

# THE LIFE

EMBRACING THE LIFE OF A CHRIST-FOLLOWER

## Part 3: The Cost of Discipleship Lesson 50: Following Jesus Won't Make You Popular

**What we want students to learn:** That faithfully living as a Christ-follower will cause you to be persecuted for your faith.

**What we want students to do with what they've learned:** To see persecution as a sign of faithfulness, and to stand firm in what they know is true and right.

**Scripture Focus:** 2 Timothy 3:10-15

**Supporting Scripture:** 1 Peter 4:12-14

**Overview:** When we think of persecution we automatically go to the worst extreme of the spectrum. We think of Christians in certain places that are at risk of losing their lives for their faith. When we do this, it's easy to only think of persecution in the extreme. And while our hearts should break for those who must face death or imprisonment for their faith, we have to help our students understand that persecution is best understood by context. Persecution in the US looks different than persecution in Southeast Asia or the Middle East. But it is still persecution nonetheless. The goal of this lesson is to help students understand the persecution they experience and to know how to process it in a way that is informed by Scripture.

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## Teacher Prep Video

Each *LIFE* 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 *LIFE* lesson 50 Teacher Prep Video, login to your Lesson Manager, navigate to lesson 50, and click on the "Background" tab. You'll notice the Teacher Prep Video near the top of the Lesson Manager window.

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## 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 of what's happening in and around the passage. *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.
- **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

- **Author:** Though in the last 200 years or so there have been efforts by some scholars to shed doubt on Paul's authorship of both 1 and 2 Timothy, their arguments aren't very compelling.
- **Time frame:** Most scholars believe Paul wrote these letters to Timothy, his apprentice in ministry, between Paul's first and second imprisonment in Rome. By most accounts, this would place the writing of 1 and 2 Timothy sometime around 64–65 AD, though 2 Timothy could be as late as 67 AD.
- **Purpose:** Paul tells Timothy in the first epistle to continue to combat false teachings. In addition, Paul gives Timothy specific instructions on how to protect against such teaching, including how to install faithful leadership in the church at Ephesus. In

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2 Timothy, we see Paul passing along his final words to Timothy. 2 Timothy can be thought of as a personal note from an old man awaiting his death to a young, son-like figure. It's personal, tender at times, encouraging, and practical.

### The Setting

Paul was like a father to Timothy. Paul was Timothy's mentor, teacher, and ministry advisor. Throughout the New Testament, Timothy is constantly with Paul. As Paul neared the end of his life, knowing that he would soon be executed for his faith, he decided to write one final letter to his "beloved child" (2 Tim. 2:2). Persecution was heating up against the Christian movement under the leadership of Nero, the Roman Emperor. Paul addressed it in his final letter to Timothy in the verses that we will look at today. 1 Peter was written within a few years of 2 Timothy. Peter saw the persecution and also addressed the issue in his letter, relating our experience in suffering to Christ's.

### The Main Point

We treasure the promises of Scripture that God gives us. So often these promises outline God's love, faithfulness, and grace to us as disciples. 2 Timothy and 1 Peter offer a different kind of promise. "Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted" (2 Tim. 3:12). Persecution is a reality of our journey as Jesus' disciples. Even so, persecution should not keep us from proclaiming the Gospel or living for God. For Christians, when we experience persecution we can also experience blessing and the glorious presence of God. This should fuel us to keep going, no matter how hard it is to live for our faith.

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### Lesson Plan

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

### The Lead In

- **Goal:** To help students think about the persecution they are sure to face as disciples of Jesus.
- **Set-Up:** Bring something that shows who/what you are a fan of.

FIRST, ask your students who is the biggest "fan" in your group? It could be a sports team, a band, a school or some other high profile person/group. You are looking for someone that is an unapologetic, die-hard fan. Then ask that student would it would take for them to stop being a fan of their favorite person/group. Once you have identified the biggest fan, ask them some of the following questions. Remind them to answer honestly:

- **Would you still be a fan if other people teased you about it?**
- **Would you still be a fan if it meant you would lose some friends?**
- **Would you still be a fan if your parents disapproved of it?**
- **Would you still be a fan if it meant you couldn't get an education or attend your school anymore?**
- **Would you still be a fan if it meant you could never get a job?**
- **Would you still be a fan if most people shunned you because of it?**
- **Would you still be a fan if all your possessions were taken from you?**
- **Would you still be a fan if you were physically beaten for it?**
- **Would you still be a fan if it meant that your family and those you love would be in danger for it?**
- **Would you still be a fan if your life were in danger because of it? If you could die for it?**

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Unless you get a sarcastic volunteer, at some point, they will break under the growing pressure of being a fan. The point is that we have our limits when it comes to being a fan of a certain person/group. Put us under enough pressure, and we will give way under the intensity.

NEXT, say something like this:

- I am a **HUGE** fan of \_\_\_\_\_. There is a lot that I would endure and still be a fan. However, if you put the kind of pressure on me that I just described, sooner or later, I would have to break. The more intense the pressure, the more willing I would become to walk away from being a fan. However, our faith cannot work that way. In Scripture, we are assured that each of us will experience persecution because we are Jesus-followers.

THEN, have your students define persecution. Answers may vary. Get a good working definition so that students have a grasp of what persecution means. *Nelson's Student Bible Dictionary* defines persecution as "the hatred and affliction that follows the witness and holy life of God's people in a hostile world." If we are honest, none of us wants to be hated, afflicted, or shunned for our beliefs. However, this is a reality that all Christians will face at some level.

FINALLY, explain to students that today will show us that following Jesus will not make us popular with some. However, persecution is not an excuse to refuse to follow God or make Him known to the world around us. Persecution happens all across the world in extreme ways. We should not be surprised when it happens in our lives in forms that may not be as extreme, but can still be damaging to us. Even so, we are promised in Scripture that in the midst of persecution we can experience the blessing and presence of God powerfully.

Transition into *The Main Event* portion of the lesson.

### The Main Event

- **Goal:** To help students understand that faithfully living as a Christ-follower will cause them to be persecuted for your faith.
- **Set Up:** You may benefit from a dry-erase board, but it's not critical. Make sure students have a Bible or that they are able to look along with a friend. You'll also want to arrange to have three slips of paper with one of the following locations and Scripture references on each: Antioch – Acts 13:42-52; Iconium – Acts 14:1-7; Lystra – Acts 14:15-20

FIRST, read or have a student read 2 Timothy 3:10-11. Explain that 2 Timothy is a letter to a church leader named Timothy from his mentor, Paul. Paul and Timothy were close and much of who Timothy was in life and ministry was modeled after Paul. Verse 10 shows how Timothy has emulated Paul in many ways. Verse 11 is a warning that as Timothy follows the example of Paul, he will also experience persecution. Paul lists three places where he experienced intense opposition for his faith. It is difficult to understand what this persecution was like without knowing the accounts that Paul is referring to.

THEN, break your students into three smaller groups. Give each group a slip of paper with a place and a Scripture passage. The slips should read as follows:

- Antioch – Acts 13:42-52
- Iconium – Acts 14:1-7
- Lystra – Acts 14:15-20

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Have each group read their Scripture passage and answer the following question in their groups: **What did persecution look like for Paul after he preached the word of God?** After giving each group a few minutes, bring the groups back together and have each group share about what they found.

NEXT, remind students that Paul faced some of the most intense moments of persecution imaginable. Nearly every time he publicly preached the Gospel or spoke of God's Word he was abused, mistreated, and threatened with death. Then ask your students the following question:

- **If these things happened to you, would you go back? Why or why not?**
  - Answers may vary.

THEN, once students have answered, read or have a student read Acts 14:21-22. Incredibly, even after enduring all the abuse the people of Antioch, Iconium, and Lystra put him through, Paul was more concerned about the work of God in the lives of people than his own security. He was undeterred in his passion to bring the Gospel to those areas that needed it, no matter the cost. It seems like Paul was a "super-Christian," but as we will see, Paul's passion in the face of persecution is something we should all possess.

NEXT, read or have a student read 2 Timothy 4:12-13. Persecution is not just reserved for Biblical characters, people who live in foreign lands, and "super-Christians." Persecution is guaranteed to anyone who desires to live a godly life in Jesus Christ. The scriptures promise that persecution will be a part of our lives as disciples. Ask the following questions:

- **In what ways do you see persecution happen to Christians in our world?**
  - Answers may vary. The point is not to pull something from news headlines, but to get students thinking about what persecution looks like for those who live for God in their world. Examples could be: never being invited to a party because of your stance of getting drunk, being made fun of for being a virgin, being labeled "close-minded" by those who believe Jesus is not the only way to God, and so on. While these are not nearly as intense as what Paul faced, they still have an affect on how we live and think about our faith in culture.
- **How should we respond when we face this kind of persecution?**
  - Answers will vary. Explain that many people will take the persecution they receive and use it as reasons they fail to talk about their faith or live it out publicly. If you are made fun of for something, you are less apt to do it again. If you are shunned for acting a certain way, you are tempted to change your behavior. It is for these reasons that untold numbers of students who sincerely love Jesus remain silent or private about their faith.

THEN, read or have a student read 2 Timothy 3:14-15. Paul challenges his protégé Timothy to "continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed." Explain to students that adversity is not an excuse for disobedience. We cannot allow an unbelieving world to influence us to be less committed as a disciple of Jesus. Instead, we are to lean into the scriptures and live our faith publicly, unapologetically to the watching world. Say something like:

- **When we do this, something incredible occurs. Even those that persecute us see the genuineness of our faith. Sometimes, it even convinces them that what we believe is true.**

At this point, many students may still be wondering how they can endure in the face of such intense opposition to their faith. Even if they are motivated to help their persecutors believe, how does God work to help us in the midst of persecution? Have your students turn to 1 Peter, which also addresses persecution that was taking place against believers.

FINALLY, read or have a student read 1 Peter 4:12-14. In this powerful passage, Peter makes it clear that God supports those who are persecuted for His sake. Jesus not only understands but relates to those who are persecuted. After all, he was brutally persecuted for speaking the good news and seeking to forgive humankind of their sins. The passage from 1 Peter not only promises that

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disciples will be persecuted, but that in their persecution the presence of God will be there to sustain them. Say something like the following after this passage of Scripture is read:

- **Peter reiterates that persecution should not come as a surprise to disciples of Jesus. Disciples should expect it. However, Peter takes it from just enduring persecution to something much different. Peter says we should actually REJOICE when we face persecution. Why? We are actually sharing in the sufferings of Jesus Christ. He understands exactly what we are experiencing because He has been mocked, abused, and tortured for proclaiming the truth as well. When we are insulted for our beliefs in God, we are blessed and marked by the presence of God who understands.**

Ask if there are any questions and if there are none, transition into *The Last Word*.

### The Last Word

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- **Goal:** To give students an idea of how to practically face persecution when they face it.
- **Set-Up:** A picture of a Facebook or Instagram comment section under a post.

FIRST, show your students the picture of the comment section under a social media post. Point out that in our day in age, we often limit what we will post based upon the comments that people will make about it. If I take a stance, what will people say, will they "like" it? Will they unfollow me? These are all considerations in what we post online about our lives, our beliefs, and our views.

THEN, point out that our faith cannot be lived in that way. We cannot limit living out our faith to times when others will admire it. We have to be willing to live out our faith even when others will misunderstand and even persecute us for it. Persecution should not stop us from doing what God has called us to do. Then ask the following question:

- **What have you been hesitant to do in your faith because you were afraid of what others might say or think? Why is this a wrong way to approach our faith?**
  - Answers may vary. The point is to get students really thinking about how the persecution they face actually affects the freedom they feel to live out their faith.

NEXT, remind your students that God promises to bless us and be present with us when we face persecution. Say something like:

- **When you take a public stand for your faith, and you face persecution, never forget that God is there with you. You are not standing alone, but God is standing along with you. We see this clearly in Scripture. A good example is a follower of Jesus named Stephen. At the very moment that he was standing for God and facing the persecution that would eventually kill him, Jesus was standing for him (Acts 7:55). We serve a God who is there to back us up with all the power and strength that we need found in His presence when we face persecution.**

FINALLY, have your students spend some time in a group prayer. Ask them to pray aloud for strength to stand in the face of persecution. Challenge them to pray for those that persecute them. Leave space for everyone in the group to pray if you have time and if they want to. After a few minutes, close in prayer.

- 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.
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## 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](mailto:feedback@youthministry360.com).