

Study Series: The Good Life

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Lesson Title: “Happy Are the Persecuted” (pp. 94-107)

Session 7

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The main point of this lesson is: The good life only comes to those who are persecuted.

Focus on this goal: To help adults learn to take joy in their trials and persecutions as they rely more on Jesus

Key Bible Passage: Matthew 5:10-12

Before the Session

Continue using “The Good Life” chart begun in Session 1. (Steps 1 and 7)

During the Session

Step 1. Create Interest / Jumpstart Discussion

As a group, review the list on “The Good Life” chart you began in Session 1. Acknowledge that many of the items on the list seem to be the opposite of what most people would consider to be a life of joy and success. But stress that in God’s kingdom, true blessedness comes from mourning sin, thirsting for God, and making peace, even if the world never understands.

Note that today’s session is the last in this study, explaining that it might be the most difficult to receive and believe. Write Persecuted on the chart and invite learners to verbalize their initial reactions to this addition to the list.

Step 2. Life in the Margins

Briefly discuss the author’s story of being a tiny fish in the ocean, both in high school and in college (p. 94). From the third Day One paragraph (p. 94), draw the connection between his story and the influence of the church on American culture.

Invite a volunteer to read Matthew 5:10. Share that, as the church loses cultural influence, it will certainly experience more persecution. As a group, discuss that we as believers can either raise our hands in despair or we can choose to entrust our resilient and remarkable God.

Step 3. Persecution Is Life Fertilizer

Say: We might think that persecution is a terrible thing, but God brings good out of it. Invite a volunteer to read James 1:2-4.

Using the Day Two content (p. 96), explain that persecution is like a fertilizer that sinks into the soil of our hearts and minds.Point out that Abraham, the father of God’s chosen nation, was tested by God and that Jesus was persecuted (pp. 96-97).

Ask: What does it say about our faith when we find ourselves being persecuted for pursuing righteousness?

Step 4. Back to the Future

Use the opening Day Three paragraphs (pp. 98-99) to explain that the earliest Christians were Jews rejected by fellow Jews so they turned their message to the Gentiles.

Invite a volunteer to read Acts 1:8. Explore the difficulty of going into the world to reach people who had persecuted both Jews and Jesus. Invite another volunteer to read Acts 8:1. Read or summarize the paragraph (pp. 99-100) that begins “The overwhelmingly Jewish church . . . .”

Say: We can be confident that the same God who used persecution to spread the gospel in the early church is doing the same thing in our day, and will continue to do so in the future.

Step 5. Happy Are the Persecuted

Admit: The idea of finding joy in persecution is a hard teaching. But Jesus’s early disciples heard Him deliver hard teachings, as well. Invite a volunteer to read John 6:60-61,66-69. Encourage learners to pray for faith and hope to believe and trust these words of Jesus.

Invite a volunteer to read Matthew 5:10-12. Stress the reward that will come in heaven, but not necessarily on earth.

Use the Day Four content (p. 101) to honestly acknowledge that living for Jesus can easily lead to persecution from many sides. Then point learners back to the phrases of Matthew 5:10 and 12 that clearly reveal the eternal reward comes in heaven.

Step 6. Handling Persecution

Invite a volunteer to read Mark 3:20-30. Using the opening paragraph of Day Five (p. 103), point out the chaos swirling around Jesus and His clarity and calm in the midst of it. Likewise, point out that Jesus could be calm because He was confident of His identity in the Father (p. 103).

Read the Day Five pull quote (p. 104). Invite a volunteer to read Colossians 4:5-6. Say: When we are calm in chaos, we can truly obey the instructions of these verses.

Draw attention to the fact that the author reminds himself of 1 Corinthians 13:4-7 in the midst of persecution (p. 104); then read those verses. Challenge learners to remind themselves of this passage when others are making life hard.

Step 7. Practical Application – Live Out the Lesson

Read the Day Five paragraph (p. 104) that begins, “Loving and praying for our enemies
. . . .” Urge learners to spend time each day this week praying for their enemies and seeking to believe the joy they have been promised even in persecution.

As a group, look back over “The Good Life” chart begun in Session 1, hitting the highlights of each element as time allows.

Close with prayer, thanking God for the truths uncovered in this study and seeking His guidance as you all seek to reflect the Beatitudes in the coming weeks.

