

John 15:14 -16:3 - Because of Jesus - Friendship, Hatred, and Persecution¹

Before the Lesson: Print handouts of Scriptures with Testimonies (4 pages: cut these into individual scriptures/testimonies, one per class member); lyrics to *What a Friend We Have in Jesus*; news article, “Global religious persecution at all-time high”

Fellowship question: (Use *one* of these to break the ice, to begin some discussion, and to lead into the study):

1. Have you had a role switch with someone? They went from co-worker to boss; a teacher went from Mr./Dr. to a first-name friend, etc. Who was it? How did the transition go?
2. Describe the path from stranger to best friend that you have experienced.

Information:

What roles can Jesus play in the 21st-century Christian’s life? (Lord, Savior, Friend, Co-laborer, Teacher/Rabbi, Mentor, Great Physician, Judge, etc.)

The disciples have been with Jesus for three years, during which time they have experienced Jesus in many roles. Now, Jesus offers them another role.

- Have a class member read John 15:14-17.

What are some differences between the roles of slave and friend?

“As everyone knew, master and slave relationships were one-way: master to slave.”²

“The key element of friendship that is emphasized is the sharing of knowledge. To be entrusted with a friend’s deepest and most intimate thoughts, motivations, intentions, and truth - that is a knowledge far beyond a master-servant relationship.”³

“The Hellenistic culture of the Roman period witnessed two kinds of friends: political friends and fictive-kinship friends. Political friends were clients who received favors from patrons and in

¹ This lesson is copyrighted by Dr. Rick Jordan, Great Bible Teachers, Inc, 2024. More lessons may be found at greatbibleteachers.com.

² Bruce J. Malina and Richard L. Rohrbaugh, *Social Science Commentary on the Gospel of John* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998), 235.

³ David F. Ford, *The Gospel of John: A Theological Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2021), 300.

return sought the good reputation of the patron. Fictive-kinship friends were persons who treated each other as though they were kin, as members of the same family.”⁴

“Friendship is a reciprocal affair, with friends mutually seeking the well-being of one another....The point is that just as Jesus’ friends seek his well-being, so he, too, is totally concerned about their well-being.”⁵

[Distribute the handout with the lyrics of “What a Friend We Have in Jesus.” You may want to play an instrumental rendition of the hymn during the next exercise.]

The 19th-century hymn, What A Friend We Have in Jesus, was written by Joseph Medicatt Scriven. It was discovered in the following manner: "A neighbour, sitting up with him in his illness, happened upon a manuscript of 'What a Friend we have in Jesus.' Reading it with great delight, and questioning Mr. Scriven about it, he said he had composed it for his mother, to comfort her in a time of special sorrow, not intending any one else should see it."⁶

Let’s take a few minutes to look through this hymn. Circle or note the friendship characteristics of Jesus you see celebrated in this song.

In verse 17, Jesus tells the disciples to love one another. They must be more than fellow followers of Jesus. They must be fellow friends with Jesus and with one another.

“What is paramount in this passage is that they demonstrate their attachment to one another: that is Jesus’ new and final request.”⁷

Now, we have a radical shift in tone. Jesus is your friend - and you will be hated by some because of that friendship.

Have a class member read John 15:18-16:3.

“Jesus loves his disciples because they remain or abide in him; the world hates them for the same reason.”⁸

⁴ Malina and Rohrbaugh, 236.

⁵ Malina and Rohrbaugh, 236.

⁶ https://hymnary.org/person/Scriven_JM, accessed 10/26/2024.

⁷ Malina and Rohrbaugh, 235.

⁸ Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John XIII-XXI*. The Anchor Bible, Volume 29A (New York: Doubleday, 1970), 692.

“John’s term for the dominant society (‘world’) is used no less than five times in a single verse (19). The members of the Johannine groups simply do not belong to this dominant society. Having withdrawn their allegiance to it, they are hated in return.”⁹

“In a series of four conditional sentences it is repeated that the world’s hatred for Christians is basically a refusal of Jesus himself. Love of Jesus has made the true Christian so much like Jesus that [they are] treated in the same manner as Jesus. We may remember that by the time the Fourth Gospel was in its final form, persecution by the Romans and the expulsion of Jewish Christians from synagogues were already accomplished facts and no longer morose forebodings.”¹⁰

“The Paraclete represented Jesus’ presence among [people]; and in hating the disciples who are the dwelling place of the Paraclete, the world is striking at Jesus’ continued presence on earth.”¹¹

Transformational Exercise

Do you know anyone who has been persecuted because of their faith? What do you know of their story?

[Distribute the handout, “Global religious persecution at all-time high.”¹²]

Let’s read this article about global religious persecution.

What are your first impressions after reading this article?

[Distribute handouts of verses with testimonies. Give one to each class member who is comfortable reading the passage and the following paragraph aloud. Read the following paragraph, then ask class members to read the verses and testimonies you have distributed. Ask for reactions to these selections.]

“We asked our sisters and brothers who risk so much to follow Jesus: *What are the scriptures you cling to and turn toward for strength, encouragement, courage and comfort?* As you read each of the verses they shared and their stories behind them, we hope these passages open your eyes to some you may have overlooked, as well as bring you back to some you’ve read but might now

⁹ Malina and Rohrbaugh, 237.

¹⁰ Brown, 695.

¹¹ Brown, 699.

¹² <https://baptistnews.com/article/global-religious-persecution-at-all-time-high/> accessed 11/1/24.

see differently. And we pray that as you walk through your own adversity and trials, you'll be reminded of these life-giving promises our God has given to all of us in His Word."¹³

Prayer: Jesus, you are our friend. You want our well-being. You want that for your other friends, too, who love you as they live in nations that persecute them because of their faith in you. We pray for our fellow Christian brothers and sisters. Protect them. Give them courage. Help them to remain faithful to you. We pray for others who also suffer persecution for their faith, even though they are not Christians. They are our neighbors who do not yet know you. Use us as you can to support those who are bullied, tortured, and must leave their homes because of political powers. Amen.

¹³ <https://www.opendoorsus.org/en-US/stories/23-scriptures-persecuted-christians-cling-to/> Accessed 11/1/24.

Scriptures Our Persecuted Family Cling To

Psalm 91:4 (NASB): *“He will cover you with his pinions, and under his wings you may seek refuge; His faithfulness is a shield and bulwark.”*

“This was my scripture when my husband was imprisoned for his faith. I had great faith in the Lord to keep him safe. I was confident he would be fine because he has God in his life. I believe in God’s promise.” —Bouapha, Laos

Matthew 7:7: *“Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you.”*

“We like this verse because it reminds us that when we pray, our needs are fulfilled by God. We had to leave our house with nothing but the clothes on our backs because of our faith. We always prayed, claiming this verse. Gradually, God made provisions for us through His people. Now, we have income sources.” — Chendo* and Kamala*, husband and wife, Nepal

Romans 8:38-39: *“For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”*

“I had to move from more than three villages because villagers and anti-Christians opposed me. I faced false accusations and have been imprisoned and interrogated. Yet wherever I went, I never stopped serving the Lord. I was able to gather people and pray. These verses always remind me that nothing can separate me from God's love; God’s love empowers me to face the trials and opposition. With my family, I will continue to serve the Lord all the days of my life.” —Shekhar*, northern India

Jeremiah 29:11: *“For I know the plans I have for you,’ declares the Lord, ‘plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you a hope and a future.’”*

“This is the scripture I heard when I first received Jesus. It gave me courage that though I am persecuted, or I am suffering, there is a future, there is a hope, and there is a plan. I won’t remain the same. I won’t remain in the same situation. Because His Word says that God’s plans are not for harm, they are not for pain, they are not for suffering. But they are for joy.” —Waswa*, Uganda

Psalm 23:4: *“Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and staff, they comfort me.”*

“The first arrest of my husband was when we were engaged. He was suddenly picked from his house. In Eritrea, your life is always at risk. Though we are afraid, at the same time we are also living boldly. This verse assures me: *Even though you are in prison, even though you are on the streets, even though you are being hunted, God is with you, wherever.* And God understands what we are passing through. Jesus understands. He passed through this for us.” —Mirjam*, Eritrea

1 Peter 5:3 (NLT): *“Don’t Lord it over the people assigned to your care but lead them by your own good example.”*

“I was persecuted by the people in my village. They falsely accused me, and I stayed in jail for three months. This verse gives me strength to live in this village. I am placed here because the Lord wants me to be an example. No matter what I face, I always get encouragement knowing the Lord has me here to be a good example and to win souls for His Kingdom.” —Dorji Rai*, Bhutan

John 3:16: *“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.”*

“As soon as I met Jesus, persecution followed. My family tried to force me back to Islam. I have run for my life for my faith in Jesus. I have been in prison for Him. I have lost all my possessions, including my home. But He gave His Son for me. He is worth it. I will continue to share His hope.” —Aman*, Sudan

Psalms 27:1: *“The Lord is my light and my salvation—whom shall I fear? The Lord is the stronghold of my life—of whom shall I be afraid?”*

“Because the environment I was in seemed dark to me; so much need, violence, I clung to Jesus as that light, but also as that salvation in times of despair, that I should not fear if I was with Him, even if enemies were lurking. It is a verse that inspired me to trust and rest in Jesus.” —Laura, Colombia

Matthew 16:24: *“Then Jesus said to his disciples, ‘Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.’”*

“This is my faith verse. It really encouraged me to stand up and be willing to take risks to follow Jesus. I was the first one in my family to make Jesus the Lord of my life and have suffered for that decision. But Jesus said that I must daily take on His cross—I pray I can always follow Him.” —A Lam* in Vietnam’s Central Highlands

Isaiah 41:10: *“So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.”*

“In spite of how difficult the situation was for us, I always remembered these words in my mind and kept them in my heart, knowing that God was always there in the midst of everything I was living through.” —V́ctor in Jalisco, Ḿxico

Psalm 23:1: *"The Lord is my shepherd ..."*

"When I was imprisoned, I held on to this scripture, especially verse 1: "The Lord is my shepherd." This is my favorite Psalm. I learned it back in China, and I meditated on it every day in the [North Korean prison] camp. I knew it was a message of encouragement in a terrible place. This Psalm taught me a lot: I may have been imprisoned in a dark valley, but that didn't matter. Jesus is my Shepherd, and I experienced peace despite the circumstances. Even though it felt as if I was literally in a valley full of the shadow of death, I wasn't afraid of anything. God comforted me every day." —Hea Woo*, North Korean refugee

What a Friend We Have in Jesus

Joseph Medicott Scriven (1855)

1 What a friend we have in Jesus,
all our sins and griefs to bear!
What a privilege to carry
everything to God in prayer!
O what peace we often forfeit,
O what needless pain we bear,
all because we do not carry
everything to God in prayer!

2 Have we trials and temptations?
Is there trouble anywhere?
We should never be discouraged;
take it to the Lord in prayer!
Can we find a friend so faithful
who will all our sorrows share?
Jesus knows our every weakness;
take it to the Lord in prayer!

3 Are we weak and heavy laden,
cumbered with a load of care?
Precious Savior, still our refuge--
take it to the Lord in prayer!
Do your friends despise, forsake you?
Take it to the Lord in prayer!
In his arms he'll take and shield you;
you will find a solace there.

Global religious persecution at all-time high
Jeff Brumley | October 23, 2024

Religious oppression has skyrocketed worldwide since 2020, when 80 million people were forcibly displaced and 260 million Christians faced some form of violence, according to a new report by World Relief and Open Doors US.

“The number of people globally who have been displaced by persecution, violence, human rights violations and disruptions of public order has surpassed 120 million for the first time in recorded history. And the number of Christians who face high levels of persecution or discrimination because of their faith has risen to 365 million, accounting for one in seven Christians globally,” the two faith-based human rights groups said in “**State of the Golden Door: Persecuted Christians and the U.S. Refugee Resettlement and Asylum Process.**”

In its accompanying “World Watch List” for 2024, Open Doors identified 50 countries where Christians faced the highest levels of oppression from Oct. 1, 2022, through Sept. 30, 2023. The 13 nations labeled “extreme” were led by North Korea, Somalia, Libya, Eritrea and Yemen, with traditional U.S. allies Pakistan, India and Saudi Arabia also populating that category.

Iraq, Myanmar, China, Cuba, Mexico and Egypt were among the remaining 37 nations labeled as having “high” or “very high” levels of persecution of Christians, Open Doors explained. Altogether, nations on the list accounted for 317 million of the world’s persecuted Christians.

Open Doors also reported one in seven Christians were persecuted globally from 2022 to 2023 as were one in five Christians in Africa and two in five in Asia. Additionally, 4,998 Christians were murdered, 14,766 churches and properties were attacked and 4,125 Christians were detained.

Refugee resettlement during the Trump administration plummeted to record lows, with only 11,000 arrivals in 2021 in accordance with the goal set during his last year in office. By comparison, a Biden administration policy enabled the U.S. to welcome more than 100,000 refugees so far this year, according to the Migration Policy Institute.

“When the fiscal year ended on Sept. 30, 2024, 29,493 Christian refugees from the 50 countries on this year’s World Watch List had been admitted to the United States as refugees,” the “Golden Door” study reported. “That’s the highest number of Christians resettled from these 50 countries since 2016, roughly coinciding with a commensurate

increase in the number of resettled refugees of all religious backgrounds and countries of origin.”

But the report also lamented the Biden administration’s crackdown on asylum, which has “significantly reduced due process protections for those fleeing religious persecution who seek asylum at the U.S.-Mexico border.”

“Those who make the difficult decision to flee face an uncertain future, full of its own risks and dangers,” the report says. “But for far too many Christians, choosing the vulnerable life of a refugee is the only way to keep themselves and their families safe from harm.”

“In Middle Eastern countries such as Iraq and Syria, longstanding conflict has led to the near extinction of historic Christian communities that have existed since the days of the early church,” the report says. “Wherever religious extremists can operate unchecked, many Christians fear for their lives and their livelihoods.”

And Christians in America should not be concerned only for the adherents of their own faith who are persecuted and displaced, the report adds. “We believe that Jesus’ all-encompassing command to love our neighbors clearly extends beyond love for one’s fellow believers, as illustrated by the ‘Good Samaritan,’ who was the model of neighborly love for a vulnerable traveler of a different religious tradition.”

The report recommends numerous actions U.S. Christians can take to help refugees and migrants, including praying for their deliverance from danger and that they find dignity and value wherever they land. The U.S. government is urged to seek diplomatic solutions to global religious persecution, to set the annual refugee ceiling at least 125,000 or higher and to reject changes to the asylum process.

“Beyond refugee resettlement, as the Congress and both the current and next administration address the security and humanitarian challenges at the border, our commitment to protecting those with well-founded fears of persecution must remain non-negotiable,” World Relief President Myal Greene said. “As a nation, we cannot turn our backs on those seeking refuge from religious oppression. The price of inaction is far too high.”

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