SU Scotland

One Big Story

51. Persecution

BIBLE STORY / REFERENCE

Acts 4:1-22, 6:8-15, 7:54 -8:1

Peter and John continue to share the Good News about Jesus despite opposition and Stephen is stoned to death.

AIMS

To help the children understand that following Jesus is not always easy and can lead to opposition.

To encourage them that God is with his people in these times giving them boldness and courage to continue living for him and telling others about him.

As Jesus' disciples spread the word about his death and resurrection, they faced opposition and persecution, but they prayed for courage and continued to tell others about Jesus.

PREP FOR LEADERS

Read through the Bible passage for this session and reflect:

- What strikes you about the disciples' response to the persecution they faced?
- Why were they so determined to continue spreading the word about Jesus?
- When have you been willing to make a stand for your faith?

Take some time to pray for your group.

GAMES / INTRO ACTIVITIES

Choose one or more of the following activities to introduce today's theme:

Dodgeball

You will need: around 5 soft balls

For this game you will need a large space, such as a gym hall, where the children can run around.

Divide the children into two equal teams. Allocate each team one side of the hall and get them to stand in a line along the baseline so that they are facing the opposing team. Spread the balls out along the centre line of the court.

When the game begins, the children run to the middle, pick up the balls and throw them at members of the opposing team, aiming to hit them below the waist. Players can pick up the balls and continue throwing them back and forth, but they must remain on their own side of the court at all times. Anyone who is hit below the waist by a ball is eliminated, and the game continues until one team has no members remaining.

Protect The President

You will need: a soft ball

Get all the children to stand in a circle, and choose two children to stand in the middle of the circle: one as the President and the other as the Bodyguard.

The children forming the circle have to throw the ball,

(continued overleaf)

attempting to hit the President, while the Bodyguard tries to defend the President.

If the ball touches the President, they are no longer the President and they have to join the circle. Meanwhile the child who was Bodyguard becomes the new President, and the child who threw the ball when it hit the President becomes the new Bodyguard.

Articulate Game

You will need: cards (cut from additional document: Articulate Game), timer

Divide the children into teams of anything from two to six players. Choose one team to start and give one member of that team the pack of cards. Set the timer for 30 seconds and get them to describe what is on the top card while the rest of their team try to guess the word. The player describing may not say the word on the card, or any part of it. Once the team guess the word correctly, the player describing can move on to the next card, and continue in this manner until the timer goes off.

Make sure they keep the cards that the team guessed correctly, then pass the rest of the cards on to someone from the next team.

Repeat like this for as long you want (i.e. – until you run out of cards or time) making sure that the teams get the same number of turns if possible. Get the teams to count the cards they guessed correctly, and the team with the highest score wins.

EXPLORING THE BIBLE

Recap / Intro

Last time we heard about how the Holy Spirit came to Jesus' disciples and gave them power and boldness to tell people about him. Around 3,000 people put their faith in Jesus in one day, and after that the word continued to spread and more and more people believed.

Christians are persecuted

You will need: pictures from Free Bible Images printed out or displayed on PowerPoint

The suggested images are taken from two sets of images on the website. The first four images (numbered 4, 5, 10 and 14 below) are taken from the relevant slides at this link: http://freebibleimages.org/illustrations/peter-john-arrested/ and the other images (numbered 8, 10, 11, 13, 14, 15, 16 and 17) are taken from the relevant slides at this link: http://freebibleimages.org/illustrations/stephen-martyred/

4. **Not everyone was happy with what was happening. Some of the religious leaders didn't like what the disciples were teaching about Jesus and they arrested Peter and John and put them in jail.**

5. **The next day they were taken before the council to answer questions. Peter took the opportunity to tell them about how Jesus had died and risen to life and that he was the Saviour.**

10. **The members of the council told Peter and John to be quiet and to stop telling people about Jesus, but they said, "Do you think God wants us to obey you rather than him? We cannot stop telling about everything we have seen and heard."**

14. **The believers prayed for courage, and they continued telling people about Jesus, but things were going to get even more difficult for them...**

8. **There was a man called Stephen who was one of Jesus' followers. One day some men began to argue with him and Stephen tried to explain what he believed.**

10. **The men got more and more angry and eventually they took him to the high council and got people to lie about him, saying that he was speaking against God and against Moses.**

11. **The high priest asked Stephen if this was true and Stephen went through the whole story of the Bible up until that point, talking about Abraham, Moses, the kings and the prophets. He pointed out that God had promised again and again that he was going to send someone to save the people but when Jesus came the people had him put to death.**

13. **The religious leaders got very angry when they heard this, but Stephen stayed calm.**

14. **He was filled with the Holy Spirit and he told them, "Look, I see the heavens opened and Jesus standing in the place of honour at God's right hand."**

15. **The leaders dragged him out of the city and began to throw stones at him. A man called Saul was watching and the leaders took off their coats and laid them at his feet as they continued to stone Stephen.**

16. **Stephen prayed, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit. Don't hold this sin against them." And then Stephen died.**

17. **He was the first Christian to be killed because of his faith.**

REFLECT & RESPOND

Reflection / Discussion

You will need: Bible

The parts of the Bible we have

been thinking about today are difficult because they show that following Jesus was not always easy for the disciples. Their faith in Jesus meant that they faced persecution – that means they were treated badly because of their beliefs.

People argued with them, they were arrested and put in prison, taken before councils to answer questions and some, like Stephen, were badly hurt or even killed.

Why do you think Jesus' followers kept on telling people about him even when they knew the consequences could be so severe?

Read Acts 4:19-20 – **Peter and John gave two reasons why they kept speaking out. They knew it was more important to obey God than to obey people, and the news about Jesus was so amazing that they couldn't stop telling people.**

Read John 16:33 – **these are words that Jesus had spoken to his disciples. He had warned them that they would face trouble but he reassured them that they could know his peace in the midst of their difficulties and that he was greater than the trials they faced.**

The Courage And The Cost Video (Open Doors)

You will need: equipment to play video

This video may be suitable for an older/more mature SU Group. It features some facts and stories about persecuted Christians around the world, highlighting their courage in continuing to follow Jesus despite the cost.

You can find the video at https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=2&v=fz4W_eJYIgQ Watch it yourself first to gauge whether or not it would be suitable for your group.

Alternatively, you could share some facts from the Open Doors Youth website at https://opendoorsyouth.org/the-problem/

This page contains the Open Doors World Watch List of the countries where Christians face the most persecution and you can click on each of the top ten countries to find out more about their specific challenges.

Prayer

In this country today we don't see people being arrested or killed just because they are Christians, but that doesn't mean it's easy to live as a Christian.

Sometimes people will disagree. Sometimes they might make fun of Christians or make nasty comments. They might want to stop others having the chance to find out about Jesus.

If you have a group with a number of children who are Christians or from church backgrounds, you could ask them about the ways in which they think it can be hard to be a Christian for them today, or even ways in which it can be hard to explore Christianity.

When we pray for Christians facing persecution we might think the obvious thing to pray is that the persecution would stop, but that's not what the disciples prayed.

You could see if the children can remember what they prayed for in the Bible passages today: **Peter and John prayed for courage and Stephen prayed that God would forgive the people who were hurting him.**

No matter what, they wanted the word about Jesus to continue to spread and for people to put their faith in him.

Lead the children in prayer for Christians facing persecution. If any of the children mentioned specific situations where they are facing opposition because of their faith, pray for them too. Pray for courage and boldness and that the message about Jesus would continue to spread.

ADDITIONAL IDEAS

Letter Writing To Persecuted Christians

You will need: paper, pens or pencils, envelopes

Open Doors provide the opportunity to send letters of hope and encouragement to persecuted Christians around the world. You can find details of this at https://opendoorsyouth.org/do-something/send-hope-write-a-letter/

There is the option to write to children in selected countries (at the time of writing these are Colombia and Sri Lanka). When you click on the page for each country it provides information about the specific challenges being faced by children there and it also gives some useful phrases in the native language. You could share some of this information with your group and encourage them to write messages or draw pictures to send to encourage the children.

If you don't have time to do this activity during the session you could explain it to the children and invite them to draw a picture or write a message at home, which they can bring in the following week for you to send to Open Doors.

God's Story Video

You will need: equipment to play video

This video could be used to tell or recap the story of Stephen:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_u9eN72iFjo

Stone Painting

You will need: stones, permanent markers or acrylic paints, paint brushes and pots for water

You could let the children use paints or markers to decorate a stone with something that will remind them of what they have been learning. They could draw a picture or write a word such as courage, peace or boldness.