

Seven Keys to SUCCESS

Lesson 6—Stay the Course

Series: “Seven Keys to Success: Habits for Christian Living”

Surrender it all to God

Unite with God Every Day

Confess Your Sins

Continually Study God’s Word

Encourage Others to Know Christ

Stay the Course

Share Your Resources

OVERVIEW

Background Bible Passage: Acts 21:10-14; 27-36

Key Verses: Joshua 1:7—“Be strong and very courageous. Be careful to obey all the law my servant Moses gave you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left, that you may be successful wherever you go.”

BEFORE CLASS

Preparation: *Your preparation will determine the direction your class will go.*

- Consider the depth of your steadfastness.
- Consider how determined you are in your walk with Christ to “stay the course.”
- Study and prepare your lesson so that you are familiar with the teaching outline.
- Use the Contact 1-2-3 system to the right to follow up on students who have recently missed Sunday School.
- Pray for each student by name.

OPENING ACTIVITY

Activity: Holding Ice

As your students enter the room, give each one of them an ice cube. (*Ice cubes and cups to carry them in will be available at the back of the activity room by the sound system.*) Tell your students that today you are going to talk about perseverance and how to stick to God's path and that you want them to hold onto the ice as long as they can. You might even challenge them to see who can melt their cube the quickest just by holding it in their hand.

Discussion

SAY: While your ice cubes melt, we're going to play a game to see what you would be willing to give up, what you would be willing to trade and how far you would be willing to go to get what you wanted.

- *What is the most expensive thing in your room right now?*
- *Would you be willing to give up, if someone gave you the car of your dreams?*
- *Would you be willing to give up the car of your dreams, if that's what it took to have the husband or wife of your dreams?*
- *Would you be willing to give up a family member—to walk away and never speak to them again—if in return you knew you would be rich and famous?*
- *Would you be willing to rob a bank if you knew you wouldn't get caught and in return you'd get a million dollars?*
- *Would you be willing to say a cuss word if someone offered to pay you a \$1000? What about \$10,000?*
- *Would you be willing to give up tens years of your life if that's what it cost to someday have children?*
- *How many years of your life would you be willing to give up to save the life of a family member?*

Answer this to yourself: *Would you be willing to give up friends, family, dreams, and everything you own to follow Christ, even if you knew you would be persecuted and suffer all the days of your life and that your life would be cut short because of your devotion to Him—Would you still follow Jesus?*

SAY: The question is: *Where do you draw the line? What the cost you put on your relationship with God? How far are you willing to go to remain faithful to Him?*

Story—What's the Cost

A young lady in New York was at social event when she was approached by a good-looking gentleman who said, "Would you sleep with me if I paid you a million dollars?" Without hesitation the lady said, "Yes." The man then said, "What about twenty bucks?" The lady became angry and responded by saying, "What do you think I am?" To which the man calmly replied, "We've already established your character. The question is simply, 'What's your price?'"

Answer this to yourself: *What's the price you put on following Jesus? How far are you willing to go to do what He wants you to do?*

● *Since you've been holding a piece of ice for several minutes now, how does your hand feel? At any point did you feel like giving up? What do you think would have to happen in your life to bring you to the point of "giving up" on following Jesus? Do you think you could ever reach that point?*

BIBLE LESSON

Turn to Acts 21.

While they are turning, SAY: Here's the background for the verses we're about to read—The apostle Paul is traveling to Jerusalem. The Jerusalem church was made up mainly of Christian Jews among whom a vicious rumor had been spreading about Paul. Some had been saying that

Paul was teaching Jews in the communities where he served that they should abandon circumcision and all the other Jewish customs. This rumor was false, of course, but some of the leaders of the Jerusalem church had urged Paul to take part in the concluding ceremony of a Nazarite vow, which was a Jewish custom, as a way of showing that he had not been teaching such things and that he still honored Jewish customs. He had agreed and was on his way to fulfill this commitment.

Choose a volunteer to read—Read Acts 21:10-14

- *How would you feel if someone gave you this message? Would a message like this make you second-guess your plans even if you knew, like Paul did, that you were doing what God wanted you to do?*
- *Why do you think God foerwarned Paul about this?* (The message wasn't intended to steer him in a different direction but to prepare his heart for what was to come.)
- *What did his friends say when they realized that Paul wouldn't change his plans?* ("The Lord's will be done.")
- *Who else in the Bible made a similar statement because he knew he was going to face sufferings and he knew it was God's will that he endured them?* (Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane said, "Not my will, but yours be done." Just as Jesus was willing to face the agony of the cross, so Paul was willing to endure whatever hardships he might encounter in Jerusalem.)

SAY: Let's find out what happened...

Choose a volunteer to read—Read Acts 21:27-36

SAY: Paul had returned to the temple to complete the Nazarite ceremony with the four Christians but some people from the area of Asia Minor, where Paul had spent three years ministering in Ephesus, saw him. They had previously seen him in Jerusalem with Trophimus, who was also from Ephesus and who was a Gentile (a non-Jew) and was therefore not allowed into the part of the temple where the ceremony would have been taking place. Immediately they assumed that Paul had brought Trophimus in as a way of dishonoring Jewish customs and began to yell accusations at him. Paul was in the temple to prove his faithfulness to Jewish ways, not to cause trouble, but the false accusations worked and a mob gathered, intent on killing him.

- *How would you have felt if this happened to you—you're falsely accused, attacked, arrested, and carried away from a mob that wants you dead? Would you have chosen to avoid this if you could have?*

SAY: Paul's imprisonment lasted at least five years—briefly in Jerusalem where some men vowed to assassinate him, so he was taken to a town called Caesarea. He was escorted by 470 soldiers (Acts 23:23) when historically there were probably only 1,000 Romans soldiers in Jerusalem at the time—That's how big a deal this situation was! Paul spent at least two years in Caesarea and then was taken as a prisoner to Rome where he remained for several more years under Roman guard. The book of Acts ends with Paul still under Roman arrest.

- *After hearing the whole story, which would you have chosen: To obey God's leading in your life or to disobey and avoid the pain, humiliation, and years of imprisonment?*

SAY: Paul is the perfect example of someone who kept his eyes on Christ, no matter what it cost him. He endured to the end and was, according to history, finally beheaded by the Romans for being a Christian (though he was probably released from this imprisonment and rearrested at a later date).

SAY: Listen to what Paul wrote about some of the sufferings he endured for the cause of Christ:

Choose a volunteer to read—Read 2 Corinthians 11:24-27

Job Description for Following Christ

SAY: If you read a job description that said:

Come and follow Christ. It will cost you everything. Five times you'll be beating with 40 lashes and three times beaten with rods. You'll be stoned (executed) once though you'll live, be shipwrecked three times, spend a night and a day in the open sea, be constantly on the move, always in danger everywhere you go from both your own countrymen as well as others. Often you'll be hungry and thirsty, cold and lacking clothes. People will falsely accuse you and you will spend a good part of your life in prison.

- *Would you be willing to accept this type of life if that's what it cost you to know and follow Jesus?*
- *What if tacked on the end of this job description was a statement that said, "And your benefits are: A personal relationship with the God of all power and an eternity in heaven." Would that change your opinion or make you feel different*
- *Why do you think Paul was willing to endure so much to follow Christ and spread the Gospel? Why do you think he didn't he just quit? (Answer: How could he quit—His life was not his own. It belonged to the Lord.)*

SAY: The chances are that besides some teasing and some occasionally pressure that you'll never be severely persecuted for following Jesus. The point of today's lesson is not to scare you concerning what God might have for you in the future. He loves you and has great plans for your life. The point is simply, how far would you be willing to go to follow Jesus? What's your cost? Where do you draw the line?

KEY VERSE

Here's God's advice for following Him:

Choose a volunteer to read—Read Joshua 1:7

SAY: Do not turn to the left or the right—not one foot off God's path. Stay the course!

- *History Test: During the Civil War when slaves would escape and try to make their way north to freedom, what did they use as a guide? (They used the North Star because it's the only star in the sky that doesn't change positions throughout the course of the night. It's constant, steady and immovable. It will always stay firmly in place. This is how Christians should be—constant and firm and steady as the North Star to always stay fixed to the course upon which God has set them.)*

WRAP IT UP

SAY: God never promised that being a Christian meant having an "easy" life, but He did promise to never leave you. He is with you always and He'll never let you encounter more than He will give you the strength to handle. God will always guide and direct you in the way you should go, so *Stay the Course*. Stick to God's path—You'll never regret it.

Prayer Time

Pray specifically today that your students will stay the course and let God do great things in and through them.

List prayer requests below and on the back of this page and pray for your students throughout the week. *Ask if any of your students want to pray today.*

Prayer Requests

¹*One Thousand Illustrations: Stories for Life*, (Texas: Student Discipleship Ministries, 2000) CD-Rom.

²*Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, 11th Edition*, (Springfield, Mass.: Merriam-Webster, Inc., 2003), 1291.