

activate

THE
BUILDING
BLOCKS
OF FAITH

What we want students to learn: That people who publicly identify as followers of God have always experienced persecution.

What we want them to do with what they've learned: To evaluate whether or not they are living their life in such a way that they would even be in the position to be persecuted.

Scripture Focus: Psalms 38:19-22, Psalms 119:68-72, Psalms 119:85-87, Psalms 69:13-18, Psalms 74:18-21, Psalms 124:6-8, Psalms 37:12-13

Overview: As long as people have been living as followers of God, they have been persecuted for it. The vast majority of people reading this lesson will do so from the confines of cultures in which it's not life-threatening to be a Christ-follower. Those of us who live in cultures where we are free to practice our faith must be aware of our brothers and sisters around the world who face death for Christ's sake. However, we need to help our students see that persecution is relative to the culture they find themselves in. In the US, persecution might not be imprisonment. But if students are made fun of because of their faith, ostracized, left out, or bullied, they are experiencing persecution.

It's important that they understand the roots of persecution that go back to the Old Testament (Lesson 32), the powerful words Christ had to say about persecution (Lesson 33), and the way we are called to handle persecution (Lesson 34). This lesson will challenge your students to think about their own lives and ask: Are their lives enough like Christ's that they would experience persecution? And if not . . . why not?

TEACHER PREP VIDEO

Each **Activate** lesson comes with a Teacher Prep Video. These are short videos designed to help you grasp the main point of the lesson as you prepare to teach.

To access your **Persecution** lesson 32 Teacher Prep Video, login to your Lesson Manager, navigate to lesson 32, and click on the "Background" tab. You'll notice the Teacher Prep Video near the top of the Lesson Manager window.

BIBLE BACKGROUND

The **Bible Background** is designed to help you provide some context for the Scripture you'll be studying. The Details gives you background info for each book, The Setting informs you what's happening in and around the passage, and The Main Point gives you an overview of how the passage will be used in the lesson.

- **What do we mean by "context"?** In every **YM360** Bible study lesson, you'll notice we make a point to encourage you to provide the context for the passages you study. By "context" we mean at the very least helping students know **who** wrote the book, **when** it was written, and **why** it was written.

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- **What's the big deal?** When we teach the Bible without giving context, students don't get a "big picture" understanding of the story of the Bible. But this view is vital to grasping the story of God's plan of redemption for humankind. As you teach, use the Bible Background to help summarize the context.

THE DETAILS

Psalms

- **Author:** God inspired various authors to write a majority of the Psalms in their era, including seventy-three by David, twelve by Asaph, eleven by the Korahites and two by Solomon. Heman, Ethan, and Moses each wrote one, while the authorship of fifty other Psalms remains unknown.
- **Timeframe:** The Psalms were written during different eras of Israel's history, spanning from 1100 BC (i.e., Psalm 29, 68) to 400 BC (i.e., Psalm 119).
- **Purpose:** The Psalms are inspired by God to poetically reflect humanity's journey with Him. Each psalm serves a different purpose, such as a personal or communal lament, hymn, song, reflection or declaration. Many of these were set to music and intended to be shared publicly, even when sharing a revealing confession (i.e., Psalm 51).

THE MAIN POINT

The idea is to help your students understand the idea that persecution for following Christ is something that is inherent to their faith. God's people have always been persecuted. You'll use the following teaching points and Scripture to lead students to this understanding.

- **You'll help students see that persecution is when people experience any level of negative treatment because of their identification as believers in God. You'll do this using the Psalm 38, and 119 passages.**
- **Then, you'll show students that when they face persecution for being Christ-followers, they can take their emotions to God and know that He hears them. You'll work through the Psalm 69 and 74 passages.**
- **Finally, you'll help students understand that God will ultimately take their cause, honoring their faith, bringing glory to Himself, and punishing those who persecute His people. Students will dig into Psalm 124 and 37.**

LESSON PLAN

The **Lesson Plan** contains three elements: An introductory activity called **The Lead In**; the Bible study section called **The Main Event**; an application-focused segment called **The Last Word**.

THE LEAD IN

- **Goal:** The idea is to create a discussion about persecution and sacrifice by using an interesting story about a neglected pet.
- **Set-Up:** Prepare to either access this story in class, or print it so you can share it with the group.

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FIRST, explain to students that you are going to be reading them a really tragic story. Access the story by doing a Google search for “tortoise survives locked storage room.” Then read the story to the group.

THEN, once you have read the story, ask students to share about a time when they felt neglected or ignored. Make sure they communicate how this made them feel. Many of the students may share times when they felt like they were left out of social situations or were the last ones picked for kickball, and so on. Try to invite participation about a time when they felt persecuted or judged in any instance.

NEXT, transition students into understanding that just like Manuela, we all have stories of when we felt like we were ignored, left out, or mistreated for various reasons. Turn the conversation toward our spiritual walk by asking the students:

- **How many of you have been mistreated or ignored because of your faith?**
- **Share a time when someone treated you poorly because of what you stood for regarding your faith in Jesus?**

FINALLY, remind students:

- **Jesus was an outcast in His day. He was rejected to the point of being crucified on a cross – and He is our example. This is the first of three lessons where we will look at the concept of persecution. In this lesson, we’ll discuss how it’s not a matter of if you will be persecuted as a Christ-follower, but when we will receive persecution. Let’s look a little deeper and see what we can learn about this admittedly tricky subject.**

THE MAIN EVENT

- **Goal:** The idea is for students to understand that persecution is present in our day and age. Students will learn to embrace the fact that God tells us we will experience persecution – but to rest in Him in spite of any opposition to the Gospel.
- **Set-Up:** No set-up required, just have your Bible handy.

FIRST, ask students to define for you what they think “persecution” means and how it may differ in their contexts in comparison to what the early Believers experienced. There really are no wrong answers in a discussion like this as students experience persecution indifferent contexts, though most of them are not on the same level as much of what the Believers in Scripture, and even in other places of the world have experienced.

For the purpose of this study, we want to define persecution simply as: When we experience any type of negative treatment because of who we are and what we stand for in Christ.

THEN, pick a few students to read the following verses aloud: Psalm 38:19-22, Psalm 119:68-72, and Psalm 119:85-87. While they are looking for the passages, provide some context for Psalms using the Bible Background. Once they’ve found and read the passages, ask:

- **What are some consistencies we see among these passages?**
 - Answer: It seems as if the persecution mentioned in these passages is defined as hardship we experience when we haven’t done anything wrong. In fact, it’s experienced when we are doing something good in trying to pursue Christ. We’re faced with the opposition that brings on persecution.

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- Another consistency is that the Psalmist is asking for God to give him the strength to overcome. He keeps his focus on the Lord even in the midst of his trials.
- **How do these verses describe the persecutors?**
 - Answer: It claims that they are callous and unfeeling, arrogant and hateful.
- **Why do you think others persecute Christians?**
 - Answer: The sin nature that we are born with dominates how we live if we don't have Christ and the Holy Spirit dwelling in us. We tend to put down things that we don't understand or disagree with. Much of the persecution we experience today is because someone believes something different from us or is vigilant in their own faith about those who differ from their own beliefs.
- **How do you think Christians are persecuted today?**
 - Answer: Christians are persecuted in a number of ways, and this list can be endless. In the US, Christians are often persecuted by words, restrictions and other ways that people mistreat others verbally or emotionally. Across the world, there are Christians who die for their faith often

NEXT, transition to our second teaching point by explaining to students that we can be confident that when we face persecution, God is with us and wants us to cast our cares on Him. Read or have a student read few Psalm 69:13-18 aloud. Then ask:

- **What emotions do you think the psalmist is experiencing?**
 - Answer: Insecurity, loneliness, overwhelmed, and terror may be a few of the things gleaned from this passage as to what the psalmist was experiencing.
- **What steps has the psalmist taken in the midst of his opposition?**
 - Answer: He begins in prayer! (Vs. 13) He reminds himself of God's faithfulness and salvation. (Vs. 13) He expresses his knowledge that God can save him. (Vs. 14) He embraces God's desire to be near to him in times of trouble. (Vs. 16-18) He focuses on persevering, not giving in. He isn't asking for retribution, but for comfort.

THEN, have a student to read Psalm 74:18-21 aloud. Ask:

- **Why is it so easy to forget that if we have God on our side, it's our enemies that should fear us instead of us fearing them?**
 - Answers will vary.
- **What encouragement does the psalmist offer to someone who has been persecuted or may be discouraged?**
 - Answer: He reminds him that this is nothing new – the enemy has mocked and berated before. This is more of the same. That being said, he encourages no retreat this time, and just like last time to stand firm and give God the glory and victory.
- **How can we be confident that God hears us when we are being persecuted?**
 - Answer: He promises never to leave us or forsake us. Ultimately, we serve a big, huge God who is not only the Creator of the universe but who deeply cares about us individually.

NEXT, explain to students that if we're on God's side, we should be confident in knowing that He will gain glory out of the situation and will defend His people. Have a student read the following verses; Psalms 124:6-8 and Psalms 37:12-13. Then ask:

- **Does it bring you comfort to know that God defends those He loves and punishes those who oppose His people and message?**

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- Answers will vary.
- **Do you think that by fearing persecution, we are in fact questioning God's faithfulness and power? Why or why not?**
 - Answers will vary.
- **How does knowing that God will defend you change your boldness in sharing your faith? Would you ever want to be on the opposing side of God?**
 - Answers will vary.
- **How does God's defense of those who are persecuted speak to the goodness of His nature?**
 - Answers will vary.

FINALLY, share with students why it is important to understand persecution is a likely part of the Christian life. Say something like this:

- **We all experience persecution in different ways. Some of us may never see a type of persecution that leads to our physical death, but in a very real way God tells us to prepare for it and that He is ready to be our defender. We can be confident in knowing that God will not leave us on our own and that we can seek Him when we are feeling opposition or discouraged through persecution.**

THE LAST WORD

- **Goal:** The idea is for students to see how God is an ever-present help for us when we experience trials and persecution in our lives.
- **Set-Up:** No set-up required

FIRST, engage students in a frank, relevant discussion about the practical experiences of persecution they have or have not experienced. Ask students a few application questions to drive the idea home:

- **Is it more difficult to experience physical or verbal persecution?**
- **Name a time that you experienced persecution or saw someone else persecuted. What was your/their response to that persecution?**
- **Why is it so difficult to stand up for Christ in our schools and among our peers?**
- **Why do we fear persecution or rejection by others?**
- **How should the knowledge that we don't stand alone change our behavior when we are persecuted?**
- **If you are not experiencing persecution on any level, could it be that you are not truly following Christ?**
 - Spend some time on this last one. It will hit close to home. Make sure students don't hear that they should go looking for persecution. But make sure they do understand that they are to be identified with Christ so closely that they would find themselves at odds with the world.

FINALLY, encourage the students by saying something like:

- **God is with us when we suffer for His Name's sake. It is because of His love for us that He sent His son to experience rejection and persecution to the fullest extent – by giving his life for us on the cross. Jesus showed us ultimately that He is not afraid of even death itself and conquered it by raising back to life. We can have confidence and boldness moving forward that He is with us and that should be enough. The next time you are experiencing opposition and even persecution for standing up for the Good**

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News of the Gospel – remember that you are not alone and He is more than capable of handling that situation for His glory. Remain faithful to Him and His Word.

- Don't forget to distribute the devotions to your students this week. If you're posting them on Instagram, or some other means of electronic distribution, make sure you inform students of when they will be receiving them.
- Use the **Social Media** guide to stay in touch with students via text or Instagram, and to encourage them to follow through with reading their devotions.

WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU . . .

- Do you have questions about a lesson?
- Something that worked particularly well you want to share?
- Something that didn't work you want to bring up?

We value your feedback! Please do not hesitate to email us with your questions, comments, or concerns, at feedback@youthministry360.com.