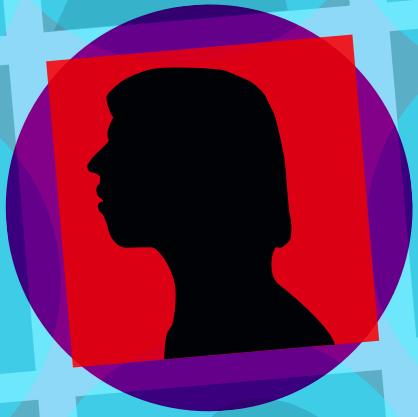


# the rack



# BEING DIFFERENT

# BEING DIFFERENT

## ***middle-school students talk about being hassled for their faith***

In many countries being a Christian or telling others about Christ is against the law or is unpopular. Christians are still being persecuted in Saudi Arabia, Iran, the United States . . .

Wait a minute. The United States? Yes, right here in your town, your school, maybe even in your home. It may not be the old-fashioned style of persecution—burning people at the stake or stoning them—but it’s happening.

Persecution simply means being mistreated for what you believe. If you’re a Christian who is following the Bible’s teachings, you will probably—eventually—be noticed and persecuted for it. When people realize you are a Christian, they may react in one of three ways. They may respect you, hassle you, or ignore you. Usually they choose one of the last two reactions.

A few groups of middle-school students talked about the difficulties they face as Christians. Can you relate to the ways that this difference affects them?



**WHAT DO YOUR NON-CHRISTIAN FRIENDS THINK IT MEANS TO BE A CHRISTIAN?**

- ▷ They think you're strange.
- ▷ They say you're no fun.
- ▷ You go to church all the time; you're boring.
- ▷ They think you have to follow a bunch of rules and do nothing you want to do. Ever!

**WHAT HAPPENS WHEN YOU TELL THEM YOU ARE A CHRISTIAN?**

- ▷ Most of them just say "Oh" and change the subject. They don't want to talk about it.
- ▷ Some kids say it's stupid and that you just do it because your parents make you.
- ▷ Sometimes they act funny around me because they know I don't like to hear dirty words or bad jokes.
- ▷ If you talk about it too much, they tell other kids not to hang around you.
- ▷ I don't really tell anybody. They would probably think I'm too religious or something.

**WHAT ARE SOME OF THE PROBLEMS YOU'VE HAD BECAUSE YOU ARE A CHRISTIAN?**

- ▷ Some of my friends are in gangs and they try to get me to be in them too, but I won't. Two girls in this one

gang wanted me to help them beat up another girl, and I said I wouldn't; so now they don't talk to me anymore.

- ▷ This guy stole stuff from a store and tried to get me to do it too, but I wouldn't. I told him that I go to church and youth group, but he said I was just afraid.

- ▷ We were listening to the radio when this really gross song came on. I think it's kind of sick, so I changed the station and they all yelled at me because they liked it.

- ▷ My next-door neighbor and I were really good friends when we were growing up. But she's not a Christian, and now she's totally different from me. Now we don't even really talk to each other.

**HAVE YOU EVER TALKED ABOUT GOD WITH YOUR TEACHERS?**

- ▷ My science teacher is always talking about evolution and saying that that's how we got here. You know, like people came from monkeys and it all just happened. I said I didn't believe it and that God created everything. Then he explained how much proof there was for evolution. He didn't put me down, but I felt stupid.

- ▷ There's one teacher in our school who's a Christian and says stuff like

*Continued on page 6*



# Bible Study

# SUSPECTED

# HERO

**Amos 1:1; 7:10-17**

**Would you like to be a prophet proclaiming doom to a nation of evil people? Amos probably wasn't too excited about it either! But he was a hero because he did what God told him to do—what he knew was right.**

**Not only did the people of Israel oppose Amos, but the king and the religious leaders did too. Our hero Amos faced some real trouble for saying what he did.**

**Read Amos 1:1 and 7:10-17, and fill out the suspect report on Amos.**

## SUSPECT REPORT

District 62  
Bethel Police Department  
Kingdom of Israel  
Suspect no. 7777373

Name:

Suspect's occupation:  
(1:1; 7:14)

Suspected of:  
(7:10)

Reasons for suspicion:  
(7:11, 17)

Accomplices (if any):  
(7:15)

Witnesses:  
(7:10)

Suspect's defense:  
(7:14-15)

Action taken:  
(7:12-13)



## TODAY'S SCRIPTURE

### Amos 1:1

The words of Amos, one of the shepherds of Tekoa—the vision he saw concerning Israel two years before the earthquake, when Uzziah was king of Judah and Jeroboam son of Jehoash was king of Israel.

### Amos 7:10-17

<sup>10</sup>Then Amaziah the priest of Bethel sent a message to Jeroboam king of Israel: “Amos is raising a conspiracy against you in the very heart of Israel. The land cannot bear all his words. <sup>11</sup>For this is what Amos is saying: “ ‘Jeroboam will die by the sword, and Israel will surely go into exile, away from their native land.’ ”

<sup>12</sup>Then Amaziah said to Amos, “Get out, you seer! Go back to the land of

Judah. Earn your bread there and do your prophesying there. <sup>13</sup>Don’t prophesy anymore at Bethel, because this is the king’s sanctuary and the temple of the kingdom.”

<sup>14</sup>Amos answered Amaziah, “I was neither a prophet nor a prophet’s son, but I was a shepherd, and I also took care of sycamore-fig trees. <sup>15</sup>But the LORD took me from tending the flock and said to me, ‘Go, prophesy to my people Israel.’ <sup>16</sup>Now then, hear the word of the LORD. You say, “ ‘Do not prophesy against Israel, and stop preaching against the house of Isaac.’ ”

<sup>17</sup>“Therefore this is what the LORD says: “ ‘Your wife will become a prostitute in the city, and your sons and daughters will fall by the sword. Your land will be measured and divided up, and you yourself will die in a pagan country. And Israel will surely go into exile, away from their native land.’ ”

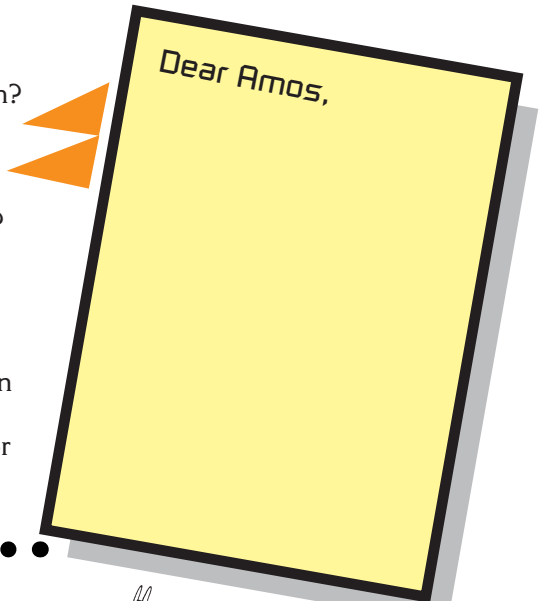


**1.** We know that the leaders of Israel were tough on Amos. How do you think our hero was treated by the people as he walked their streets every day?

**2.** What options did Amos have when everyone turned against him?

**3.** Why didn't Amos just give up?

**4.** Think about what kept Amos going when things got tough. Then write our hero a short note telling him how much you admire him for what he did.



“Hallelujah” if you get a right answer. But all the kids think he’s weird. Some of the kids who know I’m a Christian think I’m weird like he is.

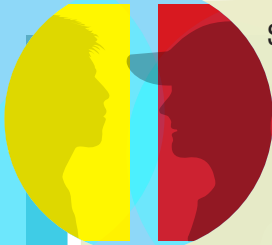
**HAVE YOU EVER TRIED TO TELL OTHERS ABOUT YOUR BELIEF IN CHRIST?**

► Yeah, my friend and I went up to these kids and started talking about Jesus, but they just told us to get away.

► I try to get some of my friends to go with me to Sunday school and youth group. Some of them come,

but a lot of times when I call them to ask if they’re going to come, they make up excuses.

. . . I asked this friend of mine to come to church with me. But he said he goes to another church. I said, “That’s great,” and asked him which church. He made up some name . . . so I asked him if I could come to his church and he said no, that his parents don’t want anybody else coming with him. So then I said I didn’t believe he went to any church and asked him why he wouldn’t come to mine. But he just wouldn’t talk about it.



Some Christian young people seem to feel that it’s just not worth sharing their faith. It’s not worth the risk of being laughed at or put down by friends because they’re different. It’s much safer to leave God at church. But that’s not what God wants.

God knew that being a Christian in front of others was going to be tough. Several times in the Bible we are told that as Christians, we should expect to be persecuted.

But it isn’t all bad news.

Jesus said, “Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven” (Matt. 5:11-12a).

Being a Christian does mean that at times you will have to be different. But wow! What a difference! It’s the difference between having friends who are there only when they need you and having a Friend who is always there. It’s the difference between eternal torture in hell and eternal life in heaven. It’s the difference between living life making your own decisions and letting God make sure you get the best out of life.

So ask yourself— **IS IT WORTH THE DIFFERENCE?**

# TALK BACK

## Thoughts for a Friend

*Press on, sweet soldier.*

*Breathe the wildness of the earth, hold it close to your heart.  
Let it out only when it has been painted with wisdom and gentleness.  
Tug softly at the skirts of danger and cower not from the challenge of life.*

*Take heart, brave prince.*

*Dance close with the natural and do not let it escape you.  
Capture the sunrise in your smile and let it spill out fresh in the darkness.  
Press your cheek against the vitality of hope, and trust the one who placed the stars.*

*Feel deeply, gentle warrior.*

*Value life, don't take it for granted.  
Seize it and let it seep into the marrow of your bones, then share it.  
Take someone's weakness, wrap it in hope, then give it back to them  
dripping with strength.*

*Seek truth, precious friend.*

*Shout love from mountaintops and share pain with the shadows.  
Treasure the time you have and listen to the secrets of butterflies.  
Plant flowers everywhere and weave relationships with threads of gold.*

*Remember:*

*It is who you are  
and what you believe.  
It is where you have been  
and what you have done with it.  
It is why you live  
and the way you think  
that creates a beauty that  
will not fade away.*

*The treasure of life is hope and our only hope is Christ.*



# every day devos

IT'S

ON

THE

TIP

OF

MY

## TONGUE!

**Jesus offered words of comfort in His Sermon on the Mount to those who were being persecuted. His message offered hope for the future and was an assurance that people could rejoice even through persecution! That was pretty radical stuff! How can you rejoice when someone says something mean about you? What you really want to do is get even! But Jesus says you're blessed when you're persecuted or picked on, particularly when you're standing up for your faith.**

**"Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven." Matthew 5:11-12a**

**MONDAY** Read Matthew 5:11-12a out loud, then complete this sentence. When someone picks on me, I feel \_\_\_\_\_, but because of what Jesus says in His Word, I can \_\_\_\_\_.

**TUESDAY** Let's say Jesus is talking directly to you through these verses. What would you like to say to Him concerning what you're going through?

**WEDNESDAY** How would you explain these verses to a friend who's going through hard times?

**THURSDAY** Think about what it was like to be a Christian during New Testament times. What's similar or different about being a Christian today?

**FRIDAY** Heaven's benefits will be your reward for withstanding persecution because you love the Lord. Look up *heaven* in a concordance. (You might have one at the back of your Bible.) Read what Scripture has to say about it.

**SATURDAY** End the week with prayer; then think about how you can take a stand for Jesus.

