

RELIGIOUS FREEDOM WEEK

June 22-29

Lesson Plan: Grades K-6

Program for **Achieving Character Education**

www.catholicpace.com

Objectives for This Lesson

- learn the meaning of Christian Persecution
- explore what the Bible tells us about religious persecution
- discover people in other lands who are not free to pray, read the Bible, go to church, or tell others about Jesus
- learn about the persecution of Christians in the United States
- explore ways to help people suffering under religious persecution

** It would be helpful to have a current world map available when discussing this topic with your children.

OVERVIEW

Parent Ask: What is persecution?

Possible answers: Persecution can mean someone is teased, picked on, or made fun of, or it can mean someone is arrested, put in jail, or injured for what they believe.

Parent Do you know of anyone who is being persecuted right now in the world?

Christians in over 50 countries in the world are being persecuted because of their faith in Christ.

More men and women are being persecuted today for being Christian than at any other time in human history.

Millions of Christians face intense persecution and risk their lives for the sake of the Gospel.

Parent Where are Christians being persecuted? (It would be helpful to have a world map.)

On almost every continent, there are people who punish Christians for their beliefs and practices.

Read: <https://www.kidsofcourage.com/?cat=15>

Here is a list of the countries throughout the world where there is the **most persecution** of Christians: North Korea, Afghanistan, Somalia, Sudan, Pakistan, Libya, Iraq, Yemen, Iran, India, Nigeria, Palestine, Sri Lanka.

See: <https://www.opendoorsusa.org/christian-persecution/world-watch-list/>

Parent How are people being persecuted?

In the United States, we are free to go to church, read our Bibles, and pray without anyone trying to stop us, but some of these freedoms are now being challenged. In other countries, Christians don't have even the basic freedoms that Americans have. Some of these countries have laws against building churches or printing Bibles. Others have rules against teaching children under 18 about God. If you are a Christian in one of these countries, you could be mocked, put in jail, or injured physically.

Christians, especially Catholics, have been persecuted since the beginning of Christianity, especially in the Middle East. The Middle East is the land where Jesus lived, died, and was resurrected, and it is the birthplace of Christianity. Christians have continued to live in this area since the time of Jesus but have faced persecution as long as they have lived there.

Read: "Rules for Schools" <https://www.kidsofcourage.com/?m=201807>

Parent Why do you think Christians in other countries are being persecuted for their Faith?

Countries have different reasons why they make rules and laws to limit Christians. People in some nations worship other gods and do not want anyone to engage in different ways of worshipping. In other places, government leaders want the people to honor the government more than they honor God.

The religion in the majority often persecutes minority religions. For example, in Niger, more than 98% of the population is Islamic, and they do not like minority religions, such as Christianity.

Many countries simply do not respect people who have different ideas from theirs.

Read: "Comparing Beliefs about God in Many Faiths" <https://www.kidsofcourage.com/?p=7196>

Parent

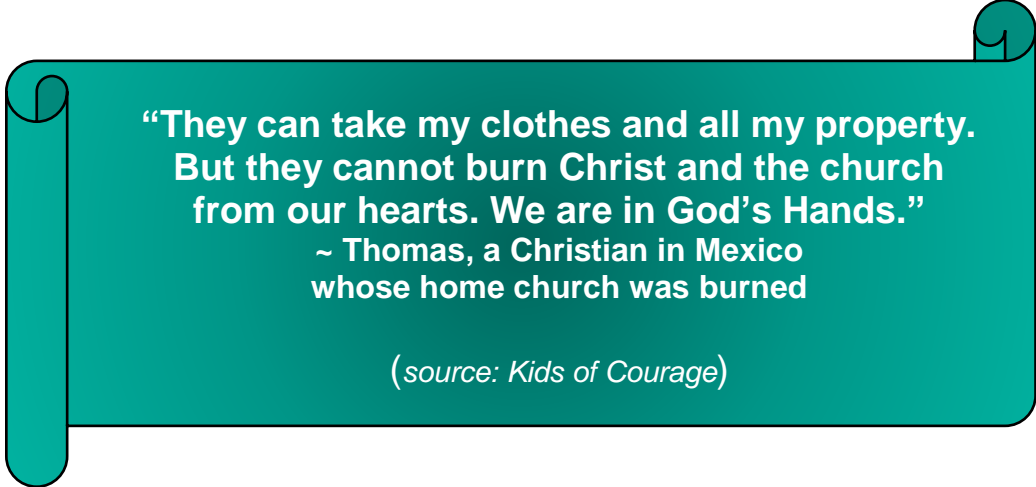
How do you think Christians feel when they're being punished?

Of course, most people would rather not be treated harshly. Many of them are very sad and scared. **However**, in many countries, churches are growing and the Christians are **joyful!**

Parent

How can people be joyful when they're being treated badly?

They are glad that God helps them stand strong for Jesus and guides them when they face problems. They feel joy when people in their countries trust Jesus as their Lord and Savior.



**“They can take my clothes and all my property.
But they cannot burn Christ and the church
from our hearts. We are in God’s Hands.”
~ Thomas, a Christian in Mexico
whose home church was burned**

(source: Kids of Courage)

THE BIBLE

Parent

Persecution is mentioned in the Bible over and over again. Here are some verses that you can read and discuss with your children.

John 15:18-20: Jesus tells us that persecution from the world is part of what it means to follow Him:

“If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. Remember the word that I said to you, ‘A servant is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted me, they will persecute you; if they kept my word, they will keep yours also.”

1 Peter 4:12-14 tells us to rejoice in our suffering, if we are doing it for God:

“Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal which comes upon you to prove you, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice in so far as you share Christ’s sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed. If you are reproached for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the spirit of glory and of God rests upon you.”

2 Corinthians 12:10 teaches us about strength during persecution:

“For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities; for when I am weak, then I am strong.”

Read: the story of Daniel and the Lion’s Den (*Daniel 6:1-28*)

BIBLE VERSES & ACTIVITIES

I. Hebrews 13:3

Parent In **Hebrews 13:3**, we hear: *“Be mindful of prisoners as if sharing their imprisonment, and of the ill-treated as of yourselves, for you also are in the body.”*

The part that says, **“and of the ill-treated as of yourselves”** means that **we should remember Christians who are having problems as if we were in jail with them.**

Activity: Here is a lesson plan & activity for studying this Bible verse: <https://www.kidsofcourage.com/?p=6453>

Articles to further understand **Hebrews 13:3** and the idea of imprisonment:

- Inside a Vietnamese Prison <https://www.kidsofcourage.com/?tag=vietnam>
- Bold Chinese Believers <https://www.kidsofcourage.com/?m=201901>
- Ukraine: Eleven Pillows <https://www.kidsofcourage.com/?p=14763>
- Uzbekistan: Child Questioned by Police <https://www.kidsofcourage.com/?p=13539>
- Singing and Praying in Prison <https://www.kidsofcourage.com/?p=11800>

II. Acts 4:1-31

Parent In **Acts 4:1-31**, we hear the story of St. Peter and St. John boldly speaking before the Sanhedrin to proclaim the Gospel.

Activity: Here is a lesson plan & activity about bold believers: <https://www.kidsofcourage.com/?p=7079>

Articles to further understand **Acts 4:1-31** and the courage to proclaim the Gospel:

- <https://www.christianheadlines.com/blog/german-pastor-persecuted-for-boldly-preaching-the-gospel.html>
- God’s Prisoner: The Story of Richard Wurmbrand <https://www.kidsofcourage.com/?p=9566>
- Bold Believers in Afghanistan <https://www.kidsofcourage.com/?m=201309>
- Family Faces Villagers’ Anger <https://www.kidsofcourage.com/?m=201206>

“The cure for the world is the gospel.”
~ Helen Berhane, a persecuted Christian from Eritrea
(source: Kids of Courage)

EXAMPLES OF RELIGIOUS PERSECUTION IN THE UNITED STATES

- In 2013, a Texas boys' track team was disqualified from competing in the state championship because of a gesture. During the qualifying meet, one of the runners silently pointed to the sky to thank God as he ran across the finish line. Someone objected to this demonstration of faith, and the team was not allowed to participate in the state championship.
- In 2015, Joe Kennedy, a high school football coach in Washington State, was suspended by his school district for kneeling in silent prayer before a game.
- In 2017, a City Council in Pennsylvania voted to remove a park bench that honored veterans because an atheist group objected to the fact that the word "God" was written on it.
- In 2018, InterVarsity Christian Fellowship at Wayne State University in Michigan was temporarily kicked off campus because of their policy requiring their leaders to be Christian. This was considered discriminatory because they wanted Christians to lead their Christian group. Although it has been reinstated, InterVarsity Christian Fellowship can no longer reserve meeting rooms *for free* like other student groups—they must *pay* to rent tables if they want to host discussions or talk to new students.
- In 2019, two United States senators objected to a man running for office as a judge because he is a member of the Knights of Columbus, a Catholic organization. They feared that his membership (and beliefs) would prevent him from being a fair judge.

WAYS TO TEACH CHILDREN ABOUT PERSECUTION

✓ Help the stories of the Bible come to life.

- There are many stories where persecution was a reality for God's children—David, Daniel, the three men in the fiery furnace, Esther, etc. Use these stories to talk about obedience and the importance of being faithful.

✓ Relate persecution to kids' own experiences.

- Children may be able to understand the struggle of persecution better than you think. Have they ever been bullied or seen someone bullied in school? Have they ever been treated badly for something? Using their own experiences can help them understand what life is like for persecuted children.

✓ Remind them that we are family.

- The Bible tells us that anyone who accepts Christ is part of God's family. That means those persecuted Christians around the world are our brothers and sisters! It's easier for children to remember those suffering across the globe when they think of them as family.

✓ Learn about their struggles.

- Read about what people in other countries are willing to sacrifice and withstand in the name of Religious Freedom. You can share what you learn with other Christians so they can remember, too. (see more Resources below).

✓ Pray.

- Persecuted Christians appreciate it when Christians in other countries pray for them. Prayer is powerful and it makes people happy to know that others, even those who live far away, are thinking about them and praying for them!

✓ Talk about this with friends and family.

- Catholics, no matter where they live, are affected by the sufferings of other Christians all over the world. We as Catholics should **tell others about the problems of persecuted Christians** around the world so that people learn about what's going on and can help by praying, sending money or Bibles and other necessary items to help them.

CONCRETE WAYS TO HELP PERSECUTED CHRISTIANS

Ten Things to Do This Summer (to help Christians without religious freedom):

<https://www.kidsofcourage.com/?m=201806>

RESOURCES

❖ **Kids of Courage** (<https://www.kidsofcourage.com>)

- A great resource for helping children understand what Christian persecution is. Check out their videos and activities.

❖ **Aid to the Church in Need** (<https://www.churchinneed.org>)

- A Catholic organization that helps persecuted Christians

❖ **Open Doors USA** (<https://www.opendoorsusa.org/christian-persecution/world-watch-list/>)

- Open Doors USA has a list of the top 50 countries in the world where Christians are persecuted. **Pray for each one by name.**

❖ **Voice of the Martyrs**

- Through **Voice of the Martyrs**, you can commit to praying for a worker who is on the front lines, working to aid those who are being persecuted, or buy Bibles for Christians in other countries.

➤ <https://www.persecution.com/adopt/>

➤ <https://www.persecution.com/bibles/>

❖ **Catholic League for Religious and Civil Rights / Focus on the Family**

- Consider joining one of these international organizations:

- www.catholicleague.org

- <https://www.focusonthefamily.com>

CLOSING THOUGHTS

Parents

God hears and responds to the prayers of children. Rather than shielding your children from the realities of suffering for Jesus's name, lead them to pray boldly on behalf of those seeking religious freedom.

Remind your children that there is always hope in Christ.

- The topic of persecution can be a difficult one. Remind your children that God is always with us and our persecuted brothers and sisters, even in times of trouble. Pray together that Christians around the world will hold on to that truth. Pray that those who persecute them will hear the Gospel, come to know Jesus, and stop harming others.

Tell your Children:

- This week at home, when you pray at meals or bedtime, remember that some Christians in other countries have to pray in secret. If you have a Bible in your house, think about the Christians who cannot get a Bible or who must hide theirs. *Please* pray for Christians who are persecuted, as well as for those who persecute them!

Closing Prayer Suggestion

Thank you, God, for our freedom to pray, worship in our churches, and read the Bible. Please help Christians who are persecuted to always remember that you are with them. Help us to remember them as if we were beside them in their struggles. Thank you that the churches are growing in other countries and for giving the Christians joy in some places where people are cruel to Christians. In Jesus' name, Amen.