



PREPARATION

STUDY

Spend the week studying John 15:18–16:4 and 16:29–33. Consult the commentary provided and any additional study tools to enhance your preparation.

DETERMINE

Determine which discussion points and study questions will work best for your group.

PRAY

Pray for our pastors and this week's message, the upcoming group time, your group members, and their openness to God's Word.

LANDING POINT

When I trust God, He gives me everything I need to persevere in any circumstance.



GROUP DISCUSSION

❑ **CONFIDENTIALITY** | What's said in the group stays in the group.

❑ **NO CROSS-TALK** | Be considerate of others as they share. Refrain from side conversations and texting during group time.

❑ **NO FIXING** | We are not in the group to fix each other. Jesus does that part.

❑ **SHARING** | Be sensitive to the amount of time you share. Don't talk too much or too little. Every person brings something valuable to the group.



As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

WHEN TIMES GET TOUGH

What do I do when things get tough? How do I handle times of uncertainty? Jesus anticipated His disciples asking themselves these questions on the night of His arrest. Like the disciples, we face difficult and uncertain times in life, and we need to know how to respond. Thankfully, Jesus gave guidance to His disciples that serves us, too.

This week your group will look at the next powerful word in this series—*persevere*. Jesus gave His disciples a game plan for when the going gets tough and we are uncertain about the future. When you trust in God, He gives you what you need to persevere in any circumstance.

🗣️: *Define the term “persevere” in your own words.*

🗣️: *How does difficulty and uncertainty affect your faith?*



Select 2–3 questions to discuss as a group.

WHAT PERSECUTION LOOKS LIKE

Jesus doesn't mince words with His disciples. He is clear about what will happen to them in the future. He tells them, "The world will hate you because they hate me. The world hates you because you're not of this world. If the world persecutes me, the world will also persecute you. So, don't be surprised when you face persecution for your faith." Jesus goes on to explain how those who hate believers stand under God's judgment. "They have no excuse for their sin. If they hate me, they hate my Father who sent me. Even though they've seen my works, they still don't believe."

Then Jesus goes back to the ministry of the Holy Spirit, saying, "When the Helper [Spirit] comes, He will tell others about me. He will be my witness, and so will you." Then, to show His love and care, Jesus says, "I don't want you to fall away when tough times come. Yes, troubling times are ahead, but you don't need to be afraid—even if God calls you to die for me."

READ: *John 15:18–16:4 and 16:29–33. What does persecution for your faith look like in your context?*

Q: *Recall a time when you were persecuted for your faith. What did God teach you through your experience?*

REASON FOR PERSECUTION

Jesus gives a number of reasons why believers are persecuted. Let's focus on three main reasons He mentions. First, believers are not of this world. They live differently. The disciples would live their life for Christ, and that would be offensive to others. Second, those who persecute believers don't know God. Whether it's people who don't have any room for God in their lives or those who think they know God and are doing His work, these people will persecute you in the name of religion or some other cause. Third, persecution is the path Jesus' followers must go down. It

fulfills God's Word and is something every generation of believers must come to terms with and embrace.

Later, Jesus tells His disciples, "You will soon be scattered. But I've told you everything so that you would have *my* peace. You're going to have trouble in this world. But take courage. I have overcome the world."

Q: *How have you seen believers respond well to those who oppose them? How have you seen them respond poorly?*

Q: *What does it mean to embrace the truth that you must suffer for Jesus?*



LIVE

Select 2–3 questions from this section to answer.

LOOK BACK AND RELY

You shouldn't be surprised when persecution comes your way. Jesus Himself promises it will come. The real question is, *how do you handle the persecution?* First, remember that God is sovereign. That means He's in control. Nothing catches Him by surprise. He sees and knows everything, and He is with you during any difficult or uncertain time. Second, Jesus calls His followers to rely on the Spirit. God has given you His Spirit to be alongside you. The Spirit allows you to find strength where you think there is none. He gives you the words to say and gives you peace in any circumstance.

When tough and uncertain times come, remember who God is. He is in control. Nothing surprises Him. Rely on the Spirit to give you the strength you need. Instead of relying on your own strength, look to the Spirit to give you the strength necessary to persevere.

Q: *Why is it essential to remember the character of God when life is hard and the future is uncertain?*

Q: *Think of a word picture to describe how God is a refuge for you in tumultuous times. Share with the group.*

LOOK FORWARD AND OBEY

In addition to looking back, you should look forward. Remember that Jesus overcame the world by His death and resurrection. That means you have hope for today and in whatever situation you're facing. Jesus says we are blessed by God if we endure persecution. Let this promise give you hope today.

Another way Jesus calls us to persevere in persecution is by obedience. Persecution is meant to silence you. Don't let it. Let persecution be a platform for you to share with others what God has done in you. Jesus says you will be His witness. So, be a witness for Him in the way you respond when your faith is challenged. The closer you walk with Jesus in hard and uncertain times, the stronger your voice for Him will become.

Q: *What's one thing you can do this week to remind yourself of the hope you have in Jesus?*

Q: *How can your response to persecution be a powerful witness to others?*



LEAD

Select 1 question from this section to ask your group.

STANDING STRONG

We live in a culture that is increasingly hostile to Jesus and what the Bible teaches. It's easy to be discouraged and

feel like an outcast when the world around you rejects Jesus and His way. But Jesus wants you to take courage. He wants you to remember that this is part of God's plan. When you persevere in faith and obedience, you show others that a greater strength lives in you. You show others that no circumstance can keep you from rejecting the God who has called you to a new way of living. You show others that when the storms of life hit, you have a reliable and secure anchor for the soul—Jesus, who gives you hope (Hebrews 6:19).

Q: *Where have you seen rising hostility toward Jesus and His followers?*

Q: *Where is God calling you to stand strong for Him in your life?*



PRAY

Praise God that He is with you in the midst of difficulty and uncertainty. Thank Him for never abandoning you and giving you strength to persevere in any circumstance. Ask Him to reveal how you can be a witness for Him with your life and in any persecution or testing of your faith you are facing now.



FOLLOW UP

Midway through this week, send a follow-up email to your group with some or all of the following:

- Read James 1:12 and reflect on what it means to find God's blessing in persecution.
- Ask the group to share any stories or lessons learned where they see God at work in their lives.



LOVE YOUR ENEMIES “The sin [in v. 22] is the particular sin of hating Jesus and those who belong to Him; it is not sin in the general sense (v. 24), of which all of Adam’s natural descendants are guilty (Rom. 3:23; 5:12–21).”¹ Jesus was the ultimate revelation from God. To reject Him is essentially to hate Him and the Father who sent Him. We shouldn’t hate our enemies because they hate Jesus. On the contrary, Jesus calls us to love them (Matt. 5:43–48). When we do this, we show others what Jesus is like and how He related to others—with love and compassion, not hate and indifference.

A GUILTY CONSCIENCE “The world is unalterably opposed to God. Their guilty conscience will not allow them the freedom to disregard completely a loyalty they sense they still owe to their Creator. Their hatred gives expression to the frustration of not being able to escape totally from the constraints of conscience. Exposure to truth simply heightens their antagonism to what they know to be right.”² See Rom. 1:18–32.

THE GIFT OF GRACE “Unbelief is the condemning sin that closes the door to heaven and opens the door to hell. People do not go to hell because they smoke, drink, or curse but because they reject faith in Christ. Furthermore, this sin characterizes every unregenerate person. God is not looking for perfect people but people who are willing to accept atonement that he has already provided.”³ We are all undeserving of God’s grace. The distinction between believers and nonbelievers is that believers have accepted the free gift of God’s grace offered by God through His Son, Jesus.

ENDNOTES:

1. R. C. Sproul, ed., *The Reformation Study Bible: English Standard Version (2015 Edition)* (Orlando, FL: Reformation Trust, 2015), 1888.
2. Robert H. Mounce, “John,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Luke–Acts (Revised Edition)*, ed. Tremper Longman III and David E. Garland, vol. 10 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2007), 582.
3. Kenneth O. Gangel, *John*, vol. 4, *Holman New Testament Commentary* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2000), 299–300.