



### **Part 3: Courage and Joy in Persecution**

Acts 5:17-32;41-42

*God calls us to boldly live out our faith with joy no matter what.*

*In this life, we need resilience. With the brokenness of this world and sin, we experience suffering in many different ways. In contrast, the culture tries to lull us to sleep with promises of comfort and not suffering. Resilience speaks against a comfort culture and the lie that we should have it all and not suffer. Jesus is the best answer to our own suffering and the worlds.*

“Christianity teaches that, contra fatalism, suffering is not overwhelming; contra Buddhism, suffering is real; contra karma, suffering is often unfair; but contra secularism, suffering is meaningful. There is a purpose to it, and if faced rightly, it can drive us like a nail deep into the love of God and into more stability and spiritual power than you can imagine.” – Timothy Keller, *Walking with God Through Pain and Suffering*

#### **Courage and Joy of the Early Church: Acts 5:17-32; 41-42**

- This powerful picture of resilience in this passage is the continuation of a story of courage and joy of the early church. Early in Acts, Jesus has risen from the dead and commissions the disciples to wait for the Holy Spirit and then with His power to be His witness in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. Soon after, they gather to pray, the Holy Spirit comes on them like tongues of fire and they boldly praise God in different languages. They start gathering as a community, devoting themselves to the apostles teaching and to fellowship, breaking of bread, and to prayer. And they also started to experience persecution. In Acts 4, Peter and John are arrested and now we see in Acts 5 the Apostles are put in jail. This courage and joy in persecution has reverberated throughout the church even till today all around the world.
- Open Doors Watch List 2024 video - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J5iCoD9OREQ>

**Main point:** To boldly live out our faith with joy no matter what.

#### **Tension**

- As we read about persecution in the bible and hear about it around the world, the question often arises in contrast to the comfort, safety, and security we experience here in the States, “Should I be experiencing

more persecution? Should we as Christians be experiencing more persecution?” If religious persecution is violence or discrimination because of one’s religious beliefs, are we really being persecuted?

- Jesus said, “If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also.” John 15:20
- ‘Do Christians really suffer in America?’ John Piper - <https://www.desiringgod.org/interviews/do-christians-really-suffer-in-america>
- Press more deeply into the darkness.
  - “If we never taste any affliction or persecution or maligning for Christ’s sake, we probably are not pressing into the darkness of the world for Christ as far as we should.” – John Piper
- Don’t pursue pain; pursue love no matter the pain.
- Bless others.
  - 1 Timothy 6:17-18, “Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share.”

## Building Blocks of Resilience



- Disordered blocks: We often put courage and action first hoping the rest will follow. We live in a “get it done” culture. Instead of starting with ourselves, we need to always start with God.

### New Life

- Acts 5:17-20, “tell the people all about this new life.”
- 2 Corinthians 5:17, “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come. The old has gone, the new is here!”

### Joy

- Acts 5:40-42, “left the Sanhedrin, rejoicing”

### Courage

- Acts 5:42, “they never stopped teaching and proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the Messiah.”

“Our problem in evangelism is not that we don’t have enough information—it is that we don’t know how to be ourselves. We forget we are called to be witnesses to what we have seen and know, not to what we don’t know. The key on our part is authenticity and obedience, not a doctorate in theology.” – Rebecca Manley Pippert, *Out of the Saltshaker and into the World*

### No Matter What

- Acts 5:27-29, “We must obey God rather than human beings!”

## **Discussion Questions:**

1. First read Acts 5:17-32;41-42. What do you see in this passage that is new or interesting? Do you have any questions?
2. When you read of persecution in the Bible or hear about it around the world, does it cause any tension in you? Do you wonder if we as Christians should be experiencing more persecution in the United States?
3. Using John Piper's words, have you ever tasted "any affliction or persecution or maligning for Christ's sake"? If "yes", what was it like? If not, do you think this is an opportunity to "press more deeply into the darkness"?
4. With the Building Blocks of Resilience (New Life, Joy, Courage, No Matter What), how have you experience new life in Christ? Have you ever had an opportunity to share your story with someone else?
5. Are there any other next steps that God might have for you with growing in joy, courage, and a 'no matter what' mentality?