



Be Strong – Week 8

DISCUSSION GUIDE

Overview

In the final message of *Be Happy*, we learn that when values in culture differ from the biblical values we live, we can still follow Jesus' example and be strong.

Discussion Questions

“Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” (Matthew 5:10)

In the eighth beatitude, Jesus tells us that when we live out the beatitudes and wholeheartedly follow Him, we will experience persecution from our culture. Jesus also promises in this same verse that when we live according to His Word and are persecuted for it, we will experience Heaven.

We will experience some pain in our walk with Christ, but being persecuted can result in much growth and pruning. Persecution can burn off impurities and improve our well-being.

Acts 4:18-21 says, “So they called them and commanded them not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus. But Peter and John answered and said to them, ‘Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you more than to God, you judge. For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard.’ So when they had further threatened them, they let them go, finding no way of punishing them, because of the people, since they all glorified God for what had been done.”

After they were released, the believers gathered together and prayed for a new boldness to share Christ. These believers were filled with the Holy Spirit and came out stronger and better after they walked through persecution.

- Why does persecution make us stronger and better?

How to Stand Strong in the Face of Persecution:

1. Accept pruning as God's process.

“I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit.” (John 15:1-2)

God does His work of pruning so we can be more fruitful. As the *ultimate Vinedresser*, He has a plan and is committed to helping us thrive. He takes away the excess that keeps us from reaching our potential, and He prunes unfruitful branches.

- Share a time when God took something out of your life because it was unhealthy. What was the outcome?

2. Live planted.

In **John 15**, Jesus shows how to prepare today for the inevitable storms of tomorrow. **“Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me. I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing.”** (John 15:4-5)

To *abide* means to create healthy habits which keep us living in the presence of God, worshiping Him, and washing our minds and hearts with truth daily. The fruitfulness of the branch is completely dependent on its relationship to the vine. As branches, we are completely dependent on Jesus to give us life.

We can live planted by spending time daily in His Word and Prayer and staying connected to God’s people.

- Identify what distractions should be eliminated in your life in order to fully abide in Jesus.
- Do you have people in your life that encourage you to *live planted*?

3. Always persist!

Jesus warned us about persecution in **John 15:18-20**: **“If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own. Yet because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. Remember the word that I said to you, ‘A servant is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you. If they kept My word, they will keep yours also.”**

The battle is the world versus the Word. Culture dislikes the Word because it brings conviction to their lives. Persecution comes because of the Word, and we can protect ourselves by emotionally separating ourselves from the battle.

- Share a time when you experienced persecution because of your relationship with Christ.
- In what ways can we prepare ourselves for the battle with culture?

Life Challenge

Spend time this week evaluating your life as a Christ follower. Do you spend time daily in His Word? Do you obey His voice? Do you have a spiritual family to lift you up and help you persevere through life challenges? Ask the Holy Spirit to help you live out the beatitudes by following Jesus’ example. The rewards will be priceless.

Prayer

Thank You, God, for welcoming us to abide in You. Thank You for sending Your Son, Jesus, to not only save us, but to also teach us how to live a peaceful life. Thank You for giving us direction through Your Word. Amen. Pray for the specific needs of the group.