

Week of 24/5/20

Persecution

BIBLE PASSAGE

Acts 6:7-8:3

BIG IDEA

When people push us away for telling the truth about Jesus, God will still win, even if it hurts us.

SHARE TOGETHER

Read out the following facts and see if children can spot the false ones:

- Some monkeys live on the ground and some live in trees (T)
- Monkeys only eat plants (F - some eat insects and reptiles)
- Most monkeys have tails (T)
- One monkey flew 83 miles into space (T - Albert was launched into space by NASA in 1949)
- A monkey was once taught to sing 'Happy birthday' (F)
- If a monkey grins, it means they're happy (F - it means they're angry!)

Or play 'Two Truths, One Lie'. Parents say three things about themselves, two true and one false; children have to guess which one is the lie.

Explain that you're going to be thinking about a man who told the truth about Jesus, even though lots of people didn't want to hear it.

READ TOGETHER

Pray to start. Read Acts 7:51-8:3 out loud, giving your children the chance to read if they are able. Ask if there are any words they didn't understand and explain them — don't be afraid to use a dictionary if necessary!

TALK TOGETHER

After you've read the passage, answer these questions together: *Have you ever gotten in trouble for telling the truth? How did you feel? Did it make you want to stop telling the truth?* (Be prepared to share a story yourself)

LISTEN TOGETHER

One parent should read the following out loud and ask the questions:

This week's Bible story tells us that when people push us away for telling the truth about Jesus, God will still win, even if it hurts us.

Last week, we heard that the Jewish rulers were very angry with Jesus' apostles for teaching people about him. They tried to stop them, and even wanted to kill them, but God protected the apostles, and they kept on speaking about Jesus.

In this week's story, however, someone was killed, someone who spoke the truth about Jesus despite the danger he faced.

Who was killed? What was he like? (Stephen. In 6:5, 7:8-10, 15, 55 we're told he was 'full of faith and of the Holy Spirit', wise and able to argue well, and he clearly knew a lot about God and Israel; 'the face of an angel' in 7:15 probably means that he was radiating God's power [think Exodus 34:29-35, rather than innocent or cute!])

Stephen was a follower of Jesus; he was brought before the Jewish rulers because some people accused him of saying Jesus would destroy the temple and change the law. This was a lie, but Stephen took the opportunity of standing in front of all those people to talk more about Jesus!

Stephen explained how God had made great promises to his people, and had made them come true through people like Joseph and Moses, but that most of the time, God's people had rejected God.

The Jewish rulers would have understood this and agreed that it was true; after all, they knew a lot about the history of their people! But they didn't agree with what Stephen said last...

Look back over 7:51-53 — In your own words, what did Stephen say that made the Jewish rulers so angry?

Stephen told the Jewish rulers that they were against God, and this made them very angry. But Stephen didn't care; he saw a vision of Jesus in heaven, standing next to God. God gave him this vision so he could be sure that everything he was saying about Jesus was true.

This made the rulers even more angry. They dragged Stephen out of the city and killed him. While he was dying, Stephen showed that he loved the rulers by praying for them; he hoped that they might think about what they had heard, and want to know Jesus for themselves.

But the rulers didn't want to know Jesus, and they didn't want other people to know him either, so they began persecuting all the people who were following Jesus, trying to stop them talking about him. They made it very difficult to be a Christian in Jerusalem, so everyone except the apostles left the city and went to other places.

When Jesus promised his followers they would be his witnesses (Acts 1:8), he said the message would start in Jerusalem, and spread out through Judea and Samaria. Because of the persecution they were facing in Jerusalem, Jesus' followers moved out to those areas (8:1).

Even though some terrible things were happening to Jesus' followers, God was still winning! Nothing could stop the truth about Jesus spreading out from Jerusalem; in fact, Stephen's death was like the fuse on a firework being lit. It led to Jesus' followers being scattered, but wherever they went, they spread light by being witnesses for Jesus.

LIVE TOGETHER

Here are some things to do in response to this week's Faith Talk:

1. Do some research together about how and where Christians are still being persecuted today. How can you help practically? How can you pray? Here are some places you could start:
 - a. Open Doors (www.opendoorsuk.org) - you could write to a persecuted Christian (<https://www.opendoorsuk.org/act/letter/>)
 - b. Barnabas Fund (www.barnabasfund.org)
 - c. Christian Solidarity Worldwide (www.csw.org.uk)
 - d. Release International (www.releaseinternational.org) - you could write to someone imprisoned for their faith (<https://releaseinternational.org/prisoners-of-faith/>)
2. Have each family member share how they might respond to someone who was nasty to them for being Christian. Talk about right and wrong responses to persecution; how did Stephen respond? How did the other followers?
3. Close in prayer together, giving your children the opportunity to pray. Pray particularly about those things you've shared, and that you might all trust that God will continue to spread the message about Jesus even when his people are persecuted.