

Trying Times

By RLD Editorial Team

for use as

STEP 1

**Lesson 8****Focus:**

Being a Christian can be tough.

Lesson 8**Bible Basis:**

Acts 21:10-14, 27-28, 31, 33; 23:11

Lesson 8**Memory Verse:**

If you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name.
—1 Peter 4:16

Your students will learn about the religious persecution in the Christian church today as they explore the reality that being a Christian can be tough.

Materials:

Internet access

As a way to introduce today's lesson to your students, invite students to respond to this question.

➤ **Have you ever been hurt, excluded, or judged by others for something you believe? What was that experience like?** (Answers will vary.)

After students have shared their experiences, share the following story with them:

Around the world, Christians are persecuted for their faith. Just a few weeks ago on Christmas Eve, the terrorist group Boko Haram attacked a Christian village in Nigeria. They killed members of the church, burned homes and a church, and stole essentials supplies from the villagers. This terrorist organization has attacked and persecuted Christians for decades, but the Nigerian church continues to stand firm in God.

Story source: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-55448105>

➤ **Does it surprise you to learn that Christians are being persecuted for their faith around the world?** (Answers will vary.)

➤ **Statistics show that one in twelve Christian believers cannot live out their faith without harassment, intimidation, or fear. Have you ever been treated differently for your faith? Have you seen other Christians experience this?** (Answers will vary.)

➤ **The video briefly touched on different sources of difficulty for Christian minorities. Can you remember some of them?** (Government, community pressure, and even within their own families.)

➤ **Why do you think most American Christians take their freedoms for granted?** (We are pretty insulated from the rest of the world, we are so accustomed to practicing our faith openly without fear, we don't necessarily live out our faith publicly, etc.)

We are going to be learning more about what some of the early Christians experienced from the Book of Acts. The apostle Paul knew what it was like to face persecution, and his example is a good lesson for us even today.

(Continue on to Steps 2 and 3 in your teacher's guide; your Step 4 appears below.)

middle school



Lesson 8 / January 24, 2021

Trying Times

for use as
STEP 4 

Lesson 8

Focus:

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Bible Basis:

Acts 21:10-14, 27-28, 31, 33; 23:11

Lesson 8

Memory Verse:

If you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name.
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Materials:

- 1 piece of paper (or a screen-shared picture of a piece of paper)
- 1 piece of cardboard (or a screen-shared picture of a piece of cardboard)
- 1 piece of wood (or a screen-shared picture of a piece of wood)

We've been studying just how costly following Jesus Christ can be. But if we're honest, sometimes what we might call **PERSECUTION** is really just **CONFLICT**. Think about it: when you disagree with someone about what's right or wrong, for example, that's not the same thing as real persecution. Persecution happens when we are targeted specifically for our belief in the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

The Bible teaches that persecution (and conflict, too) is to be expected for the believer. We should expect to be different, to be misunderstood, and to suffer. These are not easy things to grasp when we live in a country that chases comfort and belonging so strongly.

If you are meeting in person, place three objects on a table: a piece of paper, a piece of cardboard, and piece of wood. If you are meeting online, you can show pictures of these three items using a shared screen. Ask students to imagine how all three items would hold up against strong wind.

➤ **What do paper, cardboard, and wood have in common?** (They are all made of the same wood fibers but of different density and composition.)

➤ **What makes paper and cardboard so much flimsier and easy to topple?** (Even though they might contain wood fibers, they are weaker in structure. They don't have as much weight behind them as the piece of wood.)

➤ **How are Christians a lot like these three materials?** (The casual Christian is not mature or strong enough to withstand resistance, while the strong Christian has a lot of "substance" behind his beliefs.)

Persecution is a lot like strong wind to these three items. It pushes back against Christians, trying to knock us over and make us weak and useless. But Jesus is stronger than any opposition! Let's see if we can take action and increase our strength so when we are confronted, we can stand firm.

There are two ways we can take action against those who want to destroy our faith. First, we must know what we believe in and why. This doesn't happen in one class lesson—or even after a few months of becoming a Christian—but every time we learn more about what we believe, we add those wood fibers to our faith. Secondly, we must bond with other believers who can encourage and provide support.

Ask students to think of specific things that they can do to improve their “strength density” as believers. They can consider things like building relationships with other believers, consistent Bible study, being part of a Bible-believing local church, praying with other friends at school, and so forth. If you have time, allow students to share some of the best ideas with the entire class. Challenge students to incorporate at least one idea to strengthen their spiritual density over the next week.

Close your lesson with prayer, asking Jesus to strengthen and encourage the global Church in the face of persecution.

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