

Jesus Freaks

A Bible Study for Those Who Refuse to Deny Jesus

**dc Talk
and
The Voice of the Martyrs**

Study Materials prepared by

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Jesus Freak

What will people think when they hear that I'm a Jesus Freak?
What will people do when they find that it's true?
I don't really care if they label me a Jesus Freak
'Cause there ain't no disguising the truth.
What will people think,
What will people do?
I don't really care, what else can I say,
There ain't no disguising the truth.

Toby McKeehan & Mark Heimermann
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Dedicated to...all those who refuse to deny Jesus.
Your faith is not in vain.

Jesus Freaks

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This study is based on the book *Jesus Freaks*, published by Albury Publishing. Material for that book came from *Foxe's Book of Martyrs* and from The Voice of the Martyrs, Inc.

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Editor's note:

Jesus Freaks will expose you to stories of the lives and deaths of martyrs. Some of their experiences will be difficult to read. All of their experiences will challenge you to examine your own faith and will motivate you to make a difference in your own world.

The stories in this study are an abbreviated version of those in the book, *Jesus Freaks*. You are encouraged to read the stories in their entirety. Page numbers in *Jesus Freaks* are given with each of the stories included in this study. Following each story are questions designed to encourage personal application for spiritual growth. Practical application of the principles in this study are presented in Session 13: "I Will Do What I Can for Those Who Are Persecuted." You may want to review this chapter each week and begin to put into practice some of the specific suggestions for helping those in the persecuted church.

Scriptures are primarily from the New International Version unless otherwise noted. All Scriptures are printed with Bible verse references. You are also encouraged to read these Scriptures from your own copy of the Bible.

This study can effectively be used in several settings: As a bible study for an individual, as a small group with a discussion leader, or as a large group with a teacher. This study can be an intense experience—group leaders may want to only use these materials on a weekly or once-a-month basis to allow participants time to assimilate and to apply the truths contained in this study.

Some additional suggestions for use of this curriculum include:

- Vacation Bible School
- Missions training
- "Freak- Out" retreat weekend
- "Freak-Week" Summer Camp
- Weekly prayer/bible study groups in schools ("Freak of the Week")
- Introductory seminar

About Carol Sallee...

Carol Sallee is the Pastor's wife and the Director of Women's Ministries at New Beginnings Baptist Church near Tulsa, Oklahoma. She has worked with youth for more than 15 years. Currently, she travels and speaks to women's groups and other groups, challenging them to live more like Christ. She also is using her gifts as a writer to inspire and challenge the church.

Carol's first contact with the book *Jesus Freaks* was through working for the graphic designer that designed the book. She says that as the various pages would come across her desk, she was captivated by the stories and challenged in her own faith walk.

If you would like to contact Carol about this study guide, or to schedule her to speak in your church or Christian group, you can email her at carolsallee@yahoo.com. Also, visit her webpage at www.carolsallee.com.

Suggestions for The Jesus Freaks Bible Study

1. Give “Jesus Freak” door prizes.

Door prizes help to create excitement for the study. They also provide an avenue for discovering new prospects. Each student should fill out a card with name, address, phone, and age. Cards should be collected before the study begins. At the end of the study, draw names from the cards, and award door prizes.

Suggested door prizes:

A. Voice of the Martyrs posters and T-shirts

D. *Jesus Freaks* CD

B. Voice of the Martyrs books

E. *Foxes Book of Martyrs*

C. *Jesus Freaks* Book

2. Create a Jesus Freaks Prayer Map.

Order two copies of The Voice of the Martyrs special issue newsletter. In the center of this issue is a global prayer map. Mount the map on a large matboard. Cut out the description of each country (also included in the introductory issue). Mount these country descriptions around the map. Provide small sticky notes and pens. Students are encouraged to write their name on a sticky note and place on one of the country descriptions. By doing this, students agree to pray for this particular country throughout the Jesus Freaks Bible Study. Copy the country descriptions from the back of the *Jesus Freaks*. Each student should receive a copy of the country description for which he or she is praying. Encourage students to hang the country description in their rooms as a prayer reminder.

3. Provide current information

Before each Jesus Freaks Bible Study, research current information in The Voice of the Martyrs monthly newsletter or on The Voice of the Martyrs website (www.persecution.com). There are also other websites available such as www.persecutedchurch.org. Copy any stories that correspond to those countries listed on the prayer map. As students arrive at the Jesus Freak Bible Study, give them any new information you have discovered about their individual countries. This helps to create an awareness of the ongoing, daily persecution of Christians around the world.

4. Show The Voice of the Martyrs videos

Suggested videos: A. *Faith Under Fire* B. *The Martyrs' Cry*

5. Participate in the International Day of Prayer for the Persecuted Church

More information is available on The Voice of the Martyrs website (www.persecution.com).

6. Participate in The Voice of the Martyrs Projects

Decorate a container with VOM logos and other information. Encourage students to donate their change toward various VOM programs such as “Blankets of Love” for Sudan or Christmas Care Packages. It is important to affirm student donations by keeping them informed of the number of items they have purchased. Usually, the VOM monthly newsletter makes a report of the total number of items delivered and contains pictures of individuals with their VOM gifts.

Session 1

Freaks!

In this study, you will learn about those who would not compromise or apologize for their faith in Jesus Christ, even if it meant going to prison, being tortured, or facing death. You will read about people who have changed and are changing our world by refusing to lay aside their relationships with Jesus for the sake of merely being accepted by the crowd. They are martyrs . . . Jesus Freaks.

Defining two labels:

1. Martyr

It is said that there are more Christian martyrs today than there were in 100 A.D. in the days of the Roman Empire. According to a study done at Regent University, there were close to 156,000 Christian martyrs around the world in 1998. An estimated 164,000 will be martyred in 1999.

Martyr (from the Greek word for “witness”)

- Someone who chooses to suffer death rather than to deny Jesus Christ or His work
- Someone who bears testimony to the truth of what he has seen or heard or knows, as in an eyewitness in a court of justice
- Someone who sacrifices something very important to further the kingdom of God
- Someone who endures severe or constant suffering for their Christian witness
- Someone who could be called a “Jesus Freak”

Which definition of the word “martyr” is the most significant to you and why?

In your own words, define the word “martyr.”

2. Jesus Freak

Freak

- Oddly different; someone who commits to something wholeheartedly, without apology or compromise

Jesus Freak

- Someone who commits themselves wholeheartedly to Jesus Christ without apology or compromise (which makes them oddly different!)
- Someone who stands up or stands out when God calls, regardless of the circumstances
- Someone who is willing to stand up for Jesus even if it means going to prison, being tortured, or facing death
- Someone who is changing our world by refusing to lay aside their relationship with Jesus for the sake of merely being accepted by the crowd
- Someone who sees the potential to make a difference and has the courage to break away from the crowd

Which definition of the word “Jesus Freak” is the most significant to you and why?

In your own words, define the words “Jesus Freak.”

You may never have to face the decision of whether or not to die for Jesus, but every day you face the decision of whether or not you will live for Him. Will you take the challenge from these martyrs, these Jesus Freaks? Are you willing to live a martyr’s life? Will you be a Jesus Freak? Will you choose to stand strong? Will you choose to make your life count? If your answer is “yes,” God will honor your decision and you will make a difference. Now is the time for you to cross the line from innocent bystander to hard-core participant in what Jesus has called you to.

Session 2

Jesus: The Man Who Made the Whole World Freak Out

Yes, I believe in God.

Read the story of Cassie Bernall on page 17.

She was 17 years old. He stood glaring at her, his weapon before her face.

“Do you believe in God?”

She paused. It was a life-or-death question. “Yes, I believe in God.”

“Why?” asked her executioner. But he never gave her the chance to respond.

The teenage girl lay dead at his feet.

Why did she say “yes”? Why does anyone say “yes”? Why would you say “yes”?

Why? Here’s why:

Read pages 17 – 19.

Jesus knelt in the garden and prayed, “Father, if You are willing, let this cup pass from Me. But if this must happen, I will obey Your will.” His prayer was so intense that His sweat became as great drops of blood falling to the ground.

Soon soldiers came to take Him. He was betrayed by a friend into their hands. The guards asked for “Jesus of Nazareth.” When He answered, “I am He,” they were knocked to the ground by the power of His confession. Peter, another friend, tried to rescue Him by attacking one of the high priest’s servants and cutting off his ear. Jesus rebuked Peter for his actions, healed the servant’s ear, and submitted Himself to the soldiers. He could have easily escaped, but He chose to be obedient to His Father’s will.

He was taken before the high priest, where He was questioned and beaten. He was spit on and chunks of His beard were ripped out of His face. The priests demanded that He be crucified because He had said He was God. He was questioned again, but the governor could find no guilt in Him. Still, the crowd called for a crucifixion. The governor sent Him out to be whipped, hoping that would please the priests. By this time all of His followers had either betrayed Him or deserted Him.

The rest of the morning He was whipped and beaten beyond recognition. A robe was placed over His bleeding back, left until His lacerations dried to the cloth, and then it was ripped from His shoulders, reopening all of the wounds. They mocked Him as king of the Jews and made a crown of one-inch thorns, forcing it onto His head until the blood covered His face.

Again He was brought to the governor. The governor put it to the people, hoping they would show mercy on this innocent man. But the crowd called out, “Crucify Him!” Jesus was turned over to the Roman guards for execution.

Jesus bore the weight of His own cross upon the torn flesh of His back and shoulders as He stumbled up the hill outside the city. He was then nailed to that cross, raised up for everyone to see, and left there to die. He could have called twelve legions of angels to free Himself, but He didn’t. He knew His sacrifice would pay the price for all mankind to be set free from sin and to have the right to stand with God.

He died six hours later. He was taken down from the cross and buried in a borrowed tomb. But He didn’t stay there long. On the third day He was resurrected from the dead, the keys of hell and death in His hands. He had paved the way for us to become children of God and to live forever with Him.

Immediately following His death, His friends and disciples were afraid and hid. But after His resurrection, Jesus came and visited them, comforting and encouraging them.

After He ascended to heaven, on the day of Pentecost, He gave them the Holy Spirit. A new boldness rose up within them. There were 3,000 Christian converts in one day in Jerusalem. Then they spread to the corners of the earth to share the gospel of Jesus Christ, no longer afraid. Every one of them except John was executed for proclaiming the name of Jesus. They never denied His name again.

CHALLENGE: Apply the story of Jesus Christ.

1. No man has caused the worldwide stir that Jesus Christ did 2,000 years ago. People are still being imprisoned, tortured, and killed every day, because they refuse to deny the name of Jesus.

As a Jesus Freak, do you desire to know about the man Jesus who has inspired such strength and courage for thousands of years?

Why do you believe that Jesus caused a worldwide stir?

Do you believe He continues to “cause a stir”? Explain your answer.

Do you believe people are still being imprisoned, tortured, and killed every day, because they refuse to deny the name of Jesus? Explain your answer.

What steps can you take this week to deepen your relationship with Jesus?

2. Most martyrs could have saved their lives if they had been willing to deny Jesus Christ. We wonder, “Why didn’t they just say they weren’t Christians and live?” or “Couldn’t they just keep silent about their faith?” In John 15:13, Jesus says, “Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends.” Their love for Jesus was bigger than life itself.

As a Jesus Freak, will you stand with thousands of martyrs around the world today who still face persecution because Jesus means more to them than their own lives?

What does it mean to deny Jesus?

Do you think martyrs should deny Jesus and keep silent about their faith so they can save their lives? Explain your answer.

What are some ways you can begin to take a stand this week?

3. The purpose of this study is not to try to explain away the deaths of the martyrs, but to honor their conviction, commitment, and faith—and to build yours. You must choose to follow Jesus. You may never have to face the decision of whether or not to die for Jesus, but every day you face the decision of whether or not you will live for Him.

As a Jesus Freak, will you live for Him?

How can the conviction, commitment, and faith of the martyrs build yours?

How would you define “living for Jesus”?

Do you believe you are really living for Jesus? If so, how? If not, what do you need to do differently?

What can you do this week to prepare yourself to live as a Jesus Freak, regardless of the cost?

4. Our mission may not involve hanging on a cross, being jailed, or being burned at the stake here in America, but we have other, more invisible obstacles. Ours is a society built by pride, materialism, and dedication to the status quo. In a world built on free will instead of God’s will, we must be the Freaks. While we may not be called to martyr our lives, we must martyr our way of life. We must put our selfish ways to death and march to a different beat. Then the world will see Jesus.

Jesus was willing to give His life for you, and these people, these martyrs, were willing to give up their lives for Him. As a Jesus Freak, how much will it take for you to truly dedicate your days on earth to Him?

What do you believe are some of the “invisible obstacles” you face?

What does it mean to “martyr your way of life”? How can you do this in your own life?

What do you need to do differently this week so the world can see Jesus in your life?

**What will people think if they call you a Jesus Freak?
Whatever you do, pray that it makes them think of Jesus!**

Session 3

The Original Jesus Freaks: Part One

Why did they have to die?

Standing before King Nebuchadnezzar, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego proclaimed, “We do not need to defend ourselves to you. If you throw us into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to save us from the furnace. He will save us from your power, O king. But even if God does not save us, we want you, O king, to know this: We will not serve your gods” (Daniel 3:16 – 18 NCV).

Live or die, they would not deny their faith. They were strengthened and encouraged by Jesus Christ. Their faith was not in vain.

The First Jesus Freak: Stephen, Jerusalem, 34 A.D.

Read pages 37 – 39 and Acts 7:54 – 60 to learn more about Stephen.

- How does Acts 6:8 describe Stephen?

Opposition against Stephen came from several religious leaders. These leaders argued with Stephen, but they could not stand up against his wisdom or the Spirit by which he spoke. The people, elders, and teachers of the Law were stirred up against Stephen. They seized him and brought him before the Sanhedrin. They produced false witnesses against him and secretly persuaded men to say, “We have heard Stephen speak words of blasphemy against Moses and against God.”

The Bible says in Acts 6:15, “All who were sitting in the Sanhedrin looked intently at Stephen, and they saw that his face was like the face of an angel.” In Acts 7, Stephen preached the sermon of a lifetime. He reviewed the entire Jewish history from Abraham to Moses to Solomon. He concluded his sermon with these words: “You stubborn and hardheaded people! You’re always fighting against the Holy Spirit, just like your ancestors did. They killed the prophets who told about the coming of the Righteous One. And now you have turned against Him and killed Him. You have received the law of God, but you have not kept it.”

When the crowd heard this, they were even more furious. But Stephen was full of the Holy Spirit and said, “Look, I see heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.”

This was too much. The crowd rushed Stephen and dragged him out of the city to stone him. He continued preaching all the way. While they were stoning him, Stephen prayed, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.” Then he fell on his knees and cried, “Lord, do not hold this against them.” When he said those words, Stephen died.

Stephen was a Jesus Freak who could not stop telling people about Jesus, even if it meant his life.

As a Jesus Freak, are you willing to pay the price to keep telling others about Jesus?

What kind of “price” do you think you might have to pay if you tell others about Jesus?

Have you ever paid a price to tell others about Jesus?

Can you think of one person who you need to tell about Jesus this week? What price will you pay to tell this person about Jesus?

“You Will Indeed Drink From My Cup”

James, Son of Zebedee, Brother to John, Apostle, Jerusalem, Israel 44 A.D.

Read pages 193 – 194.

In Mark 10:35 – 43, James, along with his brother, John, requested that Jesus let them sit on each side of Him when He was in glory. Jesus asked them this question, “Can you drink the cup I drink or be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with? They answered, “We can.” Jesus replied, “You will.”

King Herod decided to stop the spread of Christianity by striking its leaders in the churches. He had James arrested and sentenced to death on the basis of one man’s testimony. When the accuser saw James’ courage and joy, he became a Christian.

The soldiers led James to be executed. Along the way, the accuser begged James’ forgiveness. James paused for a moment and blessed the man. Then the man said, “You should not receive the crown of martyrdom alone. I will die with you.” The two were beheaded together.

James was a Jesus Freak who said, “I can.” Jesus answered him, “You will.” Just as Jesus had foretold, James was martyred—the first of the twelve disciples to die for his faith.

As a Jesus Freak, will you say, “I can,” no matter the cost?

What is something from the Bible to which you have said, “I can”? What has been the result of this commitment?

Is there something else in the Bible to which you need to say, “I can.”?

How can you begin to follow through on this commitment during the week?

We Will Die With You

Philip, Apostle, 51 A.D.

Read pages 218 – 219.

In John 1:45, Philip told Nathanael, “We have found the one Moses wrote about and about whom the prophets also wrote—Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.”

Philip became a traveling preacher who performed many signs and great miracles. Idol worshippers refused to listen to the gospel he preached. Some historians say they whipped him, threw him in prison, and later crucified him. Other historians say he was tied to a pillar and stoned to death.

Philip was a Jesus Freak who found the one worth dying for.

As a Jesus Freak, have you found the One worth dying for?

Is there anything or anyone in your life that you would die for? Why would you?

Do you believe Jesus is worth dying for? Why?

How can you prepare yourself to be willing to die for Jesus?

Preaching From the Rooftop

James, the less, one of Jesus' brothers, Jerusalem, 63 A.D.

Read pages 88 – 90.

After the resurrection and ascension of Jesus, James preached for thirty years in Jerusalem. Through his preaching, prayers, and example, he helped to convert many people to Christ.

Feeling threatened by the rapid growth of the church, the religious leaders of that day determined to force James to deny Jesus before a crowd. They took him to the top of the temple and threatened to push him off if he did not deny Christ. From his place at the top of the temple, he preached with more boldness than ever. Enraged, two or three of the religious leaders pushed him off the roof. He did not die in the fall; only his legs were broken.

The angry men decided to stone him to death. James knelt on his broken legs and asked God to forgive these men. One of the priests, when he heard James praying, begged the others to stop, saying, "What are we doing? He is praying for us. Stop the stoning! Stop the stoning!"

While he was shouting this, another man ran up with a big, heavy stick in his hand and struck James in the head. James died instantly from the blow, still in prayer.

James was a Jesus Freak who persevered when his faith was tested.

As a Jesus Freak, are you willing to persevere when your faith is tested?

Why do you need to be willing to persevere when your faith is tested?

Has your faith been tested? What happened? How did you respond?

How can you prepare yourself to persevere the next time your faith is tested?

Dear Heavenly Father,

Thank You for showing me the One worthy dying for. If my faith must be tested because of Him, please give me the strength to persevere. Please make me willing to tell others about Him. In Jesus' Name. Amen.

Session 4

The Original Jesus Freaks: Part Two

The original Jesus Freaks were absolutely sure of eternal life. They were convinced that they were not ending their lives, but exchanging their lives on earth for a life with their Lord in heaven.

A Supernatural Release

Peter, Apostle, Jerusalem, Israel, 65 A.D.

Read pages 311 – 312 and the following Bible verses to learn more about Peter.

- *What responses did Peter make while he was being persecuted or imprisoned?*
Acts 4:19 – 20
Acts 5:29
Acts 5:41
- *Do you think Peter anticipated the kind of death that awaited him when he wrote the following verses? Why or why not?*

“In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials.”

—1 Peter 1:6

“But if you suffer for doing good and you endure it, this is commendable before God. To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps.” —

1 Peter 2:20 – 21

“Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed. If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you. However, if you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name.”

—1 Peter 4:12 – 14,16

Peter was taken into custody. Two soldiers stood guard within his small cell, each bound to him at the wrist. Two additional guards were ordered to stand watch outside the cell. Instead of being immediately executed, Peter was to be held in custody until the Passover, when he was to be executed publicly. Believers gathered on his behalf to pray, asking for his deliverance. The night before his scheduled execution, an angel of the Lord appeared to Peter, and he was miraculously released from prison.

Peter remained in Jerusalem as a leader of the church for some time. Eventually, Peter traveled to Rome to minister. Nero determined to have him executed, but the disciples there urged him to flee the city. As Peter was nearing the city gate, he felt it was his time to die, just as Jesus had prophesied in John 21:19. Peter returned to the city.

Upon being captured and sentenced to be crucified, Peter announced that he was not worthy to be crucified in the same position as his Savior and requested to die on the cross upside down. The Romans

honored his request.

Peter knew that one day he would face death for following Jesus, because Jesus had told him he would. Yet Peter never flinched from the call to follow Him anywhere. Like Paul, Peter was delivered from death again and again until he finished the course God had laid out for him.

Peter was a Jesus Freak who was willing to follow in the steps of Christ, even if those steps included suffering. He was not afraid, surprised, or ashamed over the trials he suffered. After Jesus' resurrection, Peter was a Jesus Freak who never flinched from the call to follow Jesus anywhere.

As a Jesus Freak, are you willing to suffer? Will you flinch from the call to follow Jesus?

Will following in the steps of Jesus guarantee you will suffer? Why or why not?

Have you ever suffered because of your willingness to follow Christ? What happened? What was your response?

What can you do this week to be better prepared for the next time you will suffer?

Not Afraid of the Cross

Andrew, Greece, 66 A.D., Peter's brother, Apostle

Read pages 149 – 151.

Andrew voluntarily came to face Aegaeas, the governor of Greece, to persuade him not to persecute the new Christians in the city of Patras. He tried to share his faith with the governor. As a result, Andrew was sentenced to death by crucifixion.

Instead of the fear that might be expected as he neared the cross, love for Jesus rose up in Andrew's heart. He said, "O cross, most welcome and long looked for! With a willing mind, I joyfully come to you, being the disciple of Him who hung on you."

For three days, Andrew hung on the cross. As long as he could move his tongue, he continued to teach and to encourage those who stood nearby. After three days, the Christians asked the governor to take Andrew down and release him to them. But Andrew, hearing their plans, cried out, "O Lord Jesus Christ! Don't let your servant, who hangs here on the cross for Your name's sake, be released to dwell among men. Please receive me, O my Lord, my God! You I have known, You I have loved, You I desire to see, and in You I am what I am." Having spoken these words, he committed his spirit into the hands of his heavenly Father.

Andrew was a Jesus Freak who was not afraid of death. He stayed at his task until his voice was silenced by death.

As a Jesus Freak, are you unafraid of death? Will you stay at your task until your voice is silenced by death?

Do you ever feel afraid of death? Explain your answer.

Do you believe God wants you to continue to be a witness for Christ even if it means risking your life? Why or why not?

How can you train yourself to stay at your task of sharing Christ until your voice is silenced by death?

We Will Die With You

Matthew, Apostle, 66 A.D.

Read page 219 and the following Bible verses to learn more about Matthew who wrote the first book in the New Testament.

- *Do you think Matthew anticipated the kind of death that awaited him when he recorded the following verses? Why or why not?*

“But be on your guard against men; they will hand you over to the local councils and they will flog you in their synagogues. All men will hate you because of me, but he who stands firm to the end will be saved. Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather be afraid of the one who can destroy both soul and body in hell . . .and anyone who does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.”
—Matthew 10:17,22,28,38 – 39

Matthew was sent to Ethiopia. There, he accomplished much, with teaching as well as with miracles. He was arrested while he stood teaching in his church. He was dragged outside, nailed to the ground with short spears, and beheaded.

Matthew was a Jesus Freak who was not afraid of those who could kill him but could not kill his soul. He was willing to lose his life for the sake of Jesus Christ.

As a Jesus Freak, are you willing to lose your life for the sake of Jesus?

Read Matthew 10:28 again.

Why should we not fear those could kill our body? Why are they unable to kill our souls?

Could you still lose your life for the sake of Jesus Christ without actually facing death? How?

What are some Bible verses you can think about this week that can help you be unafraid of losing your life?

Dear Heavenly Father,

Thank You for the privilege of following Jesus. Thank You for Your victory over death. Please make me willing to lose my life for the sake of Your Son. In Jesus' Name. Amen.

Session 5

The Original Jesus Freaks: Part Three

Finish the Race

Saul of Tarsus or Paul the Apostle, Roman Empire, 65 A.D.

Review the story of Stephen on pages 37 – 39 to understand the conversion of Saul of Tarsus to Paul the apostle.

Saul did not persecute men like Stephen for long. His conversion started with a seed placed in his heart by a young man full of faith, grace, and power—a Jesus Freak who could not stop telling people about Jesus, even if it meant his life. One day, soon after Stephen was stoned, Saul was on his way to Damascus to imprison more believers, and he saw Jesus. From that encounter his name was changed to Paul and he became the first Christian missionary. Paul traveled everywhere proclaiming the name of Jesus.

Read pages 250 – 253 and the following Bible verses to learn more about Paul.

- *According to the following verses, what are some of the things Paul suffered as a Jesus Freak?*
Acts 9:26 – 29
Acts 14:19
Acts 16:16 – 24
Acts 21:27 – 36
Acts 27:42 – 44

In a letter to the church at Corinth, Paul gives a brief account of all his sufferings: “I have worked harder, been put in jail more often, been whipped times without number, and faced death again and again. Five different times the Jews gave me thirty-nine lashes. Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked. Once I spent a whole night and a day adrift at sea. I have traveled many weary miles. I have faced danger from flooded rivers and from robbers. I have faced danger from my own people, the Jews, as well as from the Gentiles. I have faced danger in the cities, in the deserts, and on the stormy seas. And I have faced danger from men who claim to be Christians and are not. I have lived with weariness and pain and sleepless nights. Often I have been hungry and thirsty and have gone without food. Often I have shivered with cold, without enough clothing to keep me warm” (2 Corinthians 11:23 – 27 NLT).

Paul repeatedly escaped death and angry mobs. He was actually stoned and left for dead. Time and again, Paul was caught and imprisoned, and time and time again, he escaped. In Philippi, an earthquake freed him. In a transfer from Jerusalem to Rome, he survived a shipwreck, only to be bitten by a poisonous snake. Paul shook off the snake and continued to preach the gospel.

Paul went on many missionary journeys. He cared for the new churches he started by revisiting them and by writing them letters. He wrote the following New Testament books: Romans, Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, Thessalonians, Timothy, Titus, and Philemon.

- *Do you think Paul anticipated the kind of death that awaited him when he wrote the following verses? Why or why not?*

“ . . .offer your bodies as living sacrifices . . .” —Romans 12:1

“So, whether we live or we die, we belong to the Lord.” —Romans 14:8

“We do not want you to be uninformed about the hardships we suffered. We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired even of life. Indeed, in our hearts we felt the sentence of death. But this happened that we might not rely on ourselves but on God, who raises the dead.” —2 Corinthians 1:8 – 9

“We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed. We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body.” —2 Corinthians 4:8 – 10

“For me to live is Christ and to die is gain.” —Philippians 1:21

Paul survived many things before he finally reached Rome. There, he was put under house arrest until his trial before Caesar. He defended himself before Caesar so cleverly that he was set free for a time. After many more missionary journeys, he was again arrested, and sentenced to death.

As Paul’s execution drew near, God prepared his heart. He wrote these words to his spiritual son Timothy, “Now the time has come for me to die. My life is like a drink offering being poured out on the altar. I have fought well, I have finished the race, and I have been faithful. So a crown will be given to me for pleasing the Lord” (2 Timothy 4:6 – 8, CEV).

Because he was a Roman citizen, Paul was not tortured, but was beheaded outside the city.

Paul was a Jesus Freak who fought well, finished the race, and remained faithful. He knew that, live or die, he belonged to Jesus.

As a Jesus Freak, do you know that, live or die, you belong to Jesus?

What does it mean to “belong” to Christ?

Since you belong to Christ, how should you live your life?

What are some things you could do this week to fight well, finish the race, and remain faithful?

We Will Die With You

Jude, Apostle, younger brother of Jesus, 68 A.D.

Read page 219.

Jude was the author of the book of Jude. In Jude 3, he urged his readers to fight for the faith. He preached boldly against worshiping idols and making heathen sacrifices. When pagan priests saw that they were losing followers and money because of Jude’s teaching, they attacked him with sticks and clubs, beating him to death.

Jude was a Jesus Freak who fought to the death for his faith.

As a Jesus Freak, will you fight to the death for your faith?

Have you ever been in a situation where you fought for your faith? What happened?

Do you believe that God wants you to be willing to fight to the death for your faith?

What steps do you need to take until you truly believe you are willing to do so?

No Longer Doubting

Thomas, Apostle, Jerusalem, Israel, 70 A.D.

Read pages 56 – 58 and John 20:24 – 28 to learn more about Thomas.

Why did Thomas earn the nickname “Doubting Thomas”? What did it take to help Thomas overcome his doubt?

Thomas was chosen to go to India and North Africa. Although he dreaded living among the savage tribes, God strengthened him, and he saw many converted in these countries.

In India, the people worshiped an image of the sun. Through the power of God, Thomas destroyed the image and put a stop to their idolatry. The furious sun god’s priests accused him before their king, who sentenced him to be tortured with red-hot metal plates and the thrown into a glowing furnace.

The fire did not hurt Thomas, he was still alive in the midst of the furnace. The priest threw spears and javelins into the furnace. One of the spears pierced Thomas’ side and he fell there dead.

Thomas was a Jesus Freak who no longer doubted Jesus’ resurrection and later died for Him.

As a Jesus Freak, do you believe in Christ’s resurrection to the extent that you would die for Him?

Have you ever doubted that Jesus was resurrected? Have you overcome your doubt? If so, how?

If you still doubt the resurrection of Jesus, and if you will die for Him, what can you do to overcome your doubt?

Dear Heavenly Father,

Thank You that no matter what happens, I belong to you. Thank You for the power of Your Son’s resurrection. Please make me willing to die for Him if that is required of me. In Jesus’ Name.

Session 6

The Original Jesus Freaks: Part Four

“We Will Die With You!”

Simon, the Zealot, Apostle, 70 A.D.

Read page 220.

Simon preached the gospel in Egypt, North Africa, Mauritania (an island in the Indian Ocean) and in the islands of Great Britain. He was painfully tortured and crucified in either Great Britain or Syria.

Simon was a Jesus Freak who paid the ultimate price to take the gospel to many different countries.

As a Jesus Freak, are you willing to pay the ultimate price to take the gospel to many different countries?

How would you define “the ultimate price”?

What price would be involved in taking the gospel to many different countries?

Have you ever considered being involved in taking the gospel to different countries? Prayerfully consider the possibility this week!

I Won’t Bow Down!

Bartholomew, Apostle, Armenia, 70 A.D.

Read pages 205 – 206.

Bartholomew boldly preached Jesus Christ for thirty-seven years in Turkey, India, and Armenia. Many people became Christians, including the king of Armenia’s brother and his family. When the king threatened Bartholomew, he answered, “I have preached the true worship of God throughout your country. I have not perverted your brother and his family, but rather have converted them to the truth.”

The king continued to threaten Bartholomew to stop preaching and to make sacrifices to the god Ashtaroth, or he would be put to death. Again, Bartholomew boldly answered the king, “You can be sure of this, I will never sacrifice to your idol. I would rather seal my testimony with my blood than do the smallest act against my faith or conscience.”

Upon hearing this, the king ordered Bartholomew to suffer severe torture. He was beaten with rods, hung upside down on a cross, and skinned alive. Despite all this, he was still conscious and continued to encourage the people to believe in Jesus. Finally, to prevent him from saying anything else, he was beheaded.

Bartholomew was a Jesus Freak who would rather die than do the smallest act against his faith or his conscience.

As a Jesus Freak, will you protect your faith and your conscience?

Have you ever been faced with a situation where you were tempted to act against your faith or conscience? What happened?

Why is it important to protect your faith and your conscience?

How can you equip yourself for future situations where you may be tempted to act against your faith or conscience?

Indestructible John

John the Apostle, Roman Empire, 95 A.D.

Read pages 162 – 165.

- *Do you think John anticipated the kind of death that awaited him when he recorded the following verses? Why or why not?*

“Greater love has no man than this, that one lay down his life for his friends.” —John 15:13

“I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.” —John 16:33

John was arrested, imprisoned, threatened, and beaten. He survived the persecutions of Nero, which ended the lives of those who remained of the original twelve disciples. Based on the verses in John 21:20 – 23, a rumor was started that John would not die.

The Roman Emperor finally captured John and began to discuss what would be the method of his death. The emperor agreed to have John thrown into a vat of boiling oil. The chief executioner believed that no one could survive this. The crowd cheered their approval. They would be witnesses to the death of John the Beloved.

The Roman Emperor snarled at the apostle, “If your Jesus is really a God, then ask Him to save you! “Then, turning to the executioner, he commanded, “Take him away.” The guard gruffly said to John, “Get up, Christian. The oil is ready.”

As John was lowered into the boiling oil, he raised his hands up toward heaven, praying to God. Minutes passed. John continued to pray. Remembering that they had heard this apostle would never die, the crowd began to whisper: “The apostle is not harmed!” “It’s a miracle!” “His God has protected him!”

The crowd began to cheer. John started to loudly and joyfully worship Jesus and celebrate his deliverance from death. The emperor’s plan had backfired: Instead of destroying all faith in Jesus Christ, he had actually helped increase it!

The Emperor made a quick decision: “Get this man out of my sight.” The Emperor gave up trying to kill John. Instead, he banished John to the rocky island of Patmos.

When the Emperor died, John was released and returned to Ephesus. He suffered persecution and was forced to drink poison, yet he remained unharmed. John outlived all of the other apostles by more than

thirty years. He finally died in peace when he was about 101 years old.

John was a Jesus Freak who was willing to lay down his life for Jesus. He faced persecution with courage.

As a Jesus Freak, will you face persecution with courage?

What is courage?

Have you seen courage recently exemplified in the life of a believer? How can you follow that example?

What can you do this week to develop an attitude of courage in preparation for the next time you may be persecuted?

Dear Heavenly Father,

Thank You for the courage you provide in the face of persecution. Protect me from those things which will bring harm to my faith or to my conscience. Please make me willing to pay whatever price is required to tell others about Your Son. In Jesus' Name. Amen.

Session 7

I Will Not Be Ashamed

Jesus Freaks know that “everyone who wants to live a godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted” (2 Timothy 3:12).

We Were With Christ

Richard Wurmbrand, Romania, 1945

Read pages 63 – 68.

At the Congress of Cults, arranged by the Romanian Communist government, the pastors and priests of all the churches were asked to swear loyalty to the new regime. Out of fear, these men of God filled the air with flattery and lies. It was as if they spat in Jesus Christ’s face.

Sabina Wurmbrand could stand it no longer. She whispered to her husband, “Richard, stand up and wash away this shame from the face of Christ.”

Richard knew what would happen: “If I speak, you will lose your husband.”

Sabina replied: “I do not wish to have a coward for a husband.”

Pastor Wurmbrand took to the stage and began to preach, encouraging the delegates to glorify God the Creator and Christ the Savior. After this, he was a marked man. Three years later, after working in the underground church, Richard was kidnapped on his way to church.

He was led to a prison thirty feet beneath the earth where he was kept in solitary confinement. For years, he was kept alone in a cell. He did not see the sun, moon, stars, flowers, or another man, except for the interrogators who beat and tortured him.

To make the sense of isolation worse, the prison was kept completely silent. Even the guards had cloth shoes so their steps could not be heard.

Later, Pastor Wurmbrand wrote these words: “When we were first put in solitary confinement, it was like dying. We all had an unimaginable pain in our hearts thinking that we had not done our utmost for the Highest, for the One who has given His life for us on the Cross.”

After years of solitary confinement, he was put into a huge cell with 200 to 300 prisoners in each cell. Christian prisoners were beaten, smeared with excrement, then tied to crosses for four days and four nights without interruption. The Communists stood around them, jeering and mocking, “Look at your Christ, how beautiful He is, what fragrances He brings from heaven.” Then they kicked the other prisoners, forcing them to adore and worship this besmeared living crucifix.

After a total of fourteen years in prison, Pastor Wurmbrand was ransomed from the Communist government for \$10,000. In 1965, he finally left Romania. His purpose in leaving was to tell the Western world about the underground church and the persecution that Christians were suffering. In 1967, he typed the first issue of *The Voice of the Martyrs*. This organizations now serves in over 40 countries around the world, where Christians are persecuted.

(For additional reading on the life of Pastor Wurmbrand, read his book, *Tortured for Christ*.)

Read the following verses shared by Pastor Wurmbrand when he was questioned about his persecution:

“In this world you have tribulation. But take courage; I have overcome the world.” —John 16:33 NAS

“Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all.” —2 Corinthians 4:16 – 17

Pastor Wurmland also said: “You must stop looking at the wrong side of things. Lift your hearts to heavenly places and look down upon events from that vantagepoint. You will see life’s temporary sufferings as a gathering of pearls and jewels, with which will be adorned in eternity.”

Richard Wurmland is a Jesus Freak who knew that everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.

As a Jesus Freak, do you understand that you will be persecuted if you live a godly life?

What does it mean to live a godly life? Are you living a godly life?

Why is it important for you to understand that everyone who wants to live a godly life will be persecuted?

What do you need to do this week to live a godly life and to prepare for the persecution that will come?

Jesus Freaks know that the question is not whether they are persecuted, but whether they are willing to lay down their lives for their faith in Jesus Christ.

Read the following verses:

“Remember the words I spoke to you: ‘No servant is greater than his master. If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also.’” —John 15:20

“Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed.” —1 Peter 4:12,13

**Like Gold in the Fire
Polycarp, Smyrna (now Izmar, Turkey), 168 AD**

Read pages 136 – 138.

The bishop, Polycarp, entered the arena under armed guard. The stands were filled with an angry, shouting mob. Suddenly, a voice from heaven spoke to the bishop, saying, “Be strong, Polycarp, and play the man.” Despite the noise from the crowd, many of those who stood nearby also heard the heavenly voice.

Once inside the arena, the soldiers brought Polycarp before the Roman proconsul. The proconsul tried to get Polycarp to deny Jesus Christ, but Polycarp stood firm: “Eighty-six years I have served the Lord Jesus Christ, and He never once wronged me. How can I blaspheme my King who has saved me?”

Even after threats of wild beasts and fire, Polycarp refused to deny Jesus: “Bring on the beasts, or the fire, or whatever you choose; you shall not move me to deny Christ, my Lord and Savior.”

The crowd demanded that Polycarp be burned alive. Immediately, dry wood was brought out and heaped in the center of the arena for a bonfire.

When they were about to nail him to the stake, Polycarp said, “Leave me as I am; He who gives me strength to endure the fire will enable me to remain still within the fire.” They agreed to this and simply tied his hands behind his back with a rope.

The officers lit the fire. The flames rose high above his body, but miraculously, he was not burned. Since the fire did not hurt Polycarp, the executioner was ordered to stab him with a sword. As soon as he did, so much blood flowed from the wound that it put the fire out.

Polycarp was a Jesus Freak who knew that the question was not whether he would be persecuted, but whether he would be willing to lay down his life for his faith in Jesus Christ.

As a Jesus Freak, are you willing to lay down your life for your faith in Christ?

Do you believe that as a Christian you may be required to lay down your life for your faith in Christ? Why or why not?

Can you describe a situation in which this might be required of you?

If you cannot honestly say you are willing to lay down your life for Christ, how far are you willing to go for Him? How can you prepare this week for whatever is required of you?

Jesus Freaks know they should rejoice when they are mocked or persecuted because they are a follower of Jesus.

Read Matthew 5:11-12:

“Rejoice and be very glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.”

Ambassador for Christ

Boris, U.S.S.R., 1970s

Read page 241.

Boris did not smile. On purpose, to humiliate him for his faith in Christ, the prison guards issued him a uniform that was twice his size. The sleeves reached his knees; his gigantic shoes made him look like a clown. When he entered the barracks, he was greeted with laughter and ridicule.

A prisoner came and bowed in front of him in fake piety. “I greet you, Holy Father. You are the Ambassador of Christ Himself.”

His mocking words gave Boris courage. He boldly answered, “Yes, I do represent heaven. This is why

the atheists hate me and have imprisoned me.”

Upon his release from prison he said, “Many fear suffering; in the past, I too feared. But the presence of the Lord in jail has given me so many happy experiences that I would not have changed them for years of easy living.”

Boris was a Jesus Freak who rejoiced when he was persecuted.

As a Jesus Freak, will you rejoice when you are persecuted?

Has someone ever made fun of you because of your faith in Christ? How did you respond to that person?

Why should you rejoice when you are persecuted?

What are some Bible verses that will remind you to rejoice if you are persecuted this week?

Dear Heavenly Father,

Thank You that I may be persecuted because of my faith in Your Son. Teach me to rejoice in the face of this persecution. Please make me willing to lay down my life for You. In Jesus' Name. Amen.

Session 8

I Will Look Enemies in the Eye and Love Them With Your Love

A Communist officer told a Christian he was beating, “I am almighty, as you suppose your God to be. I can kill you.”

The Christian answered, “The power is all on my side. I can love you while you torture me to death.”
For centuries, godless torturers have been amazed that Jesus Freaks aren’t afraid of them.

Jesus Freaks show God’s love to those who betray them.

Read the following verses:

“You will be betrayed by parents, brothers, relatives, and friends, and they will put some of you to death. All men will hate you because of me. But not a hair of your head will perish.” —Luke 21:16 – 18

“Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do.” —Luke 23:34

“Love. . . takes no account of the evil done to it. . . pays no attention to a suffered wrong . . . Love bears up under everything that comes, is ever ready to believe the best of every person, its hopes are fadeless under all circumstances and it endures everything.” —1 Corinthians 13:5,7 AMP

“We Die With Gratitude”

Chiu-Chin-Hsiu and Ho-Hsiu-Tzu, Jiangxi, China, During the Red Guard Era, 1966–69

Read pages 109 – 110.

The two Christian girls awaited in the Chinese prison yard for the announced execution. They had decided to submit to death without renouncing their faith.

Flanked by renegade guards, the executioner came with a revolver in his hand. It was their own pastor! He had been sentenced to die with the two girls. But, as on many other occasions in church history, the persecutors worked on him, tempting him. They promised to release him if he would shoot the girls. He accepted.

The girls bowed respectfully before their pastor. One of them said, “Before you shoot us, we wish to thank you heartily for what you have meant to us. You taught us that Christians are sometimes weak and commit terrible sins, but they can be forgiven again. When you regret what you are about to do to us, do not despair like Judas, but repent like Peter. God bless you, and remember that our last thought was not one of indignation against your failure. Everyone passes through hours of darkness. May God reward you for all the good you have done to us. We die with gratitude.”

They bowed again.

The pastor’s heart was hardened. He shot the girls.

Afterwards he was shot by the Communists.

The two girls were Jesus Freaks who showed God’s love to their betrayer.

As a Jesus Freak, will you show love when someone betrays you?

How would you define the word “betray”?

Do you feel like you have ever been betrayed? Describe the situation. How did you respond?

Do you need to show God’s love to someone who has betrayed you? Why should you show this person God’s love? How will you show God’s love to this person?

Jesus Freaks love their enemies.

Read the following verses:

“Love your enemies. Let them bring out the best in you, not the worst. When someone give you a hard time, respond with the energies of prayer.”—Matthew 5:44, *The Message*

“If people persecute you because you are a Christian, don’t curse them; pray that God will bless them. Don’t let evil get the best of you, but conquer evil by doing good.”—Roman 12:14,21, NLT

Smiling at Her Torturer

Liuba Ganevskaya, U.S.S.R., 1970s

Read pages 157 – 158.

Liuba, arrested for her faith by the Russian Communists, was kept in a solitary cell, starved, and beaten. Still, she did not deny Jesus or reveal the names of other believers. She patiently suffered for the sake of the gospel.

One night, when the guard insulted her with foul words and was just about to start beating her, she somehow saw him differently.

She noticed for the first time that he was as tired of beating her as she was of being beaten. She was worn out from lack of sleep, and so was he. He was as desperate over not getting any information from her as she was about suffering for refusing to betray her friends.

A voice told her, “He is so much like you. You are both caught in the same drama of life. You and your torturers pass through the same vale of tears.”

Liuba looked up at the guard who had already lifted up his whip to beat her. She smiled.

Stunned, he asked, “Why do you smile?”

She replied, “I don’t see you the way a mirror would show you right now. I see you as you surely once were, a beautiful, innocent child. I see you, too, as I hope you will be. There was once a persecutor worse than you named Saul of Tarsus. He became an apostle and a saint. What burden so weighs on you that it drives you to the madness of beating a person who has done you no harm?”

The torturer put down his whip. He left that day a changed man.

“Jesus does not promise that when we bless our enemies and do good to them they will not despise us and persecute us. They certainly will. But not even that can hurt us or overcome us, so long as we pray for them. For if we pray for them, we are taking their distress and poverty, guilt and perdition upon ourselves, and pleading to God for them. It is only when one sees the anger and wrath of God hanging like grim realities over the head of one’s enemies that one can know something of what it means to love them and forgive them.” —Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Hung in Nazi Germany in 1945

Luiba and Dietrich were Jesus Freaks who loved their enemies.

As a Jesus Freak, will you love your enemies?

How would you define the word “enemy”?

How do you generally respond to your enemies? How does the Bible say you should respond?

Do you need to show God’s love to an enemy? Why should you show this person God’s love? How will you show God’s love to this person?

Jesus Freaks know they could escape their persecutors if they would deny their faith.

“One Vietnamese Christian once remarked to me, ‘Suffering is not the worst thing that can happen to us. Disobedience to God is the worst thing.’” —Tom White, imprisoned in Cuba for 17 months for distributing Christian literature (1979 – 80)

“He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose.” —Jim Elliot, killed in 1956 by headhunters in Ecuador while serving there as a missionary.

A Christian prisoner in Cuba was asked to sign a statement containing charges against fellow Christians that would lead to their arrest. He said:

“The chains keep me from signing this.”

The Communist officer protested, “But you are not in chains!”

“I am,” said the Christian. “I am bound by the chain of witnesses who throughout the centuries gave their lives for Jesus Christ. I am a link in this chain. I will not break it.”

Read the following verses:

“I tell you, whoever acknowledges me before men, the Son of Man will also acknowledge him before the angels of God. But he who disowns me before men will be disowned before the angels of God.” — Luke 12:8,9

“If we endure, we will also reign with him. If we disown him, he will also disown us.” —2 Timothy 2:12

“I Am a Soldier of Christ!”

Roy Pontoh, 15 years old, Indonesia, 1999

Read pages 47 – 48.

Roy Pontoh attended a Bible camp with other mostly Christian children and teenagers at a university on the island of Ambon, Indonesia. When the camp was over, cars came to take the children back to their homes. But there were not enough cars to hold the young people.

Men went to a nearby village to rent additional transportation to take the rest home. On the way to the village, the men were attacked by a Muslim mob. Two of the men were stabbed to death. Two men

escaped with their lives.

The same mob reached the university and found many of the teenagers who were hiding. Roy Pontoh was forced out of his hiding place and made to stand before the mob.

“Renounce your Jesus, or we will kill you!” they threatened.

Roy was terribly frightened. Though trembling, he answered, “I am a soldier of Christ!”

At this, one of the Muslim attackers swung a sword at Roy’s stomach. The sword hit the Bible Roy held, and ripped into it, knocking it out of his hand. The man’s next swing sliced open Roy’s stomach. His last word was “Jesus.”

Her Last Prayer

Girl, 16 or 17 years old, Asia, 1970s

Read page 50 – 51.

The Communist soldiers had discovered their illegal Bible study. Men with guns broke into the home, terrorizing the believers who had gathered there to worship.

The leading officer pointed his gun at the pastor’s head. “Hand me your Bible,” he demanded.

Reluctantly, the pastor handed over his Bible, his prized possession. With a sneer on his face, the guard threw the Word of God on the floor at his feet.

“We will let you go,” he growled, “but first, you must spit on this book of lies. Anyone who refuses will be shot.

A soldier pointed his gun at one of them. “You first.”

The man slowly got up and knelt down by the Bible. Reluctantly, he spit on it, praying, “Father, please forgive me.” He was allowed to leave.

A woman was nudged forward. In tears, she could barely do what the soldier demanded. She spit only a little, but it was enough. She too was allowed to leave.

Quietly, a young girl came forward. Overcome with love for her Lord, she knelt down and picked up the Bible. She wiped off the spit with her dress. “What have they done to Your Word? Please forgive them,” she prayed.

The Communist soldier shot her.

Roy Pontoh and a teenage girl in Asia were Jesus Freaks who could have escaped their persecutors if they had denied Jesus.

As a Jesus Freak, will you refuse to deny Jesus?

Is refusing to speak up for Jesus the same as denying Him? Why or why not?

Have you ever been tempted to deny Jesus? How did you respond?

How can you prepare yourself so you will not deny Jesus in the future?

Dear Heavenly Father,

Thank You for forgiving me when I betray You or live as an enemy of the cross. Help me to also forgive my enemies and those who betray me. Please make me willing to show love to my enemies and my betrayers. In Jesus’ Name. Amen.

Session 9

I Will Follow Your Voice Wherever You Lead Me

“I have seen the world, and it has nothing to offer me. Jesus is my only peace.”

—Anila, teenage girl, imprisoned and tortured, Pakistan, 1997

Jesus Freaks know Jesus.

Real followers of God know Jesus. Though they may not have seen Him with their eyes, they have “seen” His power, love, and joy in their lives. He is the Living Word and is so real to them that they would never deny Him, no matter the cost.

Read the following verses:

“So we always have courage. We know that while we live in this body, we are away from the Lord. We live by what we believe, not by what we can see . . .” —2 Corinthians 5:6 – 7, NCV

“For it is Christ’s love that compels us . . . And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again.” —2 Corinthians 5:14,15

“I Learned to See God”

Young Girl, Mainland China, During the Red Guard Era, 1966 – 1969

Read page 247.

A Chinese girl refused to betray the secrets of the underground church, even though she had been repeatedly tortured. She was asked how she could bear so much suffering.

“It was not hard,” she replied. “I had been taught by my pastor that the real torture lasts very little. For one minute of torture, there are ten minutes of glancing at the enraged faces and instruments of pain. I decided to keep my eyes closed the whole time. I did not see the stick before it hit me or afterward. The suffering was much reduced. I purified my heart of the fear of men, and I learned to see God. When the Communists became aware of my defense, they stuck my eyelids open with tape, but it was too late. My vision had already taken on a new aspect, and I had seen God as so many had seen Him before.”

This young girl was a Jesus Freak who knew Jesus. She had not seen Him with her eyes, but she had “seen” His power, love, and joy.

As a Jesus Freak, do you know Jesus, even though you haven’t seen Him?

Since you can’t see Jesus, what proof do you have that you know Him?

In what ways have you recently seen God’s power in your life? His love? His joy?

What can you do this week to “see” Jesus better?

Jesus Freaks know God well enough to discern His will for their lives and when that will is accomplished. Their first priority is to obey His will.

“Humanly speaking, we know that no one likes to suffer physically. But I know that if the Lord leads me into it, He will give me the strength to survive it.”

—Pastor Li De Xian, imprisoned and tortured, Mainland China, 1990s

Read the following verses:

“You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives.” —Genesis 50:20, Joseph

Joseph discerned the big picture of God’s plan behind his brothers selling him into slavery. What was intended as an evil act was for good to save many lives, even his brothers.

“For I am already being poured out like a drink offering, and the time has come for my departure. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.” —2 Timothy 4:6,7, The Apostle Paul

Paul knew he had finished his race and it was all right for him to go home to be with the Lord. Until he knew that, he always kept his eyes of faith looking for God’s grace to deliver him and to help him endure. He refused to quit until he’d won! He said, “Now the time has come for me to die.”

Note Our Faces Well

Perpetua, Saturus, and Felicitas, Carthage, North Africa, 202 A.D.

Read pages 298 – 302.

The judge passed the sentence: Perpetua and her fellow Christians were all condemned to be killed by wild beasts.

Two of the men were attacked by a leopard and then mauled by a bear. A wild boar was let loose on Saturus, but the boar turned on the one who unleashed him, goading him in the stomach. Saturus was only dragged on the sand. Then he was tied up in front of a bear, but the bear refused to come out of his den. For the second time, Saturus was left unharmed.

Perpetua and a young woman named Felicitas were put in the arena with a bull. Felicitas fell, seriously wounded. Perpetua was tossed in the air, her robe was torn. As soon as she got up, she ran to Felicitas and gently raised her from the ground. When the bull refused to attack them again, they were removed from the arena.

Saturus was put in the arena one last time. The leopard was let loose, and with one bite, Saturus was mortally wounded.

Those who were still alive were brought back into the arena to be killed by gladiators. First, they gave one another a kiss of peace. Then all remained still and received the sword in silence.

Perpetua was assigned a young, untried gladiator, who was not used to such scenes of violence. He stabbed her weakly several times between the ribs, but did not kill her. Perpetua guided his wavering hand to her throat.

Before her death, Perpetua wrote these final words to her family: “Do not be ashamed by my death. I think it is the greatest honor of my life and thank God for calling me to give my life for His sake

and in His cause. He gave the honor to the holy prophets . . . I have no doubt that I am dying for God's cause and the cause of truth."

Perpetua, Saturus, and Felicitas were Jesus Freaks who knew God's will for their lives and when that will was accomplished. Obeying His will was their first priority.

As a Jesus Freak, do you know God's will for your life? Is your first priority to obey His will?

How can you know God's will for your life? Do you know God's will for your life?

Can you describe a time in your life when obeying God's will was a priority for you?

What aspect of God's will for your life can you obey this week?

Jesus Freaks know the words in the Bible and the importance of those words

Read the following verses:

"However, I consider my life worth nothing to me, if only I may finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me—the task of testifying to the gospel of God's grace." —Acts 20:24, NLT

"Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ . . . contending as one man for the faith of the gospel." —Philippians 1:27

"I bless God for my imprisonment, for then I began to relish the life and sweetness of God's Holy Word."

—Nicholas Caren, martyred in England, 1539

"Hungry for God's Word"

Joan Waste, Derby, England, 1550s

Read pages 248 – 249.

During the reign of King Edward, churches began to offer readings from the Bible in English instead of only in Latin. Joan Waste went to church daily to hear the Word of God, and it dramatically changed her life. Even though New Testaments were expensive and Joan was legally blind, she decided to get one of her own and then find someone to read to her.

Joan made her way through the streets of Derby, rain or shine, to ask John Hurt to read to her. Locked in a debtor's prison, with never a visitor besides Joan, the old man had little else to do.

John Hurt agreed to read to her a chapter a day. On days when he was too sick to read, she would pay others to read to her. Joan had an unusually good memory, and she became very familiar with the Bible. By the time she was twenty-two, she could repeat many entire chapters by heart.

Later, laws were passed, making it illegal to own a Bible. Because of her beliefs, Joan was put in prison and sentenced to death. She was led to a stake where she knelt down and prayed. The executioner fastened her to the stake and the flames were lit.

Joan Waste was a Jesus Freak who treasured the Word of God. She went to great trouble to store it in her heart. The truths she found in its pages brought her great strength.

As a Jesus Freak, do you know the words in the Bible? Do you understand the importance of those words? Do the words in the Bible bring you strength?

Why is the Word of God so valuable? So important?

Can you describe a time when the Bible brought you strength?

Are you spending time in God's Word each day? This week make a commitment to spend time in God's Word for at least five minutes every day.

Dear Heavenly Father,

Thank You for giving me Your power, love, and joy. Thank You for giving me Your Word. Please make me willing to prioritize Your will in my life. In Jesus' Name. Amen.

Session 10

I Will Not Quit

One of the greatest pressures on the Freak who stands up for Jesus is the thought that they are alone—the only one.

Jesus Freaks know they are never alone. God's Holy Spirit is always there to give them comfort, strength, and hope.

Read page 314 and the following verses.

“If God is with us, no one can defeat us . . . Can anything separate us from the love Christ has for us? In all these things we have full victory through God who showed his love for us.” —Romans 8:31,35,37 NCV

You are my servant, I have chosen you and have not cast you away. Fear not, for I am with you. Be not dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, Yes, I will help you, I will uphold you with my strong right hand.” —Isaiah 41:9,10

“The Father is a merciful God, who always give us comfort . . . We share in the terrible sufferings of Christ but also in the wonderful comfort he gives.” —2 Corinthians 1:3,5 CEV

“Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a huge crowd of witnesses to the life of faith . . . let us run with endurance the race that God has set before us. We do this by keeping our eyes on Jesus, on whom our faith depends from start to finish.” —Hebrews 12:1,2 NLT

“I Rest in the Arms of God”

Nadejda Sloboda, U.S.S.R., 1960s

Read page 141 – 142.

Nadejda Sloboda was the first one in her village to be converted through gospel broadcasting in Russia from stations in neighboring countries. Soon, her love for God and her zealous witness brought others to Christ. Although she wasn't a pastor, she formed a church in her village.

For this, she was sentenced to four years of prison, her five children were forcibly taken away, and her husband was left alone

In prison, Sister Sloboda told other prisoners about Christ. For this, she was confined in an unheated, isolated cell, where she had to sleep on the cold, concrete floor without a mattress. Prisoners found it impossible to sleep in such conditions: even the walls were too cold to lean against comfortably. Some prisoners reported that by standing with just their forehead touching the wall, they could manage to sleep enough to survive for a few days.

Sister Sloboda was kept in this cell for two months. During the day she was put to hard labor. The Communists expected that the lack of sleep combined with the hard labor would ruin her health and break her resolve to stand for her faith. She never weakened.

Everybody asked, “How can you endure it?”

She answered, “I fall asleep on the cold concrete floor trusting in God, and it becomes warm around me. I rest in the arms of God.”

“Where Is Your Loving Jesus?”

Tsehay Tolessa, Ethiopia, 1980s

Read 167 – 168.

Tsehay Tolessa was tortured by the Ethiopian Communists for her faith in Jesus Christ. In her own words, here are some of the things she experienced:

“They forced my hands under my knees and tied them there. Then they put a stick through these ropes and hung me upside down. They filled my mouth with dirty rags. I almost suffocated. They beat me, breaking my bones. Great pieces of skin hung from my body. Then they freed me from bonds and forced me to run with bleeding feet over a path with sharp stones. Next, they put me in a small cell containing 62 people. There was only room to stand. Stand on what? On bleeding feet, broken bones. The cell was completely dark and there was no air. Don’t ask how prisoners fulfilled their bodily needs. There was only one hole serving as a toilet, but no one could get to it.

All had to stand pressed against each other to give a few the opportunity to sleep lying on the side a bit. Because of the limited space, no turning was possible.”

She stayed in that cell for over one year, spending a total of ten years in jail. As a result of spending such a long time in darkness, she has not regained full vision.

Her torturers asked her: “Where is your loving Jesus?”

Tsehay said: “Jesus was there, in the midst of human waste, in the humiliation, in the blood and the stench. He is more than a King ruling in heaven. He is the One tortured in prison.”

Sister Sloboda and Tsehay were Jesus Freaks who were never alone. God’s Spirit was always with them to give them comfort, strength, and hope.

As a Jesus Freak, do you know that you are never alone?

Why is it important to understand that you will never be alone, that God’s Spirit will always be with you?

Describe a time when God’s Spirit gave you comfort? Strength? Hope?

Is there another believer whom you know feels alone and needs encouragement? How could you help them find God’s comfort, strength, and hope this week?

Jesus Freaks make the most of every opportunity.

Read the following verses:

“Act like people with good sense and not like fools. These are evil times, so make every minute count . . . find out what the Lord wants you to do.” —Ephesians 5:15 – 17, CEV

“They will lay hands on you and persecute you. They will deliver you to synagogues and prisons, and you will be brought before kings and governors, and all on account of my name. This will result in your

being witnesses to them.” —Luke 21:12,13

Making Every Minute Count
Patrick Hamilton, Scotland, 1527
Read page 105 – 106.

Patrick Hamilton experienced a great spiritual change at the University of Marburg. Where before he had been skeptical and timid, he now became courageous. Each day he increased in knowledge and, inflamed with godliness, decided to return to Scotland to take the truth of God’s word to his own countrymen.

When he returned to Scotland, he immediately began to preach the truths he had learned. After a short time, he was ordered to appear before the Archbishop. He was so on fire with his message that he did not want to wait for his appointment, but came very early in the morning.

Although he argued powerfully, he was arrested and put in prison. His faith was so contagious that a priest who visited his cell was converted.

Patrick was sentenced to be burned at the stake. On the scaffold, he turned to his servant, saying, “What I am about to suffer, dear friend, appears fearful and bitter to the flesh. But remember, it is the entrance to everlasting life, which none shall possess who deny their Lord.”

When his executioners had difficulty keeping the fire lit, he used it as one last opportunity to preach to those standing near.

At last the fire consumed him. As he died, he cried out, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.”

Patrick Hamilton was a Jesus Freak who made the most of every opportunity to share Jesus. He preached in prison and at the stake.

As a Jesus Freak, do you make your opportunities count for eternity?

As a Jesus Freak, what does it mean to “make the most of every opportunity”?

As you reflect back on your week, were there opportunities when you could have shared the gospel? How did you use the opportunity?

Ask God for opportunities to share the gospel this week and that He will alert you those open doors. (Read 1 Corinthians 2:3 – 5 for encouragement, if you are nervous about what to say.)

Jesus Freaks do not underestimate the power of Jesus to forgive and to restore in the midst of weakness and temptation.

Read the following verses:

“My grace is enough; it’s all you need. My strength comes into its own in your weakness . . . It was a case of Christ’s strength moving in on my weakness.” —2 Corinthians 12:9,10, *The Message*

“No test or temptation that comes your way is beyond the course of what others have had to face. All you need to remember is that God will never let you down; he’ll never let you be pushed past your limit; he’ll always be there to help you come through it.” —1 Corinthians 10:13, *The Message*

Now I Am Strong

Thomas Hudson, England, 1558

Read page 191.

Thomas Hudson had been imprisoned and questioned again and again, but had not weakened in his faith. As he walked to his execution, the crowd wondered if he would recant.

Just before the chain around him was made fast, Hudson stooped, slipped out from under the chain, and stood a little to one side. The crowd wondered why he hesitated. The Christians prayed.

Only Hudson knew the real reason he had stepped down. At the last minute he had suddenly been attacked with doubts and felt his faith growing weak. Not willing to die while feeling this way, he fell upon his knees and prayed to God, who sent him comfort.

Then he rose with great joy, and cried, “Now, thank God, I am strong. I don’t care what man can do to me!”

Going to the stake again, he put the chain around himself.

The fire was lit.

Reversing a Denial

James Abbeys, England, 1555

Read page 293.

James Abbeys, a young Christian, wandered from place to place to avoid being arrested for practicing his faith. In time, Abbeys was captured and brought before the Bishop of Norwich, who threatened him with prison and death unless he denied his faith.

Abbeys gave in to the pressure and was released. When he was about to leave, the bishop called him back and gave him a bag of money.

Once outside, Abbeys’ conscience bothered him terribly. He knew his actions had displeased the Lord, so he immediately returned to the bishop. He threw the money at the bishop and declared he was sorry he had denied his faith and accepted the gift.

The bishop again started to work on Abbeys, but this time Abbeys would not give in. He stood firm, and as a result he was burned at the stake.

Thomas Hudson and James Abbeys were Jesus Freaks who did not underestimate the power of Jesus to intervene in the midst of weakness and temptation.

As a Jesus Freak, do you underestimate the power of Jesus to intervene in the midst of weakness and temptation?

Do you believe that Jesus has the power to forgive you for the times you do not stand up for Him? Explain your answer.

Do you think Jesus will stop giving you opportunities if you don't take them? Explain your answer.

Write a prayer asking Jesus to intervene when you feel weak or tempted:

Dear Heavenly Father,

Thank You that I am never alone. Thank You for the comfort, strength, and hope provided by Your Spirit, especially during times of weakness and temptation. Please make me willing to use every opportunity to tell others about Your Son. In Jesus' Name. Amen.

Session 11

I Will Stand No Matter What Happens

“You can tell what a person lives for by what he would die for.” —C. S. Lewis

Jesus may not ask us to die for Him, but He is asking us to live for Him.

Jesus Freaks know that Jesus made the sacrifice first.

Read the following verses:

“Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”
—Romans 5:7,8

“This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers.” —1 John 3:16

Walled In

Wrunken, Roneses, Flanders, 1500s

Read pages 41 – 42.

In the 16th century, Philip II sent the Duke of Alba to Flanders to find Protestants who were studying the Bible. They were to be hanged, drowned, torn in pieces, or burned alive at the stake.

A Bible was found while inspecting the house of the Mayor of Brugge. One by one, family members were questioned, but everyone claimed they knew nothing about how the Bible got there.

Finally the officials asked the young maid-servant, Wrunken, who boldly declared, “This book is mine. I am reading from it, and it is more precious to me than anything.”

She was sentenced to die by suffocation. A place would be hollowed in the city wall, she would be tied in it and the opening would be bricked over.

On the day of her execution, an official tried to get her to change her mind. Wrunken replied, “My Savior died for me. I will also die for Him.”

As the bricks were laid higher and higher, she was warned again. “You will suffocate and die in there!”

“I will be with Jesus,” she answered.

The last brick was put in place.

Another martyr, Girolamo Savonarola, said this before his death: “My Lord was pleased to die for my sins; why should I not be glad to give up my poor life out of love to Him.”

Wrunken and Girolamo were Jesus Freaks who knew that Jesus made the sacrifice first. They knew that Jesus did not require anything of them, that He was not first willing to do Himself.

As a Jesus Freak, do you understand that Jesus made the sacrifice first?

What kind of sacrifices did Jesus make for you?

What kind of sacrifices have you made for Jesus?

What sacrifice do you believe that Jesus is currently asking you to make? What can you do this week to begin to honor His request?

Jesus Freaks continue to honor and obey God—even if threatened with death.

Read the following verses:

“Don’t be bluffed into silence or insincerity by the threats of religious bullies. True, they can kill you, but then what can they do? There’s nothing they can do to your soul. Save your fear for God who holds your entire life—both body and soul—in His hands.” —Luke 12:4,5, *The Message*

“God has said, ‘I will never leave you; never will I forsake you.’ So we say with confidence, ‘The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?’” —Hebrews 13:5,6

Temporary, Light Affliction

John Jue Han Ding, Mainland China, During the Red Guard Era, 1966 – 69

Read pages 271 – 272.

John Jue Han Ding knew God had strengthened him to endure the unbearable. His captors had tied his hands behind his back and emptied a bucket of human waste on his head. They left him like that for days, never giving him a chance to clean himself. He was given food, but with his hands tied behind his back, he had to lie on the floor and lick it up like an animal. The food had to pass through soiled lips. He still did not deny his faith.

His torturers filled a cell with human waste and put him in it with a multitude of common criminals. They all waded and suffocated in it. The common criminals were told they would be kept like this indefinitely unless they forced John to comply with the demands of the interrogators. To survive, these criminals competed in torturing him day and night.

The authorities eventually gave up and stopped trying to make John deny his faith. He was released.

John Jue Han Ding was a Jesus Freak who continued to honor and obey God, even when he was threatened with death.

As a Jesus Freak, will you continue to honor and obey God, even if you are threatened with death?

In what things in your life do you honor and obey God?

Do you think you could continue to honor and obey God, even if you were threatened with death?

What are some new things you can do this week to honor and obey God?

Jesus Freaks know that the end of their lives on earth is not the end.

This continually surprises those who don't believe in God, who think that when one is dead one's life is over. Justin Martyr, who was killed in Rome in 165 A.D., said, "You can kill us, but you cannot do us any real harm."

Read the following verses:

"For me to live is Christ and to die is gain. If I am to go on living in the body, this will mean fruitful labor for me. Yet what shall I choose? I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far. For to me, living is Christ, and dying is even better." —Philippians 1:21 – 23, 25

"So we always have courage. We know that while we live in this body, we are away from the Lord. We live by what we believe, not by what we can see. We really want to be away from this body and be at home with the Lord. Our only goal is to please God whether we live here or there." —2 Corinthians 5:6 – 9, NCV

A Crown of Eternal Glory

Romanus, Antioch (now Antakya, Turkey), 285 A.D.

Read pages 243 – 245.

Because of the courage of Romanus, many believers in Antioch were greatly encouraged to stand firm, ready to shed their blood for the name of their Christ. The Roman prefect, Asclepades, arrested Romanus and had him scourged with whips. But instead of tears, Romanus sang psalms. The more the martyr said about Jesus, the more furious the prefect became. He commanded the martyr's sides to be slit with knives until the bones showed white.

The prefect was astonished with Romanus' unwavering commitment to Christ. He threatened to burn Romanus. The prefect blasphemed God, saying, "Your crucified Christ is but a yesterday's God."

Romanus responded by preaching about the eternity of Christ. Then he said, "Give me a child, O Prefect, one who is only seven years old, and not yet spoiled by malice and vice. You will hear what he has to say."

A little boy was called out of the crowd. "Tell me, child," said the martyr, "whether we should worship one Christ, or should we worship many gods?"

"God is one and unique," the child answered. "We children cannot believe that there are many gods."

The prefect was amazed and said, "Where did you learn this lesson?"

"From my mother," the child answered.

The mother was called, and she gladly appeared. The prefect commanded the child to be whipped. The crowd of people watching could not keep from crying. The mother alone stood dry-eyed, reminding her

child of stories from the Scriptures of others who suffered. She called to her son, “Hold fast, my child. Soon you shall pass to Him who will give you a crown of eternal glory.”

The mother smiled her encouragement. The child was encouraged and received the stripes with a smiling face.

The prefect commanded the child’s head to be cut off. The mother kissed him, saying, “Farewell, my sweet child. When you have entered the kingdom of Christ, remember your mother.”

After the child was beheaded, the prefect returned to torturing Romanus. He was cast into a mighty fire, but a great storm arose and quenched the fire. Finally, the prefect, amazed at Romanus’ courage, commanded him to be brought back to prison and strangled.

Romanus, the mother, and the child were Jesus Freaks who knew that the end of their lives on earth was not the end.

As a Jesus Freak, do you know that the end of your life on earth is not the end?

Explain what you think this phrase means: “The end of your life is not the end.”

How do you know that the end of your life is not the end? Write two Bible verses that remind you of this truth.

What difference could it make for you this week to understand this truth?

Dear Heavenly Father,

Thank You for sending Your Son to sacrifice Himself for me. Thank You that the end of my life on this earth is not really the end. Please make me willing to honor and obey You even if I am threatened. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

Session 12

I Can Do Nothing Else

Jesus Freaks have seen Jesus' power in their own lives and can't stop telling others about it, even if it means their life.

“If you knew what I know about Jesus, I'd want you to tell me!”

—A favorite saying of a teenage girl who boldly approaches other teens

“My dear Jesus, my Savior, is so deeply written in my heart, that I feel confident, that if my heart were to be cut open and chopped to pieces, the name of Jesus would be written on every piece.”

—Ignatius, devoured by wild animals in Rome, 11 A.D.

Read the following verses:

“Whoever declares openly—speaking out freely—and confesses that he is My worshipper and acknowledges Me before men, the Son of man also will declare and confess and acknowledge him before the angels of God.” —Luke 12:8

“Be ready to speak up and tell anyone who asks why you're living the way you are.” —1 Peter 3:14,15, *The Message*

“My life is worth nothing unless I use it for doing the work assigned me by the Lord Jesus—the work of telling others the Good News about God's wonderful kindness and love.” —Acts 20:24, NLT

“There is Freedom Everywhere”

Maria and Varia, 18 years old, U.S.S.R., 1960s

Read page 100 – 102

From behind bars Varia said, “If they would free me, I would do it again and tell them about the great love of Jesus. Don't think that I suffer. I am very glad that the Lord loves me so much and gave me the joy to endure for His name.”

Varia and her friend Maria were two Russian classmates. Because of Maria's love for her, Varia became a Christian.

At a school assembly, Varia witnessed to those gathered about Jesus her Savior. Afterwards, Varia was taken away and imprisoned in a Siberian labor camp. She wrote the following words to her friend Maria:

“My heart praises and thanks God that, through you, He showed me the way to salvation. Now, being on this way, my life has a purpose and I know where to go and for whom I suffer. If I feel the desire to tell and to witness to everybody about the great joy of salvation that I have in my heart. At work, they curse and punish me, giving me extra work because I cannot be silent. I must tell everyone what the Lord has done for me. As long as my lips can speak, I will witness to every one about His great love.”

Varia was a Jesus Freak who couldn't keep quiet about what Jesus meant to her.

As a Jesus Freak, will you keep quiet about what Jesus means to you?

Why is important to tell others what Jesus means to you?

Have you ever continued to tell others about Jesus even when you were asked not to? What was the result?

Is there someone you need to tell about Jesus? Are you “keeping quiet” around this person? How and when will you tell them what Jesus means to you?

Jesus Freaks know that God works through tragic situations to draw more people to Himself.

Read the following verses:

“Everything happening to me in this jail only serves to make Christ more accurately known, regardless of whether I live or die. They didn’t shut me up; they gave me a pulpit! Alive, I’m Christ’s messenger; dead, I’m his bounty. Life versus even more life! I can’t lose.” —Philippians 1:20,21, *The Message*

“Because I preach this Good News, I am suffering and have been chained like a criminal. But the word of God cannot be chained. I am willing to endure anything if it will bring salvation and eternal glory in Christ Jesus to those God has chosen.” —2 Timothy 2:9,10

The Thundering Legion, A Legion of Roman Soldiers, Sebast, Armenia (now Turkey), 320 A.D.

Read page 96 – 97.

The Roman governor stood before forty Roman soldiers of the Thundering Legion. “I command you to make offerings to the Roman gods. If you will not, you will be stripped of your military status.”

All forty soldiers firmly believed in the Lord Jesus. They knew they must not deny Him or sacrifice to the Roman idols, no matter what the governor would do to them.

The soldiers were first offered money and honors, then threatened with torments and tortures. Camdidus spoke for the legion, “You will not find us fainthearted or attached to this life or easily stricken with terror. For the love of God, we are prepared to endure any kind of torture.”

The enraged governor, wanting the legion to die a slow, painful death, had the soldiers stripped and herded to the middle of a frozen lake. He set soldiers to guard them and to prevent any from escaping.

The forty soldiers encouraged each other and spent the night courageously bearing their pain and rejoicing in the hope of soon being with the Lord.

To increase the torment of the Christians, baths of hot water were put around the lake. They would be allowed to come ashore when they were ready to deny their faith.

In the end, one of the soldiers did weaken, came off the ice, and got into a warm bath. When one of the guards on the shore saw him desert, he himself took the place of the traitor. Surprising everyone with the suddenness of his conversion, he threw off his clothes, and ran to join the naked ones on the ice, crying out loudly, “I am a Christian.”

The soldiers were Jesus Freaks who knew that God works through tragic situations to draw more people to Himself.

As a Jesus Freak, will you see God working through tragic situations to draw more people to Himself?

How can God work through tragic situations to draw more people to Himself?

Tell about a tragic situation that turned into an opportunity to draw more people to God.

Are you currently facing a tragic situation? Describe how God could use this situation to draw more people to Himself.

Jesus Freaks know that God can always take what seems like failure and turn it into success.

Read the following verses:

“Don’t be upset when they haul you before the civil authorities. Without knowing it, they’ve done you and me a favor, given you a platform for preaching the kingdom news. And don’t worry about what you’ll say or how you’ll say it. The right words will be there; the Spirit of your Father will supply the words.” — Matthew 10:17 – 20, *The Message*

Reading the Walls

Robert J. Thomas, Korea, 1866

Read page 295 – 296.

Robert J. Thomas, the first missionary to Korea, survived only a few months in that country. He was ordained on June 4, 1863. He and his wife left for Korea in July. His wife died soon after arriving in China.

Thomas went on alone to Korea, where he began to learn the language and evangelize. In 1866, Thomas rode an American ship along the Korean shore. When the ship ran aground on a sandbar, the Korean soldiers on shore became suspicious, boarded the ship, and killed the foreigners, including Thomas.

Twenty-five years after Thomas’ death, someone discovered a little guest house in the area with some strange wallpaper. The paper had Korean characters printed on it. The owner of the house explained that he used the pages of a book to paste on the wall to preserve the writing. Not only the owner, but many of the guests would come in and stay to read the walls—to read the pages of the Bible Thomas had given to his murderers.

Many would call Thomas’ years of preparation a waste. He worked so long for only three brief months during which he did not convert one person, and it cost him and his wife their lives.

Though Thomas died before leading anyone to Christ, he penetrated the darkness of that land with the

Word of God. The Word Thomas deposited there created a pocket of light that perseveres today. Currently, more than one hundred families secretly worship Jesus Christ in this area.

Robert J. Thomas was a Jesus Freak who knew that God could take what seemed like a failure and turn it into a success.

As a Jesus Freak, will you trust that God can turn what seems like your failure into a success?

How does God define the word "success"? How does His definition differ from the world's view of success?

What is an example of a failure in the world's eyes that is a success in God's?

Are you currently facing a failure? Describe how God can turn your failure in to His success.

Dear Heavenly Father,

Thank You that You can work through tragic situations in my life to draw more people to You. Thank You for taking my failures and turning them into Your successes. Please make me willing to tell others about what Jesus means to me. In Jesus' Name. Amen.

Session 13

I Will Do What I Can For Those Who Are Persecuted

Jesus Freaks don't underestimate what one person can do. They know that God will work through anyone who is submitted to Him to accomplish His will on earth.

“In countries where the church is persecuted the drama, bravery, and martyrdom of the Early Church are happening all over again—now—and the free church sleeps.

Our brethren there, alone and without help, are waging the greatest, most courageous battle of the twentieth century, equal to the heroism, courage, and dedication of the the Early Church. And the free church sleeps on, oblivious of their struggle and agony, just as Peter, James, and John slept in the moment of their Savior's agony.

Will you also sleep while your brothers in Christ suffer and fight for the gospel?

Will you hear our message: ‘Remember us, help us. Don't abandon us!’

Now I have delivered the message from the faithful, martyred church—from your brothers and sisters suffering in the bonds of atheistic communism, and under attack across the world from Indonesia to South Africa. Don't abandon them.”

—*Tortured for Christ*, Pastor Richard Wurmbrand, page 150

How you can help:

Read pages 358 – 361

1. Remember those who are persecuted.

Read the following verse:

“Remember the Lord's people who are in jail and be concerned. Don't forget those who are suffering but imagine that you are there with them.” —Hebrews 13:3

Why is it important for you to remember those who are suffering?

What are some specific things you can do to that will help you remember those who are persecuted?

2. Partner with The Voice of the Martyrs.

For a list of believers currently in prison for their faith in restricted nations, write The Voice of the Martyrs and ask for their “prisoner list.” VOM offers a sixteen-page, full-color monthly newsletter free of charge. It includes updates on today's persecuted church and ways you can help.

The Voice of the Martyrs
PO Box 443
Bartlesville, OK 74005

918-337-8015
www.persecution.com
thevoice@vom-usa.org

Why would becoming a partner in The Voice of the Martyrs' work help you to remember those who are persecuted?

Write down the day you that became a partner in The Voice of the Martyrs' work:

3. Pray.

“A Pirate from the House of Prayer”

Aida Skripnikova, 19 years old, U.S.S.R., 1961

Read pages 84 – 87.

By the age of 27, Aida Skripnikova faced her fourth prison term for her work in the underground church, yet prison seemed to do little but increase her love for God's Word and its importance to her faith.

When she was released from her fourth prison term, Aida had changed drastically. The movie-star beauty of her youth was not only gone, but at only thirty years of age she looked more than fifty.

In 1992, couriers from The Voice of the Martyrs found Aida—sick, pale, and thin—living in a clean, neatly kept apartment in a crumbling old building in St. Petersburg.

Aida was surprised about the attention her story had drawn from around the world. She said, “I have only been able to endure because of the many prayers from around the world. Otherwise I would not have persevered.”

Look over the map and country descriptions and choose a country to pray for during the week. Pray for the specific needs of that country, for the protection of the believers there, for new hearts to be won to the gospel, and that the persecutors in that country would come to know the love of Jesus.

- a. Be as specific as possible in your prayers.
- b. Be aware of your country as you spend time on the internet, watch the news, etc.
- c. Ask others to pray with you.
- d. Pray often. Each week, ask God if He wants you to pray for a new area of the world.

Prayer suggestions:

- Pray for the people in these countries to find the love of Jesus Christ and to be saved.
- Pray for the release of those being held on false charges. Pray for their protection and provision as they are released from prison.
- Pray for prisoners in restricted countries, that God's love will be evident in their lives and that it will change the hearts of their tormentors.
- Pray for God to strengthen new believers by the Word that is in their hearts and to help them to withstand persecution.
- Pray for strength for those who would risk their lives to take the gospel to people who have yet to hear it.

What country have you chosen to pray for this week? When will you pray for this country?

What do you already know about your country as it pertains to the persecuted church?

4. Do what you can to bring the gospel to the entire world.

- Find out about the best way to share Christ in other cultures.
- Support missionaries by praying for them and helping to meet their needs.

Why is it important to understand the best way to share Christ in other cultures? How could you find out the best way to share Christ in other cultures?

Why is it important to pray for missionaries who minister to the persecuted church? Do you know any missionaries you could pray for by name? If not, how could you find out some names?

5. Write

- The editor of your local newspaper
- Elected officials
- The ambassadors and officials of foreign governments.

These letters often mean the difference between life and death, jail or freedom for those who are persecuted for their faith. Sample letters are included on The Voice of the Martyrs' web page.

I'd Rather Be in Prison

Gao Feng, Mainland China, 1997

Read pages 189 – 190.

Gao Feng, tried to work within the Communist government system to register a Protestant church. Feng collected signatures for a petition seeking government registration so the church could meet legally. For his "crime" he was arrested and sent to prison without a trial, his home and possessions confiscated.

To Feng, it was all worth it, and he would happily go to prison again. "I would prefer to be in prison for two years than to do nothing for God," he said. As news of his situation reached believers in many countries, people wrote to the Chinese government demanding his release. The international attention focused on his case earned him better treatment from the Chinese authorities. He said, "Others who are less well known are simply executed."

- Believers who are in prison

'I Devour Every Letter'

Pastor Lap Ma, Vietnam, 1982

Read pages 285 – 286.

Because Pastor Lap Ma refused to cooperate with the government, he and his family were forced into exile. Their clothing, books, letters, and property were confiscated. For twelve-and-a-half years, they

were forced to live alone in a remote area, unable to leave.

When Christians around the world heard of his arrest, many wrote letters to Pastor Lap Ma and to the government. Because of the international attention focused on this case, the police allowed him to leave his village and receive visitors—as long as he first got their approval.

Pastor Lap Ma and his family received over 3,000 letters from Christians from around the world. Just knowing that someone was thinking of them encouraged them for days. He said, “I devour every letter we receive and mediate on the Scriptures shared in them. I then share these words of encouragement and the Scriptures in Vietnamese with my family. We are glad and encouraged in spirit for the messages in them.”

(Your letters can make a big difference in their lives. Not all can write back. In some countries it can cost an entire week’s wages to send a letter overseas!)

Why are your letters important to those in the persecuted church?

Choose one person to whom you will write:

Name

Address

Date I sent a letter:

6. Help to send Bibles and portions of Bibles

In his book *Tortured for Christ*, Pastor Richard Wurmbrand recounts the following story:

“Two very dirty villagers came to my home one day to buy a Bible. They had come from their village to take the job of shoveling the frozen earth all winter long to earn money in the slight hope that they might be able to buy an old, tattered Bible with it and take it back to their village. Because I had received Bibles from America, I was able to hand them a new Bible, not an old tattered one. They could not believe their eyes! They tried to pay me with the money they earned. I refused their money. They rushed back to their village with the Bible. A few days later I received a letter of unrestrained, ecstatic joy thanking me for the Scriptures. It was signed by thirty villagers! They had carefully cut the Bible into thirty parts and exchanged the parts with one another!”

Why is it important to send Bibles to those in the persecuted church?

Discover ways you can help send Bibles and write them here:

7. Give financially.

Why is it important to financially support those in the persecuted church?

How could you begin to do this?

8. Assist the families of martyrs.

The Voice of the Martyrs encourages you to involve your friends, family, Sunday school class, or even your entire church in participating in practical demonstrations of your love for persecuted Christians. Past projects have included “Blankets of Love!” for the Sudan and “Christmas Care 2000—Egypt.”

Why is it important to assist the families of those in the persecuted church?

How could you begin to do this?

9. Take the Jesus Freaks pledge on page 58.

How can taking a pledge like this help you in the future?

Write the date you took the Jesus Freaks pledge:

10. As a Jesus Freak, don't underestimate what God will do through you!

Do you believe you can make a difference for those in the persecuted church?

What do you believe is something that God wants to do through you to help those in the persecuted church? How do you believe He wants to accomplish this?

Dear Heavenly Father,

***Thank You for providing ways to care for those in the persecuted church.
Thank You for using me to make a difference. Please make me willing to do
whatever I can to help those in chains. In Jesus' Name. Amen.***

Session 14

From This Day Forward I Will Make a Difference

Jesus Freaks: Make the Commitment

Jesus Freaks know their faith is not in vain. They know their reward is in heaven.

Read the following verses:

“Therefore, my brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because your labor in the Lord is not in vain.” —1 Corinthians 15:58

“The Spirit testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children. Now if we are children, then we are heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory. I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed to us.” —Romans 8:16 – 18

“I Will Go Straight to God”

Jack Vinson, Kiangsu Province Mainland China, 1931

Read pages 74 – 75.

The bandit told the missionary, “I’m going to kill you. Aren’t you afraid?”
Jack Vinson replied simply, “Kill me, if you wish. I will go straight to God.”

“A Merry Supper with the Lord”

John Bradford, England, 1535

Read pages 177 – 179.

John Bradford, the well loved pastor of St. Paul’s in London, was thrown in prison for his beliefs that differed from the state church during Queen Mary’s reign. While in prison, so many of his congregation came to visit him that he continued to preach twice a day. He also preached weekly to the other men in prison, the thieves and common criminals, exhorting them from the Word of God and often giving them money to buy food.

After a year and a half, Bradford was offered a pardon if he would deny his beliefs, but he would not. Then after six more months in prison, the offer was repeated. Again he refused.

John was sentenced to death and the keeper’s wife came to him with the news: “Tomorrow you will be burned.”

Upon hearing his sentence, Bradford looked to heaven and said, “I thank God for it. I have waited for this a long time. Lord, make me worthy of this.”

A crowd gathered at the place where Bradford was to be burned. A large number of heavily armed men brought Bradford out to the stake. With him was John Leaf, a teenager, who also refused to deny his faith. Both men fell flat to the ground and prayed for an hour.

Bradford got up, kissed a piece of firewood and then kissed the stake itself. In a loud voice he spoke to the crowd: “England, repent of your sins! Beware of false teachers! Don’t let them deceive you!” Then he forgave his persecutors and asked the crowd to pray for him.

Turning his head toward John Leaf, he said, “Be of good comfort, brother, for we shall have merry

supper with the Lord tonight!”

Jack Vinson and John Bradford were Jesus Freaks who knew that their faith was not in vain. They knew that after their deaths, they would be with Jesus.

As a Jesus Freak, do you understand that your faith is not in vain?

What does this phrase mean to you: “Your faith is not in vain”?

If you share what Jesus means to you with someone who doesn’t respond, was your sharing in vain? Why or why not?

What are some areas in your life in which you need to be reminded that your faith is not in vain?

Jesus Freaks live their lives in such a way that the world is not worthy of them.

Read the following verses:

“And what more can I say? I do not have time to tell you about Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel, and the prophets who through faith conquered kingdoms, administered justice, and gained what was promised; who shut the mouths of lions, quenched the fury of the flames, and escaped the edge of the sword; whose weakness was turned to strength; and who became powerful in battle and routed foreign armies. . . Others were tortured and refused to be released, so that they might gain a better resurrection. Some faced jeers and flogging, while still others were chained and put in prison. They were stoned; they were sawed in two; they were put to death by the sword. They went about in sheepskins and goatskins, destitute, persecuted, and mistreated—the world was not worthy of them.”

—Hebrews 11:32 – 38

“People who live this way make it plain that they are looking for their true home. . . .They were after a far better country...heaven country. You can see why God is so proud of them, and has a City waiting for them.” —Hebrews 11:14,16, *The Message*

“I Can’t Bear Your Beatings!”

Pastor Florescu, Romania, 1960s

Read pages 268 – 269.

The Communist torturers came toward Pastor Florescu again, this time with red-hot iron pokers. “Who else believes as you do? Give us their names.” Florescu would not speak. They had already cut him again and again with knives and beaten him very badly. When he refused to cooperate, he was returned to his cell.

Starving rats were then driven into his cell through a large pipe. He could not sleep, having to defend

himself at all times. If he rested a moment, the rats would attack him. He was forced to stand for two weeks, day and night. The Communist kept asking him to betray his brethren, but he resisted steadfastly.

In the end, they brought his fourteen-year-old son and began to whip the boy in front of his father, saying that they would continue to beat him until the pastor told them what they wanted to know. The poor man was half crazy. He bore it as long as he could. But when he could stand it no more, he cried to his son, "Alexander, I must say what they want! I can't bear your beating anymore!"

The son answered, "Father, don't do me the injustice of having a traitor as a parent. Withstand! If they kill me, I will die with the words, 'Jesus and my fatherland.'"

This enraged the Communists. They grabbed the young man and beat him to death, his blood splattering over the walls of the cell. He died praising God.

Pastor Florescu and his teenage son were Jesus Freaks who lived their lives in such a way that the world was not worthy of them.

As a Jesus Freak, will you live your life in such a way that the world is not worthy of you?

What does it mean to be worthy of something?

What do you think it means to "live your life in a way that the world is not worthy of you"?

This week, how can you live your life so that, like those mentioned in Hebrews 11:32 – 38, the world is not worthy of you?

Dear Heavenly Father,

Thank You that my faith in You is not in vain. Thank You for the example of those who lived in a way that the world was not worthy of. Please make me willing to live my life in the same way. In Jesus' Name. Amen.

You are a Jesus Freak

You have been exposed to the stories of the lives and deaths of martyrs. Their experiences challenge you to examine your own faith and motivate you to make a difference in your world. You may never have to face the decision of whether or not to die for Jesus, but every day you face the decision of whether or not you will live for Him. Will you take the challenge from these martyrs? Will you choose to stand strong? Will you choose to make your life count for Jesus Christ? Will you be a Jesus Freak?

Read: "I am Jesus Freak" on page 59. Do these statements describe you? If not, are you willing to change your life so that you can truly be called a Jesus Freak? If your answer is "yes", God will honor you and you will make a difference. Now is the time for you to participate in what Jesus has called you to do.

If you are willing to live the life of a Jesus Freak, take time now to sign the Jesus Freak Pledge on page 58.

Congratulations. You are a Jesus Freak. Your faith is not in vain.

The Jesus Freaks' Pledge

I Promise, From This Day Forward...

I Will Make a Difference

I will make a difference.

Jesus, I thank You that You suffered and died for me on the cross to pay for my sins.

Father, I thank You that You raised Jesus from the dead to be my living Lord and Savior.

Holy Spirit, I thank You that You will lead me to do the right thing and change my world.

Today, Lord, I want to make You a promise.

I will not be ashamed of Your name or Your gospel.

I will do what I can for those who are persecuted and pray for them.

I will look enemies in the eye and love them with Your love. I will pray for them and love them—no matter what the consequences.

I will follow Your voice wherever You lead me, unafraid, for I know You will be with me. If I should stumble, if I fall, if I should deny Your name, if I should feel guilty that I did not pray or forgot to do something You've asked me to do,

I will not quit. I will not wallow in guilt. I will turn back to You, confess my sin, and do what You called me to do, because that is why You died for me.

I will stand with You and my brothers and sisters around the world, because no matter what happens, no matter what I face or how it looks, in the end, we will be victorious—we will inherit eternity and heaven with You.

I can do nothing else, because . . .

. . . I am a Jesus Freak.

Signature _____ Date _____

I am a Jesus Freak

1. I found the One worth dying for.
2. I commit my life to Jesus Christ, wholeheartedly, without apology or compromise.
3. I place the name of Jesus Christ above any other need or desire.
4. I will not stop telling people about Jesus Christ, even if it means my life.
5. I persevere under trial.
6. I follow in the steps of Jesus Christ, even if those steps included suffering.
7. I am not afraid, surprised, or ashamed over the trials I suffer.
8. I never flinch from the call to follow Jesus Christ.
9. I am not afraid of death. I know that the end of my life on earth is not the end.
10. I will stay at my task until my voice is silenced by death.
11. I am not afraid of those who can kill me but cannot kill my soul.
12. I will lose my life for the sake of Jesus Christ, because I know that, live or die, I belong to Him.
13. I would rather die than do the smallest act against my faith or my conscience.
14. I face persecution with courage and joy, because I know that everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.
15. I show God's love to my betrayers and enemies.
16. I make obeying God's will my first priority.
17. I treasure the Word of God.
18. I am never alone. God's Spirit is always with me to give me comfort, hope, and strength.
19. I make the most of every opportunity to share Jesus Christ.
20. I do not underestimate the power of Jesus Christ to intervene in the midst of weakness and temptation.
21. I acknowledge that Jesus Christ made the sacrifice first. He does not require anything of me that He was not first willing to do Himself.
22. I will continue to honor and obey God, even if I am threatened with death.
23. I do not keep quiet about what Jesus Christ means to me.
24. I see God working through tragic situations to call more people to Himself.
25. I allow God to take what seems like a failure and turn it into a success.
26. I am changing my world by refusing to lay aside my relationship with Jesus Christ for the sake of merely being accepted by the crowd.
27. I stand with thousands of martyrs around the world today who still face persecution. I will not forget them.
28. I do not underestimate what one person can do. I am making a difference.
29. I refuse to deny Jesus Christ.
30. I am living my life for Jesus Christ, knowing that my faith is not in vain.

I am a Jesus Freak