take this sin into account.” We see that Stephen followed Jesus’ example, who also begged the Father to forgive his executors.

This lesson teaches us that those who follow Christ with true commitment will encounter difficulties along the way, but the Holy Spirit will equip and sustain them to face difficulties. The Lord needs fully committed servants of the Holy Spirit to serve in his church.

INTRODUCE THE LESSON

What is persecution?

On the blackboard or on a card, write the word PERSECUTION in large letters.

Ask the children: “Have you ever heard the word ‘persecution?’” (yes/ no) The ask: “What do you think it means?” Allow them to respond. Supplement their answers by explaining: “Persecution means bothering someone or making them suffer as much as possible. Some people are cruel to others for what they believe or what they are.”

Ask: “Has someone ever mistreated you for what you believe or for being different from others?” (allow several responses)

Based on their answers, tell the group: “Today’s story is about a man who obeyed the great commission and spoke to the people who lived in Jerusalem about Jesus, although this cost him his life.”

TEACH THE LESSON

Stephen trusts in God

One day Stephen was preaching to many people. Suddenly, he heard angry voices approaching.

“Stop talking like that! You are speaking against God!” a man shouted.

“It is not right to speak badly about the temple,” said another. “The temple is a sacred place.”

“You are inciting people to disobey our religious law,” others said. “Why do not you shut up!”

Stephen saw that everyone was very angry. But why did those people hate him so much? He had not done anything he was accused of. They were all lying. The only thing Stephen had done was to teach people about Jesus.

But that did not matter to the people around him. They did not want to love Jesus. They just wanted to get rid of Stephen.

That day, they attacked him and took him to the Sanhedrin, which was a group of religious leaders of the Jews. There these men told more lies about Stephen.

“The only thing he does is to speak badly about the temple and the law. We heard him say that Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and change the customs that Moses taught us.”

The leaders of the Sanhedrin listened to all the lies the outraged men said. Afterwards, they looked at Stephen. He did not look angry. On the contrary, his face showed love, like the face of an angel.

Then the high priest asked him, "Is everything they say against you true?"

Instead of responding yes or no, Stephen began to remind them of all that God had done out of love for his people.

"God called Abraham to a new land and gave him a big family," said Stephen. "Later, God rescued his people from the bondage of Egypt. He gave them good laws to help them live well, and he sent prophets to teach them the way of God. Finally, he sent his Son Jesus to be our Savior. But you killed him, just as you killed the prophets. God has shown you His love again and again, but you do not want to hear it or obey it."

When the religious leaders heard that, they became enraged against Stephen.

"Blasphemer," they responded indignantly.

"Look," he said, looking at the sky, "I see the heavens open and I see Jesus at the right hand of God."

"Enough!" the leaders shouted, covering their ears and shouting loudly.

Then they took Stephen and dragged him out of the city. They threw him on the ground and started throwing big stones at him.

The sharp stones hit Stephen on the head, arms, legs and all of his body. Soon, blood began to flow down his face and his body.

Stephen looked at the men who were stoning him, and prayed, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit, and do not take this sin into account." After that, he died.

Stephen's death did not cause these men to repent for what they had done. On the contrary, they wanted to destroy all Christians, so they started to persecute them and lock them in prisons.

To escape the persecution, many Christians fled from Jerusalem to other cities and countries. They had to leave their homes, their jobs and many of their possessions, but they did not give up their faith in Jesus.

Everywhere they went they talked about the good news of Jesus. Upon hearing the message, the people of those places also believed in Jesus. Enraged men could persecute Christians, and even kill them, but they could not stop the church from growing.

CONNECT THE LESSON

The persecution of Stephen

Distribute Student Activity Sheet #178-A and #178-B.

Together read the Bible verse that is at the bottom of Student Activity Sheet #178-A. Then, help the children cut the two openings marked on the figure of the Bible in SAS #178-A, and show them how to insert the strip of drawings from #178-B. Ask some volunteers to use their finished work to relate what they learned in the biblical story.

Triumph over the persecution

Hand out Student Activity Sheet #178-C, and help them cut out the stars and squares with numbers.

Then ask them to choose a partner to play this game. Each person must place a star with his name in the start box. Then, put all the numbers in a bag. Then, each player must draw a number without seeing, and advance the spaces indicated by that number. If a player reaches a box where there is an order, he should read it aloud and do what is indicated there.

This game will help them identify occasions when they may be mistreated for doing the right thing, or persecuted for loving and serving God. Assure them that they can trust in God, because he will be with them in difficult times and give them the courage they need to defend their faith in Christ.

PRACTICE THE MEMORY VERSE

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Write the words of Mark 16:15 on a poster board. Then, divide into four groups and the verse into four sentences: (1) Go into all the world (2) and preach the gospel (3) to all creation (4) Mark 16:15.

Assign a phrase to each group to say when it is their turn. Then, rotate the phrases among the groups so that everyone learns the full text.

WRAP-UP

Pray

Pray for each other that God will give each one strength during difficulties.

Encourage

Encourage your children to trust in God in difficult times.

Invite

Tell some interesting things about the next session so the children will want to attend. Challenge them to invite friends.