



A KINGDOM WORTH DYING FOR: What should we do about persecution? Facilitator's Guide

KINGDOM

🎯 OVERVIEW:

Persecution has plagued the church since it first began, over 2,000 years ago. Is this something that should be expected? Will following Christ inevitably lead to persecution? And if so, what should our response be to persecution or other hardships we might face in the name of Jesus? This lesson will demonstrate that hardships we face, minor or life-threatening, for the sake of Jesus' mission and serving others should not be avoided. Rather, they connect us with Christ, who suffered and died for us.

? OPENING QUESTIONS:

- Has anyone looked down on you because of your faith? What was your response?
- When are the times you find yourself hiding the fact (or purposely omitting the fact) that you're a Christ follower? Why?

💬 WHAT THE BIBLE HAS TO SAY ABOUT IT:

If someone made a movie out of the Bible, it would either be R-rated, or the writers would have to take out a bunch of stories. A lot of tough stuff happens to believers in the early church, just because they followed Jesus. They're mocked, harassed, kicked out of towns, and in many cases, killed. Those who are killed for following Jesus are called martyrs, and the first martyr was a guy named Stephen. When he preached about the good news of Christ, a bunch of people picked up rocks and stoned him to death.

What do you think Christ-followers should do if they're put in this kind of situation? Should they keep under the radar so they can protect themselves? Or should they stick up for what they believe, knowing that there are a lot of people in the world who want to hurt them? This is a question followers of Christ have been wrestling with for centuries, not just a long time ago, but even today. There are many places in the world where believers fear for their lives and experience physical pain because they follow Jesus openly. But even here in the United States, following Christ can still inflict a social and emotional toll. Following Jesus won't always lead to an easy, carefree life. Often, it will make your life harder. How will you respond when others belittle you because of your faith? How would you respond if your relationship with Jesus put your life in danger? Peter, Jesus' close friend and follower, explains what we should do in the following passage.

Read: 1 Peter 4:12–19

Discuss:

- How does Peter believe we should respond to suffering? Why?
- How can the safe routine of just going to church on Sundays sometimes get in the way of loving people who need our help?
- How does our desire for safety and convenience get in the way of loving people who need our help?





LEADER'S NOTE: Here are a few more Bible passages that explain how Christ-followers should respond to persecution: Jeremiah 20:11; Matthew 5:10; Matthew 5:43–48; John 15:18–19; 2 Timothy 3:10–13; James 1:2–4.

* A SECOND LOOK:

He managed to escape. Sure, it wasn't some elaborate rescue mission. It was just an invitation to teach in another country. But he could only hide for so long. So he got out of there, and fast. Away from the impending war, away from the threats, and away from the abuse and impending doom so many of his friends endured. Finally, he was out of sight and out of mind. He hoped.

When Dietrich got to the States, he started doing all the right things. He taught in a seminary, he helped other escapees find refuge and start over. Back in Germany, the Nazis had been breathing down his neck. He had to lead a seminary “on the run,” and his students were arrested. In the States, he could have more impact in a classroom that wasn't under attack—right? But as time went on, Dietrich couldn't avoid seeing the real needs of the people he loved back in Germany. He couldn't walk away from them. His trusted friends told him that he was in the right place. But he eventually wrote, “I have made a mistake in coming to America. I must live through this difficult period in our national history with the Christian people of Germany. I will have no right to participate in the reconstruction of Christian life in Germany after the war if I do not share the trials of this time with my people.”¹ So, Dietrich returned to Germany, choosing service over safety. He worked hard to meet needs, and suffered greatly. He took part in the Nazi resistance, he held the church to God's standards, and when he was arrested, he reached out to his fellow prisoners and even the guards by holding Sunday services and teaching them about Jesus Christ. He did all this before he turned 39, when he was executed by the Nazis.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer didn't get lost in his own world, seeking comfort and security. Instead, he put his own safety on the line for the sake of Jesus' message and mission.

LEADER'S NOTE: Keep in mind that many of our students are afraid to represent their faith because of what people might think or say. Students are afraid they will be viewed as intolerant or unintellectual. In these cases, a person isn't persecuting them, but they are acting as if someone is. Satan uses this fear to keep the gospel hidden. As students answer these questions about persecution and faith, help them identify the moments they act persecuted, even if they aren't. Guide them toward making a plan to overcome this fear the next time they encounter it. Maybe they can start by memorizing Romans 1:16: “I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes.”

Discuss:

- What did Bonhoeffer risk in order to show Christ's love to the people of Germany? Do you think he knew what he was risking?
- What would have been different if Dietrich hadn't gone back to Germany?
- You might not face the life-or-death risk that Bonhoeffer did, but how might you be persecuted because of your faith in Jesus?
- Do you think you would have been able to follow God's call into a life-threatening place, like Bonhoeffer did? Why or why not?



RATE IT:

Give yourself a 1 to 5 rating. How do you react to uncomfortable situations regarding your faith?

1

I usually try to protect myself first, even if that means missing opportunities to serve others.

3

If it's convenient, I'll love or help out my neighbor.

5

I regularly risk my status, time, and convenience to follow Christ's call and love on my neighbors.



LIVE IT OUT: *Extreme Hot Potato*

What you'll need: a tennis ball (or similar object)

Have students stand in a circle. Then tell them to take two large steps back so there's plenty of room in between students. Assign one person as the "starter" and hand them the tennis ball. Assign two students as the "distractors." Have students play "hot potato" with the tennis ball, tossing it to the next person in the circle until it goes all the way around and ends with the starter. No person can touch the ball for more than one second. If the ball touches the ground, they must start over.

Tell the distractors to keep the ball from making it around. The distractors can do anything they want (scream, wave their arms, get in the way) as long as they don't make contact with the other students or the ball. Repeat this a few times, choosing/adding new distractors to increase the challenge.

LEADER'S NOTE: The point is to keep students trying until they succeed, not settling for dropping the ball a single time, not letting the distractions and obstacles discourage them, and not looking for shortcuts (like holding the ball a little longer).

Discuss:

- What was hard about this activity? Why?
- What was it like to accomplish the task in the midst of adversity?
- What are the "distractors" you face that keep you from growing in or expressing your faith?
- What can you do to prepare yourself now for any future antagonism you might face in the name of Christ? Think about your answer to this question carefully. Is your answer an attempt to make yourself safer and more comfortable, or are you thinking of ways to build up your faith so that you can persevere in the midst of persecution and suffering?



↓ APPLY IT:

How connected are you to God's burden for the lost? This week, how can you connect to God's heart for the lost and actively seek out people who don't know Jesus?

Be specific:

What are you going to do?

When are you going to do it?

Is there someone who can keep you accountable?

LEADER'S NOTE: Whenever students make applications, challenge them to be specific. It's one thing to say, "I'm going to trust God more." The truth is, our students won't really know if they did this, or if they grew in trust over the week. It's another thing to say, "Every morning this week before I eat breakfast, I'm going to tell God that today is his and that I trust him, and I'm going to ask him to give me the strength to replace worries with trust." Challenge your students to answer the questions under the "Be Specific" section. You can even have them pair up, share their applications, and ask for accountability from their partner.

💬 THINK ABOUT IT:

"Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account," (Matt. 5:11).

"If you are going to walk with Jesus Christ, you are going to be opposed...In our days, to be a true Christian is really to become a scandal." – George Whitefield²

"Of course [spreading the good news of Jesus is] dangerous, but it's a lot more dangerous for all of us if we don't do it. Even in a conquering army there are casualties. Safety is not the issue when we look at the Great Commission. The purpose of the church cannot be to survive, or even to thrive, but to serve." – Brother Andrew³

***Any reference within this piece to Internet addresses of websites not under the administration of LeaderTreks is not to be taken as an endorsement of these websites by LeaderTreks; neither does LeaderTreks vouch for their content.

¹ "Dietrich Bonhoeffer: German Theologian and Resister," *ChristianityToday.com*, accessed July 19, 2017, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/history/people/martyrs/dietrich-bonhoeffer.html>.

² "13 George Whitefield Quotes That Will Challenge Your Spiritual Life," *RELEVANTMagazine.com*, December 16, 2015, accessed July 19, 2017, <https://relevantmagazine.com/god/church/13-george-whitefield-quotes-will-challenge-your-spiritual-life>.

³ Brother Andrew and Al Janssen, *Secret Believers: What Happens When Muslims Believe in Christ* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2007), Kindle edition.