

A guide for youth group leaders: the suffering Church

Illustration 1

Step one: *Scruples* is a fun and easy game that presents various moral situations, like, 'you have been asked to look after your neighbours pet whilst they are on holiday, but it is dead when you arrive. What do you do?' If you want to save time in preparation you can buy the board game "Scruples for kids" or the original version, online. If you would like to personalise the evening, why not write situations relevant to your youth group. When the situation is read out, one person is asked to say how they would respond. Everyone else then decides together whether they are telling the truth or not. The point of the game is to convince everyone else that your response to various moral scenarios is genuinely held and not just the first thing you thought of. It is a wonderful way to explore the breadth of attitudes and beliefs in your group.

Step two: When you have been playing for a little while throw in this question: "You are given a Bible. You read the Gospel of Mark and decide to follow Jesus. However, your family are Muslim and forbid you from changing your faith, threatening to disown you if you go to church. What do you do?" Throw the question out to the whole group and take a mental note of the reaction.

Step three: Award an edible prize to the person with the most honest answer.

Illustration 2

Step four: Hand out a few paperback copies of Mark's Gospel and then ask your group how many of them have ever taken the time to sit down and read it. Ask about the reasons why and highlight the various online audio opportunities to enjoy the Gospel.

Step five: Get them to guess in a TV game show style (if you want to make this a feature, a useful tool is the interactive DVD of 'the price is right' game show, available online) how much it costs to get one of these paperback Gospels? Take the first guess from your youngest member; write it in the middle of a roll of wallpaper or large paper and then ask whether people think it is higher or lower. If dressing up as a game show presenter will aid the enjoyment, feel free.

Step six: Show them the receipt and whoever is closest gets a copy of the Gospel to take home as their prize.

Step seven: Once they have settled a little after the excitement of the game, point out to them that in the Karakalpakstan region in north-western Uzbekistan having a Bible can lead to your being raided by the secret police. In other countries it would be illegal to meet with the Bible as you are doing now. For instance, Christians meeting together to read the Bible in rented property in the Maldives can be evicted or deported and in Belarus, unless your church Bible study is registered, you cannot meet; if you break the terms of your registration, you will be fined or closed down. Ask your group whether they think following Jesus is important enough to go to prison for.

Explanation

Read John 13: 34

³⁴ **A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another.**

The love that Jesus has for us is clearly displayed, not only in Mark's Gospel but also throughout the Bible. One way that Jesus' love for us is shown to the world today is through our love for each other, both at home and overseas, both in good times and in trials. Jesus says here that we **must** love one another. Loving people close to us is sometimes really hard. What would loving a persecuted Christian in another country look like? How easy would it be? How can we love those who are responsible for the persecution? How does this look like Jesus' love for us? Take a moment to try and catalogue Jesus' acts of love. Pick one to start with and challenge your group to put it into practice in the next 7 days.

Investigation

In any crime there is a victim and a criminal. TV shows teach us that the criminal has a) motive, a reason to act outside the law, b) opportunity, a chance to act without being caught, and finally c) means, the skills and tools to complete the perfect crime. Using all your detective skills take the following passage and try to unpick Saul's motive, opportunity and means. Start with the passage below and then have a more detailed read of the passages surrounding it. Try to sketch out exactly what happened and why. Once you have done this why not turn to the information pages in this magazine for some examples of the cost of following Jesus from the last few months and repeat the exercise above.

Acts 8: 1-3

¹ On that day a great persecution broke out against the church in Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria. ² Godly men buried Stephen and mourned deeply for him. ³ But Saul began to destroy the church. Going from house to house, he dragged off both men and women and put them in prison.

Jesus catches Saul on the road to Damascus later in the same chapter and challenges him about his behaviour. Saul then goes to the house of Judas on Straight Street, and God commands a Christian called Ananias to go to him. How do you think that Ananias would have felt about being asked by God to visit Saul, the persecutor of the church? How did Ananias react? How would we? If that seems a difficult question to answer then consider your reaction to this: how would you feel about praying for those who persecute the Church and asking that they may encounter Jesus in a similar way? Jesus does after all give us a specific command to do this, and He gives us a concrete example in the life of Saul, who becomes Paul, the writer of 13 books of the New Testament.

Matthew 5: 44-45a

⁴⁴ But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, ⁴⁵ that you may be children of your Father in heaven.

Competition

Do you want the opportunity to get more involved in supporting the suffering Church?

Well, if you are 18 or under then take part in this competition. You could have your work published in our magazine and on our website, as well as interview one of our staff writers by phone about the work of Barnabas Fund. All you need to do is to find out whether your church has links with a country where Christians are persecuted and write 500 words about what it is like to be a Christian there and how that compares to being a Christian in your own country. If your church has no links with any country where Christians are persecuted ask them why not and pick one of your own. Your article will need to include references of any quotes or facts you use; any relevant large photograph is a bonus.

Closing date is 1 January 2010.

Entries to be emailed to competition@barnabasfund.org or posted to the Pewsey, UK address on the back of the magazine.

Discussion

- Whom do we love?
- When do we love despite difficulties?
- What example did Jesus set us in this?
- How can we love our fellow followers of Jesus better?
- Where could you make a start?
- Why wait?

Contemplation

What verdict would you give on Saul before he met Jesus? How does the forgiveness he receives in repentance and baptism encourage us in prayer today? End your investigation by having a time of prayer for those who persecute the Church today, that they may encounter Jesus, repent and follow Him. Read the poetic verse of Psalm 30:5, "weeping may endure for a night, but joy comes in the morning" (NKJV). Play the music track *C.S. Lewis Song* by Brooke Fraser as an aid to reflect upon our response to the suffering experienced by our brothers and sisters who begin to follow Jesus, only to face immediate opposition and oppression, hostility instead of help. How can we make our faith more urgent?

You may need:

- The board game, *Scruples for Kids*
- Some paperback copies of Mark's Gospel (making sure you keep the receipt)
- The interactive DVD *The price is right*
- A roll of wallpaper
- Some marker pens
- A couple of edible prizes
- Bibles
- Pens and paper
- A copy of Brooke Fraser, *C.S. Lewis Song* (MP3 or CD), and the means to play it