

The Church on Mission: "A Spirit-Led Testimony in a Very Worldly World" **Acts 6:8-15; 7:44-60**

"Father, I pray for those in the persecuted church and for their leaders. Strengthen them, encourage them, and grant miracles of provision and deliverance. Cause the gospel to spread like wildfire. Give them so much joy, peace, and love that their persecutors will be convicted and fall down and worship you." – Scotty Smith

Spirit-led: Living daily relying on the Spirit as we learn from Scripture how to leave our old life behind and walk in our new life in Christ.

"How do you know a song is good?"

"I'm looking for songs that prepare people for their encounter with death."

Paul Coleman of the Alliance Defending Freedom International:

- In Poland, offending "religious feelings" could result in two years in prison.
- In Germany, committing an "insult" is now a crime.
- In Cyprus, anyone found guilty of promoting "feelings of ill will" may be committing a crime.
- In Sweden, showing "contempt" toward a group of people may carry a prison term after paying a fine.
- Ontario recently passed Bill 89, which..."protects" a child's professed homosexual orientation or transgender expression and, thus, allows the government to remove children from the homes of parents who oppose gender ideology.
- Canadian Bill C-16 also makes it illegal to use the "wrong" pronouns when referring to a transgender individual.
- Government of Wales is proposing registration and inspection of religious schools and churches to evaluate if they are complying with "fundamental values" of Wales."
- In Bordeaux, France, two Christians (after a legal battle) were acquitted of "hate crime" charges for distributing a pamphlet that included a man's testimony of conversion to Christ and abandoning homosexuality.

Three Main types of persecution today in America: (*Everyday Church* by Chester and Timmis)

1. Legally attacked.
2. Excluded and rejected in relationships.
3. Slandered and accused of being unloving. (homophobic, narrow minded, intolerant, hateful, etc.)

"... we need to regain the sense that anything other than persecution is an unexpected bonus... Jesus promised this." (Chester and Timmis)

Matthew 5:11 - "You are blessed when they insult and persecute you and falsely say every kind of evil against you because of me."

Philippians 2:15 – "...be children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world."

I. A complete testimony of Jesus. (Acts 6:1-15)

1. Filled with the Holy Spirit and wisdom. (Acts 6:3)
2. Filled with faith. (Acts 6:5)
3. Filled with grace and power. (Acts 6:8)

II. A clear testimony of Jesus. (Acts 7:44-53)

III. A continual testimony of Jesus. (Acts 7:54-60)

1. Spirit Life versus Anger. (Acts 7:54-55a)
2. Spirit-led Sight versus Blindness. (Acts 7:55-58)
3. Spirit-led Forgiveness versus Unforgiveness. (Acts 7:60)
4. Spirit-led Hope versus Hopelessness. (Acts 7:59-60)

Gospel statements:

~If the Lord Jesus is who He says He is....

~If the Lord Jesus can do what He says He can do...

~That was not God's original plan for.... (Homosexuality, relationships, etc.)

~How do you think we have gotten where we are...Do about it....?

~This is what the Lord Jesus has done for me....

Our purpose to live by daily: Love God, love others and make disciples

Faith Sheet for This Week

1. How have certain songs comforted you during times of suffering? What scriptures do you turn to in suffering?
2. What comparisons do you see between Stephen and Jesus?
3. What do you make of the term "hate speech" when leveled against Christians? How can we have a solid core (our beliefs) and softer edges (our engagement with others)? (Proverbs 15:1, 28; Psalm 119:46, Colossians 4:6, 2 Timothy 2:25, and 1 Peter 3:15)
4. How might faithful suffering in persecution encourage believers? Open doors to sharing the gospel with the nonbelieving?
5. How is the good news of Jesus displayed in examples of radical forgiveness? Why does it matter that Stephen wanted to love and forgive his persecutors?
6. Review the "Gospel Statements" from Sunday and role play on how you could use one or two in conversations.
7. Look up a bio or two of martyred saints and share with your C group or family. Or check out www.persecution.com - Pray for the persecuted church.