

Lesson plan

for children & young people



Suffering Church
Action Week

Living in Babylon

Faithful to Christ in a
hostile world

barnabasfund
hope and aid for the persecuted church

Introduction

Dear group leader,

Welcome to this lesson plan, which will enable you to run a dedicated lesson or event for children or young people on the theme of *Living in Babylon: Faithful to Christ in a hostile world*.

The lesson aims to explain what it means to be faithful to Christ despite opposition. It also aims to encourage group members in their faith by exploring how God enables persecuted Christians to stand firm despite the pressures they face.

The lesson includes discussion topics and activities for a wide range of ages, so please select the ideas that are most suited to your group. Some of the activities are written in conjunction with this year's *Being Brave for Jesus* children's magazine, which is included in your Suffering Church Action Week Inspiration Pack. This magazine can also be ordered from your nearest Barnabas office (address at www.barnabasfund.org/contact-us).

We thank you for standing with us in encouraging the next generation to remain faithful to Christ.

Barnabas Fund

Lesson objectives

To understand what "faith" is and what it means to be "faithful to Christ".

To learn that although it can be very hard for persecuted Christians to remain faithful, with God's help they can stand firm – and so can we.



Memory verse

Hebrews 11:1

"Faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see." (NIV)

OR

"To have faith is to be sure of the things we hope for, to be certain of the things we cannot see." (GNB)

Being faithful to Christ

What is faith?

- Explore the memory verse by explaining that we are certain in life of many things that we have not seen with our own eyes. Many of the group will not have been to any African countries, for example, but they will still be certain that Africa exists.

This is like our relationship with God. We have not seen Him with our own eyes, but we still believe and trust in Him. This is what it means to have faith.

- Explain that there is a lot of evidence to help us trust in God: creation, what the Bible says about Him, how God became human in the person of Jesus Christ, how He has worked in the lives of people we know, etc.



Activity ideas

- Ask the group to think of things they are certain of despite not having seen them. Make a list of the group's ideas. For example, we may be certain that an aeroplane will be able to get up in the air even though we have not seen the parts that make it work.
- Put a variety of small items into an opaque bag. Ask members of the group to feel the objects inside and guess what they are. Point out that they may be sure of what the objects are despite not being able to see them. Choose items with a distinctive shape and texture, such as an apple or a straw, but make sure that none of the items have sharp edges that could cause injury.

What does it mean to be faithful?

- If to have faith is to trust God, to be faithful is to keep trusting Him even when this is very difficult, and to show this in what we do. Explore what it means to be faithful by using other examples: being faithful to our responsibilities, a faithful friend or a faithful supporter of a sports team, for example.
- God is the supreme example of faithfulness. He always keeps His promises, and He will never leave us or forsake us (Hebrews 13:5). He wants us to be faithful to Him, but He never stops being faithful to us even when we are not faithful (2 Timothy 2:13).

Activity idea

- Label one side of the room "Faithful" and the other "Unfaithful". While the group stand in the middle of the room, read out a list of real-life scenarios such as "Joined in when others were making fun of a friend" or "Did my homework on time". The group decide whether each example is faithful or unfaithful and run to the side of the room they have chosen, then return to the middle. Alternatively, the group could write their own ideas of faithful and unfaithful actions on two large sheets of paper.

Faithful in a hostile world

- Ask the group if it is easy or hard to keep trusting God. Discuss circumstances where it might be more difficult to stand firm. Introduce the idea that in some countries, Christians face pressure from others to stop trusting God.

You could introduce the story of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego here, or you could wait until later on.

- Read out Rose's story from the children's magazine *Being Brave for Jesus*. Discuss it with the group. Does the group think it would have been easier for Rose to give up being a Christian so that she could go back to her family and education? How do they think what happened made her feel? Why do they think Rose didn't go back? Point out that God helps us to be faithful; we can't stand firm in our own strength, and we don't have to.
- Explain that although Christians in the West have many freedoms, we will sometimes feel pressure to stop being faithful to God. But if Rose and other persecuted Christians can remain faithful to God, with His help, then we can and should do the same.

Activity ideas

- Show the group two plastic milk bottles, one with the lid screwed on and the other without its lid. Ask them to imagine that the bottle with the lid on is full of faith, but the other is empty: it has no faith. You could label the bottles to show this and could also fill the closed bottle with water

or milk. Demonstrate that the open bottle can easily be crushed, while the other cannot be crushed. Explain that Rose and other faithful, persecuted Christians are like the bottle that cannot be crushed. Because they trust God throughout everything that happens to them, they are able to withstand persecution.



- Create an obstacle course in the room. Ask the group to get into pairs, blindfold one of each pair and have their partner lead them safely around the obstacles. Explain that this is how God leads Christians through life. We can trust Him to guide us through difficult times.
- Ask a group member to stand with their legs and back straight and fall backwards into the arms of another group member (or several others). Repeat for every child who wants to take part, and discuss how it felt to fall. Explain that Rose and other persecuted Christians trust in God, much as the "faller" trusts the "catchers", even when the situation they are in is frightening, and that we can do the same. Make sure the catchers are aware of their responsibility and able to bear the weight of the faller. You may wish to use crash mats.
- Photocopy the word search in *Being Brave for Jesus* so that each child has a copy. You will need to provide NIV Bibles so that the group can look up the verses.



Bible story to read out

Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego remained faithful to God in the hostile world of Babylon. Introduce their story (from Daniel 3) as an example for us to follow. Discuss the story with the group. For example, you could discuss real-life contexts in which we need to be faithful under pressure. Perhaps our friends or other people make fun of us for being Christians or because we do not join in certain behaviour that we know is wrong. How were Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego faithful to God in what they did? How could we follow this example in the scenarios mentioned?

Withstanding the flames

Long ago Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, ordered a gigantic statue made of gold to be built within sight of his palace. It stood there as if to show everybody his power and to say, "My rule will endure and be established in the eyes of everyone."

The statue could be seen for miles around, standing on the banks of a river near Babylon and as tall as 15 men one on top of another. It was completely covered in gold, and it was entirely Nebuchadnezzar's idea.

Nebuchadnezzar summoned all the leaders, advisers, judges, magistrates and provincial officials to a grand ceremony and commanded the people to worship the image.

"O people, nations and men of every language," cried the king's herald, *"when you hear the sound of the musical instruments, you are to fall down and worship this image of gold that King Nebuchadnezzar has built! All who fail to obey this command will be cast into a blazing furnace!"*

As the king had pronounced, at a given signal horns and flutes, pipes and drums, and zithers, lyres and harps were played. The thousands of people gathered on the plain all bowed down and worshipped the statue. All, that is, except for three of God's people in Babylon: Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, who worked for the king.

The court astrologers were jealous of these three men, and so they went to the king and reported that Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, out of all of the people, had refused to bow down in response to the King's command.

Nebuchadnezzar was angry. *"Bring them to me,"* he roared, and the three were summoned.

"Is it true," said Nebuchadnezzar, *"that you have deliberately disobeyed my command that all must bow down and worship the golden image on the plain? Now is your chance to put things right. Bow down and worship as commanded, or you will be thrown into a fiery furnace and will perish!"*

With supreme confidence, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego spoke up. *"We do not need to defend*

ourselves and our actions before you, O King," they announced. *"If we are thrown into the furnace, the God we serve will be able to save us from it and rescue us from your hand. But even if He doesn't, we will not worship your gods or the image of gold you have set up, for we serve God and Him alone."*

There was a pause and a gasp in the court. Those gathered around the king could hardly believe what they were hearing. Nebuchadnezzar's face reddened, and in fury he proclaimed, *"Light the fires in the kilns – make them seven times hotter than normal – and get the strongest soldiers to bind them and cast them in the fire so that they may be no more!"* he cried. And he left the court.

Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego stood quietly and calmly, trusting in God. They prayed, and they trusted in God. The stokers worked harder than ever before to fire up a raging blaze, for they could see the king's urgency and impatience. Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego were bound by strong-armed soldiers who threw them fully clothed, one by one, into the roaring furnace. The fire was so hot that some of these soldiers themselves died.

As he watched from a distance, King Nebuchadnezzar suddenly leapt to his feet. *"Wasn't it three men we threw into the fire?"* he queried. *"Yes,"* answered his advisers. *"But I can see four!"* said the king in astonishment. *"Look! Four men; walking around inside the flames, but unbound and unharmed. And look at the fourth man,"* he cried, with terror in his voice, *"He looks like an angel – a son of the gods!"*

Drawing close to the entrance to the kiln, Nebuchadnezzar cried, *"Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, servants of the Most High God, come out! Come here!"*

And miraculously, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego appeared and stepped out of the fire. As the leaders and royal advisers gathered around them they saw first-hand that their bodies were not harmed, the hair on their head was not singed and their robes were not scorched. They didn't even smell of the fire.

Nebuchadnezzar was flabbergasted. *"O praise be to the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego,"* he exclaimed. *"They trusted in God; they defied the king's command; they were willing to give up their lives rather than worship any other god than their own, and He has saved them."*

"I decree that anyone who blasphemes against their God will be taken from their home and cut to pieces and their house turned into a pile of rubble. No other god has the power to save."

And he promoted the three Jews in their employment in Babylon.



Helping others to stay faithful

Barnabas Fund helps persecuted Christians to remain faithful by providing them with Bibles and other Christian resources, church buildings and support for pastors and evangelists. We also provide practical support, such as food and school places, for those who are poor because they suffer discrimination.

- Discuss ways in which your group could raise awareness and funds for Barnabas. In the past, young people have raised money in many creative ways, including:



Cake sales and table-top sales

Painting and selling pictures



Selling their old books

Sponsored events – including being sponsored to stay up all night, swim in the sea on Boxing Day or eat their vegetables!

Collecting coins

Donating their pocket money

- Conclude with prayer. Give thanks to God that He is faithful. Pray for Christians in places where it is difficult to keep trusting God, and ask Him to help everyone in the group to remain faithful, even when this is difficult.



Children's song

Living in Babylon

Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego
Lived in Babylon, in Babylon.
Far from their home: the life they know
In Babylon, in Babylon.
Pressed by the king God to forswear;
Urged by the crowd to break their prayer.
Taking a stand to do and dare
In Babylon.

*With them we stand in Jesus' Name
To raise a cry, God's love proclaim;
To honour those who risk the flame
To serve God in their living.*

Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego
Lived in Babylon, in Babylon.
Watching the golden image grow
In Babylon, in Babylon.
"Bow down and worship", said the king,
"Now, praises to the idol bring!"
But, to the true God they did sing
In Babylon.

*With them we stand in Jesus' Name
To raise a cry, God's love proclaim;
To honour those who risk the flame
To serve God in their loving.*

Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego
Lived in Babylon, in Babylon.
Betrayed by men who hate them so
In Babylon, in Babylon.
Hear Nebuchadnezzar's angry cry:
"Bring them to me, and they shall die!
Come worship gold, for it is!!"
In Babylon!

*With them we stand in Jesus' Name
To raise a cry, God's love proclaim;
To honour those who risk the flame
To serve God in their giving.*

Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego
Lived in Babylon, in Babylon.
Thrown to the fire, their skins did glow
In Babylon, In Babylon.
Deep in the flames the three men walk
Then with a fourth are seen to talk:
The Lamb of God protects his flock
In Babylon.

*With them we stand in Jesus' Name
To raise a cry, God's love proclaim;
To honour those who risk the flame
To serve God in their suffering.*

Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego
Lived in Babylon, in Babylon.
Called from the blaze God's power they show
In Babylon, in Babylon.
Servants of the most High God,
Unharm'd within the fire they trod.
No hairs upon their heads were fired!
In Babylon.

*With them we stand in Jesus' Name
To raise a cry, God's love proclaim;
To honour those who risk the flame
To serve God in their trusting.*

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