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The point of every session is a main idea with the goal of informing our knowing, feeling, and doing.

MAIN IDEA: Persecution is part of following Jesus.

Head Change: To know that persecution doesn't hinder the spread of the gospel but creates opportunities for supernatural intervention.

Heart Change: To celebrate that God is with us when we're persecuted, refining our faith and providing strength and hope.

Life Change: To forgive our persecutors, and to respond confidently to persecution with prayer, boldness, and patient endurance.

Has anyone in your family or community been killed for their faith? Have you ever been sidelined for a promotion, left out of a group chat, or uninvited to a party because you're a Christian?

Christians in every country, on every continent, are persecuted for their faith—whether through blatant violence or subtle cold-shouldering. In this session, Chadwick Mohan explores the persecution of the first-century church in the book of Acts, giving us hope as we face persecution today.

VIEW

As you watch, write down how Chadwick answers these questions.

What did Jesus tell His followers about what they should expect regarding persecution?

Which of Jesus' first followers named in the book of Acts were persecuted?

According to Chadwick, does persecution hinder the progression of the gospel?

How does Chadwick suggest we respond to persecution?

Show SESSION #5: *The Persecuted Church* (14 minutes)

REVIEW

Chadwick opens the session reminding us that two millennia ago, a small group of followers ignited a movement that would shake the world's foundations. "This explosive beginning of the Christian church," he says, "wasn't a story of ease and comfort, but one of non-stop persecution."

Considering John 15:20, why should persecution never come as a surprise?

The persecution we read about in Acts, however, didn't signal defeat. Rather, it catalyzed faith across the Roman Empire and beyond. The book of Acts shows us how the early Christians responded to the growing opposition around them and what we can learn from their response when we encounter persecution ourselves. Acts is also an inspiring and astonishing illustration of how God continued to carry out His sovereign will in and through the persecuted church. **Is the Christian community you're part of regularly persecuted? If so, are you still seeing people coming to know Christ and growing in their faith?**

Jesus made it clear that persecution is part of the Christian life, so we should embrace it with confidence and be prepared to face it. **Does this sound defeatist to you or sobering and realistic? Do you tend to view persecution negatively—as something to be feared and avoided? Should we feel sorry for persecuted Christians? Why, or why not?**

Of course, we shouldn't seek out pain and suffering. Martyrdom doesn't make us more spiritual. However, the book of Acts confirms that persecution is a natural consequence of faith, and so, part of a believer's lifestyle. **When you first chose to put your faith in Jesus, were you**

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Read Romans 8:35, Romans 12:14, and 2 Corinthians 12:10. **How does Paul mirror the attitudes and responses to persecution we've studied in this session?**

Read 1 Peter 1:6–7, 2:19–20, and 4:12–16, remembering that these verses were written by the same Peter whose persecution we read about in the book of Acts. **What kind of reward do we get when we're persecuted for our faith in Jesus? Is God *always* pleased when we endure suffering and ill treatment? Why, or why not? Have you ever been surprised by hostility leveled against you for your faith? Could you say you were "very glad" for the privilege of partnering with Jesus in His suffering? Why, or why not?**

Read 2 Timothy 3:12 and 1 John 3:13. **How might you use these verses to encourage and equip someone who has recently accepted Jesus as Lord and Savior?**

In Revelation 1:9, John writes, "I, John, your brother and companion in the suffering and kingdom and patient endurance that are ours in Jesus, was on the island of Patmos because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus." **What encouragement do these verses hold for persecuted missionaries on the frontlines of gospel advancement?**

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LAST WORD

Persecution today may not always include death. However, hostility against Christians is common in this cultural moment and may well affect our families, careers, or other aspects of our daily lives. The good news is that God is with us, providing strength and hope as we endure for His name's sake. This endurance not only pleases God but also refines our faith, making it more precious than gold. As we continue to stand firm, let's rejoice that, in the end, our faithful endurance will be rewarded.

DEEPER WALK

Select at least one activity below to complete before watching the next session.

Read: Read the words of Jesus in Matthew 5:10–12, Matthew 5:44, Matthew 16:24–26, Luke 6:22, and Luke 23:34. Read them aloud a few times over, and preferably in a few different Bible translations. What do you imagine Jesus' tone of voice to have been when He first uttered these words to His friends and followers? What is He saying to you about the circumstances you find yourself in, in this time and place in history?

Write: Write out a personal manifesto in which you declare your undying allegiance to Jesus Christ. Picture reciting this statement of faith in the face of any social sidelining or physical aggression you may come up against for following Jesus.

Pray: Start a monthly or weekly prayer meeting in your community, to pray for persecuted Christians around the world.

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