



ICEBREAKER: What do you do if you can't sleep at night? Do you count sheep, toss and turn, or get up and try to do something productive?

OVERVIEW: Persecution refers to the deliberate decision to cause the discomfort, oppression, suffering or even death of individuals or groups of people because of their faith. Scripture indicates that believers can expect to face such ridicule, mockery and suffering from hostile individuals or even the state authorities. A number of possible sources of persecution are identified by the New Testament, including the world in general, earthly powers, religious authorities and even the family and friends of believers. Specific forms of persecution noted in the NT include deception, threats of various kinds, violence and ostracism. Faith poses a threat to the disbelief and rebellion against God on the part of the world which therefore attempts to eliminate this threat. The New Testament makes it clear that believers must expect to face persecution and calls upon them to endure in the face of these threats and dangers (Thematic Reference Bible, 1323). In this study we will dig deeper into the eight Beatitude and learn more about facing persecution in a way that glorifies and honors God.

1. Read Matthew 5:10-12. What insight, principle, or observation from this weekend's message did you find to be the most helpful, eye-opening, or troubling? Explain. (Or what was your key takeaway from Sunday's message?)
2. Read the following verses and jot down how believers are instructed to respond when persecuted:
 - a. 1 Peter 4:19
 - b. 1 Corinthians 4:12
 - c. 1 Peter 4:13
 - d. 1 Peter 4:16
 - e. Psalm 7:1
 - f. Matthew 5:44
 - g. Romans 12:14

BLESSED ARE THOSE WHO ARE PERSECUTED

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3. Do you have a personal story of persecution? Have you ever persecuted or treated someone rudely because of their beliefs of any kind (religious, political, philosophical, etc.)?
4. Why do people persecute? How does understanding the root causes of persecution help you to endure it?
5. If Christ wants you to stand firm in the face of persecution, what does that look like practically? What does it look like to respond to persecution in an ungodly way?
6. The first way to look at persecution according to Matthew 5:10 is that when you stand firm you get to maintain the benefits of the kingdom of God — or enjoy the full benefits of intimacy with God. Do you agree with this statement: Losing intimacy with God is not worth relief from persecution. Explain.
7. The second way to look at persecution is to remember that God will reward you for standing firm. How is persecution affecting your life right now? How can believing God's promise of rewards help you to stand firm?
8. The third perspective that you need to have to stand firm in the face of temptation is that persecution is a sign that something is right, not wrong. Why do we tend to equate earthly prosperity with heavenly favor? Has suffering ever left you wondering if you had possibly lost God's favor, and why is it important to believe that in the Bible spiritual success often, if not usually, meant earthly trouble?

It is better to face persecution and have the kingdom of God than to get relief from persecution but not have the kingdom of God.