

PERSECUTION

CHECKLIST: WHAT YOU NEED

- A map or a globe of the world and notes on persecuted nations; a marker and pieces of paper
- Copies of the downloadable “Litany” and “Prayers & Thanksgivings” booklets
- Copies of the lesson handout
- Copy of the leader’s notes
- OPTIONAL: A white board, easel pad, or chalk board with markers/chalk
- OPTIONAL: Bibles (ESV or similar recommended)
- OPTIONAL: Have notebooks on hand for teens to take home and use as prayer journals if they wish

ICE BREAKER: WHERE IN THE WORLD?

Ahead of time, prepare notes on countries of the world where Christians are experiencing persecution (for example, Myanmar, Pakistan, and Eritrea). Write the name of one country on each of your pieces of paper. If possible, add some information about what that persecution looks like in that part of the world.

There are a number of online resources that can assist with this. Voice of the Martyrs Canada offers a printable map of persecuted countries, as well as descriptions of each one (<https://www.vomcanada.com/restricted-nations.htm>).

As the teens arrive, tape or pin one country to each person’s back, and place the map of the world in a visible place for reference. Teens must then ask yes-or-no questions of one another in order to guess which country they have been assigned. (For example, “Am I located in Europe?” or “Do I begin with a vowel?”). When all have guessed, let them take a look at the country they were assigned and also review the information about what life is like for Christians there.

THE LITANY: BEGINNING WITH PRAYER

Begin the formal part of the lesson (below) by saying together the Litany, leaving off the Grace (which can be said at the close of the lesson).

AT THIS POINT IN THE LESSON, ASK IF THE TEENS SUCCEEDED IN DOING LAST WEEK’S CHALLENGE, HOW IT WENT, AND WHETHER THEY HAVE ANYTHING TO SHARE.

DISCUSSION: WHAT IS PERSECUTION?

As an introduction to the lesson ask the teens to discuss the following questions.

DEPENDING ON THE COMFORT LEVEL FOR SHARING IN YOUR GROUP, IT MAY BE EASIER TO HAVE THEM VOLUNTEER ANSWERS WITH ALL RESPONSES WRITTEN TOGETHER ON A BOARD.

- What is “persecution”?
- Have you ever felt persecuted because of your faith?

A few things worth pointing out (if they don’t otherwise arise during the discussion):

- *When we use the term “persecution” we mean a systematic hostility towards and mistreatment of a particular group of people, such as Christians. The website for Voice of the Martyrs Canada (VOMC) describes a persecuted nation in this way: “In these countries, Christians encounter varying degrees of repetitive, persistent and systematic suffering, and deprivation of basic human rights, because of their faith in Jesus Christ – a belief their persecutors will not tolerate.” VOMC also makes note of countries where there is an increasing trend towards the persecution of Christians.*
- *Persecution may take on different forms and levels of severity. For the most part in the western world, we “have*

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not yet resisted to the point of shedding blood” (Hebrews 12:4). We may, however, be familiar with various forms of ridicule and coercion that aim to make life difficult for Christians.

THE LESSON: 2 CORINTHIANS 4

The first part of the lesson (below) can be read aloud. Then the teens are asked to read the Bible text (either silently to themselves or aloud together), followed by some additional questions for discussion.

*To succour, help, and comfort all that are in danger, necessity, and tribulation,
We beseech thee, good Lord.*

So what have we learned about the world? God loves it so much that he sent his Son so that those who believe might be saved (John 3:16). But the world loves darkness rather than the light (John 3:19). In fact, the world hates Jesus, and it hates those who belong to him (John 15:18-19). But we’re here because we are called to love as God loves: to be messengers of reconciliation, a blessing, to care for the vulnerable, to work for peace, to pray for those in authority, and to be salt and light.

The New Testament teaches us not to be surprised when the world directs hostility and persecution our way. Instead we are to love our fellow believers with a love that shows the world who we belong to (John 13:35). This means that we must pray with a special love for the persecuted Church, though we know that God is at work in spite of – and even because of – the suffering of those faithful Christians.

St. Paul, who experienced a great deal of persecution firsthand, wrote these words from prison:

“I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel, so that it has become known throughout the whole imperial guard and to all the rest that my imprisonment is for Christ. And most of the brothers, having become confident in the Lord by my imprisonment, are much more bold to speak the word without fear” (Philippians 1:12-14).

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In the second epistle to the Corinthians, St. Paul and St. Timothy remind us of the amazing ministry we share and God’s power to see us through whatever this world may throw at us.

Refer to 2 Corinthians 4:1-18.

(THE TEXT IS PROVIDED ON THE BACK OF THE HANDOUTS AND IN THESE LEADERS’ NOTES SO THAT EVERYONE CAN MARK IT UP AND MAKE NOTES ON IT IF DESIRED. ALTERNATIVELY, YOU CAN READ OUT OF A BIBLE).

Read through the text. Then ask the teens to respond to what they’ve just read. Here are some questions to help guide the discussion.

- What were some of the things referred to in this passage that might have been discouraging for St. Paul and St. Timothy?
- What was it that kept them from losing heart?
- How can these reflections help us to pray for those who are experiencing persecution?
- How can this text equip us for experiencing persecution ourselves?

A few notes and reflections for reference:

- *The letter speaks of being “afflicted in every way... perplexed... persecuted... struck down” (v8) and goes on to say “our outer self is wasting away” (v16). These writers had been faced with many discouraging circumstances, yet for each one they describe themselves as being overcomers: “not crushed, not driven to despair, not forsaken, not destroyed” (v8).*

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- *St. Paul and St. Timothy view the ministry they have – and for which they have suffered – as a gift, given to them “by the mercy of God” (v1). They are motivated by a love for those to whom they minister (v14-15), their identification with the sacrifice of Jesus (v10-11), and their certainty of the glorious future in which they will share (v14,16-18).*
- *There are many passages, especially in the New Testament, which can help us to pray for our persecuted brothers and sisters. We can pray that those experiencing persecution would be “overcomers” and have the same attitude as St. Paul and St. Timothy, that they would know the presence of Jesus in their work and in their struggles, and that they would be confident in the hope of their reward.*
- *Whenever we consider the lives of saints and martyrs who have gone before us, we can be inspired and encouraged by the example to share the Gospel fearlessly in the knowledge that the opportunity to share it is a privilege, and that God is able to cause our lights to shine even in great darkness.*

DURING EACH LESSON, IF THE TEENS RAISE THEOLOGICAL OR BIBLICAL QUESTIONS THAT YOU DON'T FEEL CONFIDENT ABOUT ANSWERING, SAY SO, BUT LET THEM KNOW THAT YOU'LL FIND THE ANSWER AND RESPOND AT THE NEXT MEETING.

PREVIEW: AT-HOME CHALLENGE

Take a brief moment to look at the at-home challenge together.

THE WEEKLY “AT-HOME CHALLENGE” IS TYPICALLY A SIMPLE ASSIGNMENT TO SPEND SOME QUIET TIME IN PRIVATE PRAYER. ENCOURAGE THE TEENS TO GET NOTEBOOKS THAT CAN BE USED AS PRAYER JOURNALS. ASSURE THEM THAT THEY WILL NOT BE REQUIRED TO SHOW THEIR JOURNAL OR THEIR PRIVATE PRAYERS TO ANYONE.

Each morning and evening, follow your own rule of prayer.

(IF YOU DON'T HAVE ONE, TRY SAYING THE MORNING AND EVENING PRAYERS FROM THE “FORMS OF PRAYER TO BE USED IN FAMILIES”, WHICH BEGINS ON PAGE 728 OF THE BCP. IF YOU DON'T HAVE A COPY, YOU CAN LOOK IT UP HERE: [HTTP://PRAYERBOOK.CA/RESOURCES/BCPONLINE/FAMILY-PRAYER.](http://prayerbook.ca/resources/bcponline/family-prayer))

Give your teens a moment to think of a group of believers who are persecuted because of their faith in Christ. They may wish to highlight the country they were assigned for the ice breaker, or another situation in the world that they are familiar with. (For groups of more than ten, you'll want to break the teens into smaller groups.) Each person in the group should write down all the names mentioned on their lesson paper so they can remember them.

Each day this week, take time to pray for each of the areas on your group's list and the believers there. Ask God to provide for their every need, giving them hope so that they would be confident in his love and courageous in sharing the good news. Ask him to open the hearts of their persecutors so that they might believe and be changed.

- AND/OR -

Take some time to pray through this prayer.

O God, who art the author of peace and lover of concord, in knowledge of whom standeth our eternal life, whose service is perfect freedom: Defend us thy humble servants in all assaults of our enemies; that we, surely trusting in thy defence, may not fear the power of any adversaries; through the might of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. (COLLECT FOR PEACE, BCP PAGE 11)

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CLOSING PRAYERS

Close with any prayers that might be appropriate in the context of the discussion of the day.

AT THE END OF EACH LESSON, IF YOU FIND THAT YOU STILL HAVE LOTS OF TIME REMAINING, YOU MIGHT CHOOSE TO TAKE SOME TIME TO EXPLORE THE "PRAYERS AND THANKSGIVINGS" SECTION IN THE BCP (PAGES 39-62, OR YOU CAN USE THE DOWNLOADABLE BOOKLET). AS YOUR GROUP MEMBERS COME ACROSS PRAYERS THAT THEY FIND RELEVANT, PAUSE AND PRAY THEM TOGETHER. IF YOU'RE PRESSED FOR TIME, YOU MIGHT CLOSE WITH THE THEMED PRAYER FROM THE AT-HOME CHALLENGE.

Then finish with the "Grace", printed at the end of the Litany booklet.

2 CORINTHIANS 4: **WE DO NOT LOSE HEART**

¹Therefore, having this ministry by the mercy of God, we do not lose heart. ²But we have renounced disgraceful, underhanded ways. We refuse to practise cunning or to tamper with God's word, but by the open statement of the truth we would commend ourselves to everyone's conscience in the sight of God. ³And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled only to those who are perishing. ⁴In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. ⁵For what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. ⁶For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness", has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

⁷But we have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us. ⁸We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; ⁹persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; ¹⁰always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies. ¹¹For we who live are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh. ¹² So death is at work in us, but life in you.

¹³Since we have the same spirit of faith according to what has been written, "I believed, and so I spoke", we also believe, and so we also speak, ¹⁴knowing that he who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and bring us with you into his presence. ¹⁵For it is all for your sake, so that as grace extends to more and more people it may increase thanksgiving, to the glory of God.

¹⁶So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. ¹⁷For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, ¹⁸as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.