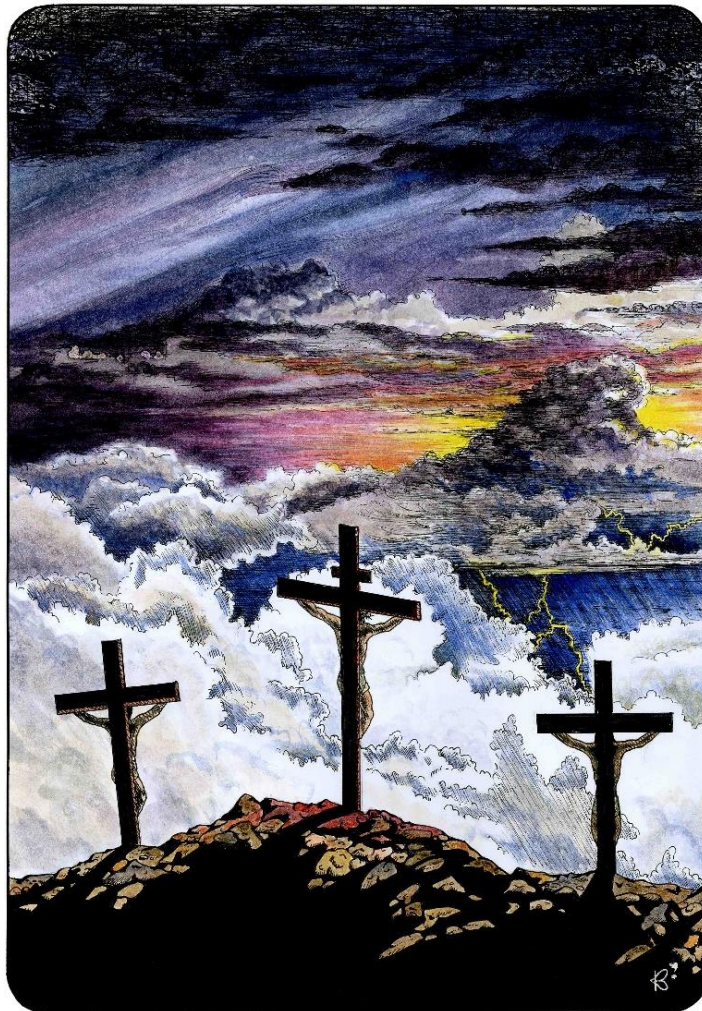


PROGRESSING TOGETHER



COURSE 105

PERSECUTION



Remember the word that I said to you,
'A servant is not greater than his master.'
If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you.

John 15:20a

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COURSE 105: Persecution

Course Objectives

1. Understand that persecution for one's faith in Christ is to be expected as part of God's good plan for our lives.
2. To commit to do what is right and share the gospel even to those who want to harm us.
3. To rejoice for the privilege of suffering for the name of Christ.
4. To trust in the justice and loving care of our Father in all circumstances.

Lessons

1	Nothing Can Separate Us from God's Love!
2	The Certainty of Persecution
3	Our Priority: Christ above All
4	A Response to Persecution: The Apostles
5	Jesus, Our Example in Persecution

Introduction

Jesus tells us: "... I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you" (John 15:19b). For those who follow the Lord Jesus, persecution comes in many forms: from being ridiculed or insulted for our faith, to being shunned or refused employment, to being physically beaten or tortured. But all have their source in the hatred that this world has for the Lord Jesus and those who love Him.

This course is intended to help us understand why believers in Jesus Christ are persecuted, what our attitude should be toward persecution, and how the Lord wants us to live when we are persecuted.

Testimony

The group leader will have you watch or listen to a testimony related to the topic of this course.



Lesson ①: Nothing Can Separate Us from God's Love!

Name: _____ Date: _____

Lesson Objectives

1. To understand that nothing can separate us from the love of God.
2. To embrace God's goal for believers to be conformed to His image.
3. To rejoice that God uses evil for good.



Read Romans 8:14-39 carefully.



In verses 35-39, Paul lists several things that some people might think capable of separating us from the love of Christ.



List and explain each one in your own words in the chart below.

Potential Threat	Explanation
Trouble or tribulation	Torment, distress, affliction
Persecution	
	Lack of food
Danger or peril	
	Threat of execution (usually by government agents, see Romans 13:4) or violent death more generally
Angels and demons or principalities and powers	
	Likely angelic and demonic beings which also influence earthly powers and authorities



Which ones have you experienced in your own life? Describe briefly what happened.



What future blessings does God have for us?



Why do you think the Apostle Paul used the word 'glorious' to describe these blessings? (verses 17 to 23)



For whom does God work all things together for good? (Verse 28)



Do you belong to this group of people? If you say 'yes', how does that happen according to verses 28-30?



To what has God predestined us? (verse 29)



How does this verse (8:29) help us to understand the fact that 'all things work together for the good' of the elect in verse 28?



What assurance or comfort does this passage give you personally when confronted by the difficulties of this world?



The life of Joseph, the son of Jacob, is a real-life example of Romans 8:28 from the Old Testament. You can read the parallel verse in: Genesis 50:20.



Fill in the blanks. The following words of Joseph, based on his own experience of injustice and suffering, amplify Romans 8:28 by telling us that:

God even uses _____ for _____ for those who love Him.



You can read the story of Joseph in Genesis chapters 37 and 39-50.



Optional activities

1. Sing a worship song about God's steadfast love for us and His wonderful blessings. Praise Him that nothing can separate us from His love. You can choose your own song or one from the list below:
 - [Nothing Could Ever Separate Us](#), by Citizen Way
 - [Nothing Can Separate](#), by Lucy Grimble
 - [He Will Hold Me Fast](#), by Keith & Kristyn Getty
 - [O Deep, Deep Love of Jesus](#), words by S T Francis, tune by T J Williams
2. Listen to the story of Joseph or watch a movie telling the story. (Make sure it is biblically accurate.) Then, discuss as a group what we learn about God through this story and what we can learn from Joseph's attitude throughout difficult times.



Applications

1. Rejoice together!!! Share an example of how God turned evil in your life into good. Then praise God together for His power and love manifest in our difficulties.
2. A key verse of this passage is Romans 8:28. Learn this verse by heart for spiritual support in times of trial. In the coming days, repeat this verse regularly.
3. If someone in the group is presently being persecuted, have them share about the persecution that they face. (If no one is being persecuted, share about brothers and sisters who are.) Pray together for them and ask God to fill them with the assurance of his promises in Romans 8:38-39. In the coming days, keep praying for those who are being persecuted. If you can help them in practical ways, do so.



Sharing

This week, share with others what you have learned in this lesson. You can also redo the lesson with someone.



Lesson ②: The Certainty of Persecution

Name: _____ Date: _____

Lesson Objectives

1. To understand why the world will hate and persecute Christians.
2. To appreciate the blessings that persecution can bring.
3. Commit to loving and praying for those who persecute them.



How are you getting on?

1. What were the main points of the last lesson?
2. What happened when you shared with others what you learned?
3. What changed in your lives as a result of these teachings?



Read John 15:18 to 16:4 and Matthew 5:10-12, and 43-45 carefully.



Give three reasons why this world hates those who follow Jesus. Base your answer on what Jesus said in John 15:18-21.



In John 15:21, who is the One who sent Jesus? Tick the right answer.

☐

God the Father

☐

The Holy Spirit

☐

The angel Gabriel



Jesus said: "They will treat you this way because of my name." Explain how this is true in your personal experience.



How is it possible that people can kill followers of Jesus and in so doing think that they are offering a service to God? Base your answer on John 16:1-4.



God promises blessing when we are persecuted for what reasons? (Matthew 5:10-12 – See also 1 Peter 3:13-15.)



Can you give some examples of persecution God blesses?



What kinds of blessing is He promising?



According to Matthew 5:44-45, what should we do to those who persecute us?



Why?



Optional activities

1. Listen again to the two passages from Matthew 5. Discuss as a group what practical implications Jesus' teaching should have on your life. Pray that you would be able to put this into practice in the coming days.
2. Learn these two passages by heart. Then, play a drama where you are encouraging someone who is going through persecution by reminding him or her of this teaching.



Applications

1. Reflect together on the wonderful privilege we have of knowing Christ, his salvation and the Father who sent him. Praise and thank God for these blessings. Tell him, He is worth whatever hardship we must bear in His name.
2. Make a list of those who have persecuted you (and describe briefly what they have done). Ask God to show you how He wants you to pray for them and then do it.
3. This week, memorize a key verse of your choice that will encourage you and/or others with regard to persecution. In the following days, repeat this verse regularly.



Sharing

This week, share with others what you have learned in this lesson. You can also redo the lesson with someone.



Lesson ③: Our Priority: Christ above All

Name: _____ Date: _____

Lesson Objectives

1. To be able to explain the promises of God to persecuted believers.
2. To commit to being a witness for Jesus whatever the cost.
3. To commit to loving Jesus more than anything else.



How are you getting on?

1. What were the main points of the last lesson?
2. What happened when you shared with others what you learned?
3. What changed in your lives as a result of these teachings?



Read Mark 8:31-38 and Matthew 10:16-39 carefully.



Tick the best answer. In Mark 8:34-38, Jesus says that we must take up our cross and follow Him. According to the context, this means:

☐

that I must die as a martyr crucified like Jesus was.

☐

that I must die to my own interests and plans and live for Jesus and the gospel.

☐

that I must carry a wooden cross around with me in life or wear a cross round my neck.



What does it mean to be 'ashamed of Jesus and His words' (Mark 8:38)?



Give a practical example.



Explain Matthew 10:16 in your own words.



According to Matthew 10:17-20, for what reason does God allow us to be brought before government officials?



About what are we not to worry?



Reread Matthew 10:28-39.



According to verses 28 to 31, whom are we not to be afraid of and why?



Give an example of how we can 'acknowledge' Jesus before men (verse 32).



Give an example of how we can of how we can 'disown' Jesus before men (verse 33).



Matthew 10:37-39 is the key to understanding the preceding verses 34-36. We are to love Jesus more than anything else, including our own family and even our own life. This doesn't mean that we stop loving them, but we are to love Jesus more.



If we live this way, what might the result be? (verse 36)



Optional activities

1. As a group, play a drama showing two people facing persecution with different attitudes: the first one has put other people or things before God (spouse, family, job, honour in society, future, finances, his life, etc.). The other one puts God first. Show the consequences of both attitudes. Then, pray individually for God to forgive you if you did not put him first and ask him to help you gain victory in this area.
2. Sing a song of worship proclaiming Jesus as the highest priority in our lives. You can choose your own song or one from the list below:
 - [Jesus, Only You](#), by Kathryn Scott
 - [Goodness of God](#), by Bethel

- [All I Once Held Dear](#)
 - [Stand Together](#), from Kingdom Rock
 - [People of the Cross](#), by Selah
3. Watch [this video retelling the story](#) behind the song ‘I have decided to follow Jesus’. Pray and ask God to help you commit to following Jesus, whatever the cost. Then, sing [the song](#) prayerfully.



Applications

1. Think of occasions where you have had to choose to follow Christ’s teaching rather than conform to the expectations of members of your family. Share these with the group. What was the outcome of your decision? Then, pray for one another.
2. Pray and ask God to show you if you are afraid to do something or if you fear someone because of persecution. In groups of two, share what God has shown you and pray that you would be delivered from this fear. Throughout the week, if you become fearful recite Matthew 10: 28a and 31: “Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Don’t be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows.”



Sharing

This week, share with others what you have learned in this lesson. You can also redo the lesson with someone.



Lesson 4: A Response to Persecution: the Apostles

Name: _____ Date: _____

Lesson Objectives

1. To understand the response of the apostles and the early church to persecution by authorities.
2. To be ready to appear before authorities to testify to one's faith.
3. To consider how to wisely give testimony to Christ without fear of authorities.



How are you getting on?

1. What were the main points of the last lesson?
2. What happened when you shared with others what you learned?
3. What changed in your lives as a result of these teachings?



Read Acts 5:12-42 carefully.



Why did the religious leaders arrest the apostles and put them in prison? (verse 17)



The High Priest and his associates had given the apostles strict orders not to teach in Jesus' name. (4:18). But they did anyway and were arrested and put in prison. That night the Lord sent an angel to release them from prison.



What did the apostles do immediately the next morning? (verse 21)



Why? (verses 5:20 and 4:19-20)



What does 'We must obey God rather than men' mean? (verse 29)



Give a possible real-life situation for which a believer in your country would have to follow this principle.



When men fight against us because we teach about Jesus, who are they really fighting against? (verse 39)



Why did the apostles rejoice after leaving the presence of the Sanhedrin?



What did they continue doing? (verse 42)



Optional activities

1. Watch the [Book of Acts movie](#), in particular the section covering Acts 5:12 to Acts 8:4. As you listen, note the outcomes of persecution for different disciples. Discuss as a group how they glorified God whether through their lives or their death.
2. Pray for those who are presently persecuted. Ask that they would glorify God whatever the outcome or their trials. Keep praying for them during the week.
3. In times of persecution, disciples who seemed strong will sometimes become afraid and divided. Recall how Peter ended up denying Christ three times (see Luke 22:54-62). How can the church stay close to Christ during persecution? What are some things that a church can do to avoid division and lies? Discuss this as a group.



Applications

1. For which activities is it worth taking the risk of provoking a negative reaction within our family, among our neighbours or from the authorities? Discuss this as a group. Then, pray entrusting yourselves to God's care with confidence that he will give you the grace you need when the time comes.
2. Meditate on the following verse: "The **king's heart is in the hand of the LORD**, like the rivers of water; He turns it wherever He wishes." (Proverbs 21:1) Then, pray for God to move in the hearts of those who are in authority in your family, your town or your country. This week, continue to pray for the authorities.
3. If someone in the group is presently being persecuted, pray together for them and ask God to remove any fear from their hearts and to help them testify wisely in front of their persecutors. (If no one is being persecuted in the group, pray in the same way for brothers and sisters who are.) In the coming days, keep praying for those who are being persecuted.
4. Discuss as a group how you could encourage and give practical support, either individually or as a group, to those who are being persecuted. Ask God to guide you in this. Decide which steps you need to take to implement this initiative and decide who is going to do what. Then, pray that you would be real encouragers for those who face trials.



Sharing

This week, share with others what you have learned in this lesson. You can also redo the lesson with someone.



Lesson 5: Jesus, Our Example in Suffering

Name: _____ Date: _____

Lesson Objectives

1. *More fully understand the attitude of Jesus in the face of unjust persecution and torture unto death.*
2. *Accept to follow his example with patience, joy and hope.*
3. *Trust God to help and strengthen us through every trial and preserve us unto eternal life.*



How are you getting on?

1. What were the main points of the last lesson?
2. What happened when you shared with others what you learned?
3. What changed in your lives as a result of these teachings?



Read 1 Peter 2:19-25, 4:12-19 and 5:5-11 carefully.



Not all suffering is commendable to God.



Explain what this means according to 1 Peter 2:19-21.



In 2:21, Peter says that we are to follow in Christ's footsteps regarding unjust suffering.



According to verses 22-23, how did Christ respond to his tormentors?



What was Jesus' mindset which sustained him while being tortured? (23b-25)



Re-read verses 4:12-19. Then, tick the correct answers below. A person who suffers for being a believer in Jesus Christ...



can rejoice.



should be surprised.

- ☐ is blessed by the Spirit of God.
 - ☐ should praise God for the privilege of bearing the name of Jesus Christ.
 - ☐ should not be ashamed.
 - ☐ should stop doing good.
 - ☐ cannot be suffering according to God's will.
-



How does our 'judgment' now compare with the coming judgment of those who oppose the Gospel of Christ? (4:17-18)



This present life is the only opportunity we will have to glorify God through suffering for his sake!



Re-read 1 Peter 5:6-11.



What should we do with all our anxieties? (Verse 7).



What does this mean?



How is this possible? Take time right now and put this verse into practice!!!



According to 1 Peter 5:9, choose the correct statements from among the following:



I am the only one who is going through this kind of suffering for Christ.



There are many brothers throughout the world who suffer just as I do for Christ.



While I am suffering for Christ, I am to resist the devil and stand firm in the faith.



The suffering that we endure is for a 'little while'. What things will the Lord do for us after we have suffered? (Verse 10)



In his first epistle, Peter has a lot to say about suffering as a believer in Christ. If you have time, read the whole epistle and note the passages that teach directly about suffering.



Optional activity

1. Watch the episodes of the trial and the crucifixion in the ['Jesus' movie](#) (Luke 22:39 to 23:49). As you watch, note the different persecutions that Jesus endured and how he reacted. Then, pray that you would become more like Jesus as you face trials and persecutions.
2. Sing a song of worship thanking Jesus for enduring the cross for your salvation. You can choose your own song or one from the list below:
 - [From Heaven You Came](#), by Graham Kendrick
 - [Thank You for the Cross, Lord](#), by the Brooklyn Tabernacle Choir
 - [When I Survey the Wondrous Cross](#), by Spring Harvest group worship
 - [This the Power of the Cross](#), by Stuart Townend
 - [Above All](#), by Michael W Smith



Applications

1. How is God changing your attitude toward persecution to be more conformed to Christ's perspective? Discuss this as a group. Then, pray together that you would become more like Jesus in the face of opposition. Ask the same thing for believers who are being persecuted presently. In the coming days, keep praying for this.
2. In Acts 9:25, we see the local church helping the future Apostle Paul to escape death. They lowered him in a basket over the wall. How should we work together to help those facing persecution going forward? Discuss this as a group and ask God to show you if there is anything he wants you to do, individually, as a group or through your local church to help a persecuted brother or sister in danger. If so, decide which steps to take to implement this and, if applicable, who is going to do what. Then, commit this action to the Lord in prayer.



Review of Course 105

Review the five lessons of this Course. What is the most helpful thing you have learned? Share your discoveries with the group.

Ask the students to present the 3-5-minute messages they have prepared based on a verse that has particularly strengthened them and that they have learned by heart. Their message should encourage the others in the group with what they have learned through this course and include testimonies of how it has impacted their lives.



Sharing

This week, share with others what you have learned in this lesson. You can also redo the lesson with someone.

