



11

SESSION ELEVEN

Jesus Faced Opposition

SESSION SUMMARY

This session shows Jesus speaking in the synagogue in His hometown of Nazareth. After He read the words of Scripture, Jesus claimed to be the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy and that His mission was to free people held by various types of bondage and sin. The people in Jesus' town rejected Him as a prophet and rejected His message of liberation. As followers of Jesus, we should expect to face opposition and experience hostility because of the gospel, but we can also depend on the Spirit's power to help us endure.

SCRIPTURE

Luke 4:14-30

THE POINT

Jesus' followers often experience rejection and opposition.

INTRO/STARTER 5-10 MINUTES

Option 1

There is something about stories of people who overcame seasons of failure or moments of rejection before they discovered success.

- R. H. Macy failed in several business startups before hitting it big with his clothing store in New York City. We know it today as Macy's.¹
- When he was just 22, Walt Disney was fired from the newspaper he worked for because he was not creative enough to deliver good ideas. Of course, Disney later went on to create one of the world's best-known and most-beloved cartoon characters, as well as build an entertainment empire based on imagination.²
- Albert Einstein was one of the greatest scientific minds humanity has ever known. Yet, he began talking late, was described as “dull,” many believed he had dyslexia, and he did not do well academically throughout his early years.³

In addition to inspiring stories like these, Christians throughout the centuries have overcome various forms of opposition through the ministry of the Holy Spirit, who demonstrates Jesus' glory through believers' suffering. Because of their courage and confidence, Christians from all over the world have been able to overcome some of the most severe forms of persecution on account of the power of the Holy Spirit at work within them—the same Spirit who was at work in the life of Jesus Himself when He experienced rejection and opposition.

- **When have you felt rejected by someone? How did you respond? What was the outcome?**

Option 2

Being set against another is called *opposition*. One can also oppose ideas, decisions, or tasks. Ask students to create a list of opponents. Tell them the list can be comprised of famous team rivals, friends playing a board game, or titles such as *lawyers*, *athletes*, and *debate competitors*. After students have generated a pretty good list, ask them to discuss the ways these people oppose one another. Then, ask the following:

- **How do Christians sometimes face opposition?**
- **When have you faced opposition or been rejected by someone in your own life?**

People often oppose what they don't understand, what they don't like, or what they've been raised to reject. Many of Jesus' own people, the Jews, rejected and opposed Him, despite knowing the Messiah would one day come. Jesus faced opposition with courage and confidence, and we can do the same through the power of the Holy Spirit.

HIS STORY

15-20 MINUTES

THE POINT

Jesus' followers often experience rejection and opposition.

CHARACTERS

- **Jesus** - the eternal Son of God; second person of the Trinity

PLOT

In this session, Jesus spoke in the synagogue in His hometown of Nazareth. After reading a passage of Scripture, Jesus claimed to be the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy; He claimed that His mission was to free people held by various types of bondage and sin. The people in Jesus' town rejected Him as a prophet and rejected His message of salvation.

JESUS CLAIMED TO BE THE SPIRIT-FILLED MESSIAH

Luke 4:14-28 places Jesus' ministry in the region of Galilee. Through His teaching and miracles, Jesus demonstrated the power of the Holy Spirit. The news about His ministry spread, and people began to praise Him for the good work He did. But the scene shifted as Luke showed the contrast between Jesus' reception in Galilee and His rejection in Nazareth, the place where He grew up.

14 And Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit to Galilee, and a report about him went out through all the surrounding country. 15 And he taught in their synagogues, being glorified by all. 16 And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up. And as was his custom, he went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and he stood up to read. 17 And the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written, 18 "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, 19 to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." 20 And he rolled up the scroll and gave it back to the attendant and sat down. And the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. 21 And he began to say to them, "Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." 22 And all spoke well of him and marveled at the gracious words that were coming from his mouth. And they said, "Is not this Joseph's son?" (Luke 4:14-22)

It was customary for the Jewish people in Jesus' day to spend time in the synagogue where leaders would read and comment on the ancient Scriptures. When Jesus went into the synagogue, as was the custom, He stood up to read a passage of Scripture. The reading for that day was part of a prophecy from Isaiah that spoke of the coming Messiah.

In a dramatic moment that likely shocked the people in the synagogue, Jesus read a passage that described the ministry of the Messiah, and then He sat down. "Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing," He said. The moment was shocking for a couple of reasons. First, Jesus implied that He Himself was the Messiah upon whom the Spirit rested. He was saying, in effect, "I'm the guy Isaiah was talking about."

TIMELINE

HOMETOWN OPPOSITION

Jesus makes plain His identity and is rejected in His hometown.

ZACCHAEUS AND THE SYCAMORE

Jesus has come to seek and save the lost.

**Beginning Summer 2017*

THE SOWER AND THE SOILS

Jesus teaches on people's responses when hearing the Word.

Secondly, Jesus' words were shocking because of what He didn't read. He stopped reading the text at the line where Isaiah spoke of the year of Jubilee and freedom for the captives. The next line spoke about the God's judgment coming upon people. Jesus deliberately ended the reading at the declaration of grace, not judgment. Why? Because the Day of Judgment was to come later. In that particular moment, Jesus declared freedom and grace.

Jesus boldly declared that right there, before the eyes of the people in the synagogue, Isaiah's prophecy had been fulfilled. The people were taken aback by the claim. Maybe they were amazed at His eloquence, but they couldn't believe that a carpenter's son could be so special.

JESUS FACED REJECTION FROM HIS PEOPLE

After Jesus read from the scroll of Isaiah, He saw the unbelief in the hearts of the people and anticipated their rejection of Him, just as God's people had often rejected the prophets.

23 And he said to them, "Doubtless you will quote to me this proverb, 'Physician, heal yourself.' What we have heard you did at Capernaum, do here in your hometown as well." 24 And he said, "Truly, I say to you, no prophet is acceptable in his hometown. 25 But in truth, I tell you, there were many widows in Israel in the days of Elijah, when the heavens were shut up three years and six months, and a great famine came over all the land, 26 and Elijah was sent to none of them but only to Zarephath, in the land of Sidon, to a woman who was a widow. 27 And there were many lepers in Israel in the time of the prophet Elisha, and none of them was cleansed, but only Naaman the Syrian." (Luke 4:23-27)

Have you ever heard the saying, "A prophet is without honor in his hometown?" It comes from what Jesus said and is similar to a more common phrase that is used today: "Familiarity breeds contempt."

The idea behind the phrase is that the people in Jesus' hometown did not see Him as special or unique; they saw Him as ordinary. What's more, they didn't care for His message, even though they wanted to see His miracles.

Sometimes, it's difficult to notice the growth of people who are closest to us. You know what it's like. You don't see the day-to-day growth of your siblings or everyday friends, but you notice immediately when you visit friends or family you haven't seen in awhile. Distance gives us perspective on people.

In a similar way, the people in Nazareth saw Jesus grow up before their eyes. But they could not reconcile the presence of this prophet who was before them with the young boy who had grown up in their midst. They would not accept the truth of Jesus' words as He read the scroll of Isaiah.

Jesus confronted the unbelief of the people in Nazareth by referring them to two Old Testament stories, one with Elijah and one with Elisha (both of whom were mighty prophets of God). In both accounts, God did something miraculous for people who were not part of the official "people of God." God sent these prophets into Gentile territory because Israel would not receive the Word of God through their ministry.

The telling of these two stories took on new meaning in Jesus' time. He put Himself in the line of prophets who had been rejected by God's people, and put the people of Nazareth in line of ancient Israelites who rejected the prophets of old. No wonder they were offended at His message! In hearing this word from Jesus, their hearts grew callous.

- **How difficult do you think it was for Jesus, who came to rescue His people, to experience rejection?** (p. 79, PSG)

JESUS CONTINUED HIS MINISTRY DESPITE HIS PEOPLE'S REJECTION

The people of Nazareth reacted first with amazement, and then with anger. Watch how they responded to Jesus' message:

28 When they heard these things, all in the synagogue were filled with wrath. 29 And they rose up and drove him out of the town and brought him to the brow of the hill on which their town was built, so that they could throw him down the cliff. 30 But passing through their midst, he went away. (John 4:28-30)

The people were so enraged at Jesus's words that they wanted to throw him off a cliff so that He would fall to His death. Although Jesus' mission included His substitutionary death, this was not the appointed time for Him to die. We don't know exactly how Jesus passed through the crowd and avoided death in this moment. Some commentators think Jesus' escape was miraculous. Others believe He simply managed to get away. Either way, it is clear that the situation in Nazareth was dire.

Jesus' own people rejected them, just as Isaiah predicted 700 years before. Despite the rejection from the people in His own hometown, Jesus pressed on to fulfill the ministry God called Him to.

TIMELINE

THE UNMERCIFUL SERVANT

Jesus teaches on forgiveness.

THE GOOD SAMARITAN

Jesus teaches on how to love one's neighbor.

TWO LOST SONS

Jesus teaches on God's grace to both the prodigal and self-righteous brother.

99 ESSENTIAL DOCTRINES

Christ as Prophet (p. 79, PSG)

As one of His offices, Jesus fulfills the role of prophet: He alone is the ultimate teacher and has the words of eternal life (John 6:68). Jesus is also God's ultimate revelation of Himself.

CHRIST CONNECTION

What a Savior we have in Jesus! Although He faced rejection and opposition, the ministry of the Holy Spirit empowered Him to remain steady in order to complete the mission to seek and save those who were lost. It's comforting to know that God had not abandoned Israel—that hundreds of years before Jesus was even born, God gave the prophet Isaiah the message that freedom from sin would come. Jesus is the fulfillment of God's promise to redeem people out of the captivity to sin.

Now, we can find the hope we need to endure when we face rejection and persecution. No matter if it comes from a friend we've share the gospel with, or even a family member who rejects us for our stance for Jesus. May we rally among other believers to encourage them and remind them of Jesus who endured opposition for our sake! May we reengage with those who have rejected us with the refreshing truths of the gospel of Jesus, who seeks to rescue them from captivity.

YOUR STORY

10-15 MINUTES

GROUP QUESTIONS

God's Story has always been designed to connect with your story. It is because of His Story that our stories make sense, have meaning, and carry on into eternity. Use the questions below to help think through how His Story connects with your own.

- **What are some ways people try to discredit the uniqueness of Jesus today?**
Answers will vary.
- **What do you think about Jesus' decision not to perform miracles in Nazareth? Why did Jesus respond to the Nazarenes' rejection in this way?** *Answers will vary.*
- **When have you faced rejection because of your faith?** *Answers will vary.*
- **What encouraging words would you offer to a young believer facing rejection because of belief in Jesus?** *Answers will vary.*

HIS STORY

God's Story of Redemption, through His Son, Jesus Christ.

YOUR STORY

Where your story meets His.

YOUR MISSION 10-15 MINUTES



HEAD

The rejection of Jesus goes back to the sinfulness of the human heart. John 3:19 reminds us: “And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil.” As people rejected Jesus in His day, sadly they still reject Him today. People react harshly to the truth of the gospel because it exposes the darkness of our hearts.

- **When have you seen people reject Jesus because He demands they live a certain way?** *Answers will vary.*
- **How does the truth of John 3:19 warn us when it comes to our own hesitations in trusting Jesus as Savior?** *Answers will vary.*



HEART

As God’s people endure persecution and suffering, they can rejoice to be counted among believers who faced rejection just like Jesus. In times of rejection, we remember the words of the apostle Paul: As God comforted us during times of suffering and affliction, we are then able to walk alongside and comfort other believers who are suffering through various trials (2 Cor. 1:3-7). This is the tangible expression of God the Spirit’s ministry through our lives, benefiting those inside the body of Christ.

- **What do you think happens when unbelievers see Christians rejoicing in times of suffering rather than complaining?** *Answers will vary.*
- **In what ways does our endurance in the midst of rejection or opposition strengthen our witness and mission?** *Answers will vary.*



HANDS

According to Isaiah, the ministry of the Messiah would answer both spiritual and physical needs. For this reason, the church has always focused on both kinds of needs—spiritual and material. The church proclaims the work of Jesus for the salvation of the world, while simultaneously working alongside others in bringing physical and temporal relief to suffering. Believers should take these two attributes seriously: the pursuit of holiness and the expression of love and mercy to people in need (Jas. 1:27).

- **Jesus redeemed us from spiritual captivity. How does His redemption lead us to meet physical and temporal needs of people around us?** *As with Jesus’ own earthly ministry, we should seek to meet the physical and tangible needs of others. Doing so doesn’t detract from the belief that people’s greatest need is their spiritual need to be made right with God. It only demonstrates our desire to show compassion in the same way we see it shown in the life of Christ.*
- **Why is it problematic for Christians to focus only on spiritual problems and fail to meet physical needs?** *Answers will vary.*

► ADDITIONAL INFO

LEADER PACK

For this session, refer students to pack item #11, which contains an informational chart that highlights biblical examples of the costs of following Jesus. Use this to discuss current idols we are called to abandon today in as we follow Christ, especially noting the similarities between our own idols and those of the individuals listed in the chart.

SOURCES

1. "Macy's: A History," *Macy's Inc*, accessed August 28, 2016, <https://www.macysinc.com/press-room/macysinc-history/macys-a-history/default.aspx>.
2. Rachel Gillett, "How Walt Disney, Oprah Winfrey, and 19 Other Successful People Rebounded After Getting Fired," *Inc.*, accessed August 28, 2016, <http://www.inc.com/business-insider/21-successful-people-who-rebounded-after-getting-fired.html>
3. Barbara Woff and Hananya Goodman, "The Legend of the Dull-Witted Child Who Grew Up to Be a Genius," *The Albert Einstein Archives*, accessed August 28, 2016, http://www.albert-einstein.org/article_handicap.html.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Check out the following additional resources:

- **Leader Training Videos**
- **One Conversations**
- **Midweek Studies (to access your Midweek Study, go to lifeway.com/TGPRescueSpr17)**
- **Circular Timeline Poster**
- **App (for both leader and student)**



Additional suggestions for specific groups are available at

GospelProject.com/AdditionalResources

And for **free online training** on how to lead a group visit

MinistryGrid.com/web/TheGospelProject