

BIG QUESTION UNDER INVESTIGATION

We're in... Unit 12: God's People Live for Him

Unit 12 Big Question and Answer and Song:

"How Should God's People Live?

They Should Live Like Jesus!" *PFI NIV Songs 12, Tracks 3,4*

Unit 1 Bible Verse and Song: Ephesians 5:1-2

"Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God."

PFI NIV Songs 12, Track 5

BIBLE TRUTH

We're learning... Bible Truth 12:

God's People Suffer According to God's Good Plan

God has promised His people that though they will suffer in many ways here on earth, they will only suffer according to His good and perfect plan. God promises to only use their sufferings to do good to them and bring glory to His name. He will use their sufferings to make them holy and to strengthen their faith, their love and their dependence on Him. God's people don't like to suffer, but they trust in God's good purposes in allowing them to suffer and in His promise to use it for their good and His glory. They know that God's Holy Spirit will always give them the strength they need to endure the suffering He allows. God's people count it an honor to suffer for Jesus, the One who suffered most of all, when He took the punishment for their sins upon the cross. But, they also look forward with great excitement to the day when they will live with God and their sufferings and sadnesses will be gone forever.

BIBLE VERSE

How do I know this is true? The Bible tells me so!

Bible Truth 12 Bible Verse: 1 Peter 1:6-7, NIV 1984

"...for a little while you may have suffered grief in all kinds of trials. These have come that your faith—which is of greater worth than gold which perishes though refined by fire—may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed."

CASE STORY

Our story is called:

The Case of the Atheist Under Attack.

As you listen to the story, see if you can figure out:

1. Who was the Atheist Under Attack? Who did he refuse to confess as God?
2. How did he show he suffered only according to God's good plan?

This story doesn't take place in Bible times. It takes place in Smyrna--modern day Izmir, Turkey-- about one hundred years after Jesus died on the cross and rose from the dead.

Long ago when our story took place, Smyrna was a part of the great Roman empire. It was known as the "Glory of Asia," and considered the most beautiful city in that entire Roman province. Smyrna had grow Rich on the goods brought into its harbor from around the Roman world. Rich merchants built luxurious houses with beautiful hand-painted walls, colorful mosaic tile floors, and beautiful, enclosed gardens, high on the hills above the city and the sea. The city, itself, was filled with temples and government buildings built with massive, carved columns and lined with statues of famous men and Roman gods. Smyrna had a large library and the largest public theater and all of Roman Asia. Yes, it was easy to see why Smyrna was first among the cities of Asia.

But Smyrna claimed to be first in something else, too. Something that made life very hard for Christians. It was the first city to worship Caesar, the Roman king, as Lord and God. "Once a year every Roman citizen must burn a pinch of incense on the altar to our God, Caesar, proclaiming that he is Lord," it was decreed. "Every citizen who does so will receive a certificate of his confession and will continue to enjoy the rights of a citizen and good-standing. Anyone who does not is a traitor to his king. He will lose his rights as a citizen and be punished."

The Christians wanted to be good, obedient citizens, they couldn't never sacrifice to Caesar or called him their Lord and God. Yahweh was the one, true God and Jesus Christ was their only Lord. They would rather be put in jail or die than obey this new law.

The Smyrnaneans began to abuse the Christians. "Down with the atheists - you unbelievers in the Roman gods!" they jeered. "It is bad enough that you re-fuse to believe in our gods and lead others to worship that dead man,

and Lord that he is! You are traitors and we will be rid of you!"

These were no idle threats. Soon the Christians weren't allowed to buy food at the market and no one dared hire them. Their houses and things were taken from them. They were arrested and dragged into prison. Many were killed. It became very difficult and dangerous to be a believer in Smyrna, but God was with them. He gave them face to stand strong in their sufferings.

The Lord gave them something else to help them endure their hardships. He gave them a young pastor named Polycarp. Polycarp has learned about Jesus from the apostle John himself. John passed on the Polycarp everything Jesus had taught him about God and how God wanted his followers to live. Polycarp took good care of the believers at Smyrna. He taught them from God's word, he encourage them to trusting God to bravely confessed his name, even to their death. Polycarp was a very humble man, but very bold, too. Among the churches, he became famous for helping confused Christians understand what Jesus really taught. But among the Romans he became famous powerfully preaching the good news of Jesus. They called him "The Destroyer of the Gods" because his preaching turned so many Romans turned from worshiping the Roman gods to follow Jesus instead.

One day, Polycarp received some sad news from Antioch, a city hundreds of miles south of Smyrna. The Romans there had begun to punish Christians for their unwillingness to worship the Roman gods. They had arrested Ignatius, the wise old pastor, and dragged him before the governor of Antioch.

"Worship the gods and live, Ignatius! But this honor them and die!" The governor threatened.

"I would rather die than betray Jesus!" Ignatius boldly replied.

"Then to the lions of Rome you go, you atheist!" The governor declared. Ignatius was chained and handed over to Roman soldiers. These men would take Ignatius to the coliseum in Rome, where thousands would watch and cheer as he was thrown to hungry lions.

Polycarp knew the thousand – mile route from Antioch to Rome well. "Ignatius and his guards will stop here in Smyrna on their way to Rome. I will gather the pastors from the churches in nearby towns and we will wait for them to pass through Smyrna. Perhaps we can comfort and

encourage Ignatius," Polycarp planned.

Sure enough, before long Ignatius and the soldiers arrived in Smyrna. Polycarp and the others gathered around him that night to bring him good food and new hope. Yet, it was Ignatius who encouraged them. "God has given me strength to stay strong in my sufferings and keep on trusting in him," Ignatius told them. "And soon I know I will be in heaven with him forever. Stay loyal to Jesus, friends. He will hope you enjoy your sufferings, too."

The next day Ignatius and the Roman soldiers were off to Rome. Months later, news of Ignatius' death reached Polycarp. He had faced the lions bravely, glorifying the Lord in his suffering to the very end.

Almost 50 years past since Ignatius' death. Polycarp, the young man, had become Polycarp, the eighty-six-year-old man. For over half a century, Polycarp had cared for the Christians of Smyrna and preached the good news of Jesus boldly. Never forgetting Ignatius's encouragement, he encouraged them all to trust God and to stay loyal to Jesus, even to death.

But now, it was Polycarp's turn to stand strong in suffering for Jesus. During a festival honoring Caesar as their God, a mob of the Smyrneans began to chant, "Down with the Christians, the atheists! They dishonor Caesar, our God! Bring us Polycarp! He must die!"

The crowd rushed to Polycarp's house and beat down his door. Polycarp wasn't there, but two servant boys were questioned harshly until they revealed where he was. "They've hidden him in a haystack and a farm outside of town," they confessed at last.

Soldiers went to the farm and found Polycarp. The old man went with them without a fuss. He was ready to suffer and die for Jesus. The soldiers put Polycarp on a donkey and let him to the crowd gathered in the public theater. They cheered loudly as Polycarp was brought in and presented to the governor of Smyrna.

"You are an old man, Polycarp," the governor said to him. "Why should you die in this way? Don't be trouble. Place your pinch of incense on the altar. Make your own to Caesar. That's all you have to do, and I will release you. Curse Christ! Say, 'Away with the atheists!' And you are free man!" the governor promised. He knew that it Polycarp would but say these words in front of the crowd, it would be a huge discouragement to the Christians and any others who heard the good news of Jesus. He waited hopefully

hopefully Polycarp reply.

But God gave Polycarp the strength to stand strong even now. "... Polycarp with his face firmly set, looked at all the crowd in the stadium and waved hand towards them, size, looked up to heaven, and cried: 'Away with the godless!... For eighty-six years... I have been Christ's servant, and He has never done me wrong: how can I curse my king who saved me?'

'I have wild lions that I will use on you,' said the governor... 'If you make light of the lions, I'll have you destroyed by fire...' he promised Polycarp.

But Polycarp answered him: 'The fire you threaten burns for a time that as soon extinguished; there is a fire you know nothing about – the fire of judgment to come and of eternal punishment, the fire reserved for the ungodly. But why do you hesitate? Do what you want.'

The governor was amazed, and sent the crier to stand in the middle of the arena and announce three times: "Polycarp has confessed that he is a Christian."

Then shout went up from every throat: 'Polycarp must be burned alive!'

The crowd rushed and gathered logs and sticks... When the bonfire was ready... Polycarp prayed... When he had offered up the Amen and completed his prayer, the man in charge lit the fire, and a great flame shot up." (Eusebius, History of the Church) And just like Ignatius, Polycarp bravely endured his suffering, glorifying God to the end.

Our Bible Truth is:

God's People Suffer According to God's Good Plan

Our Bible Verse is: 1 Peter 1:6-7 NIV 1984

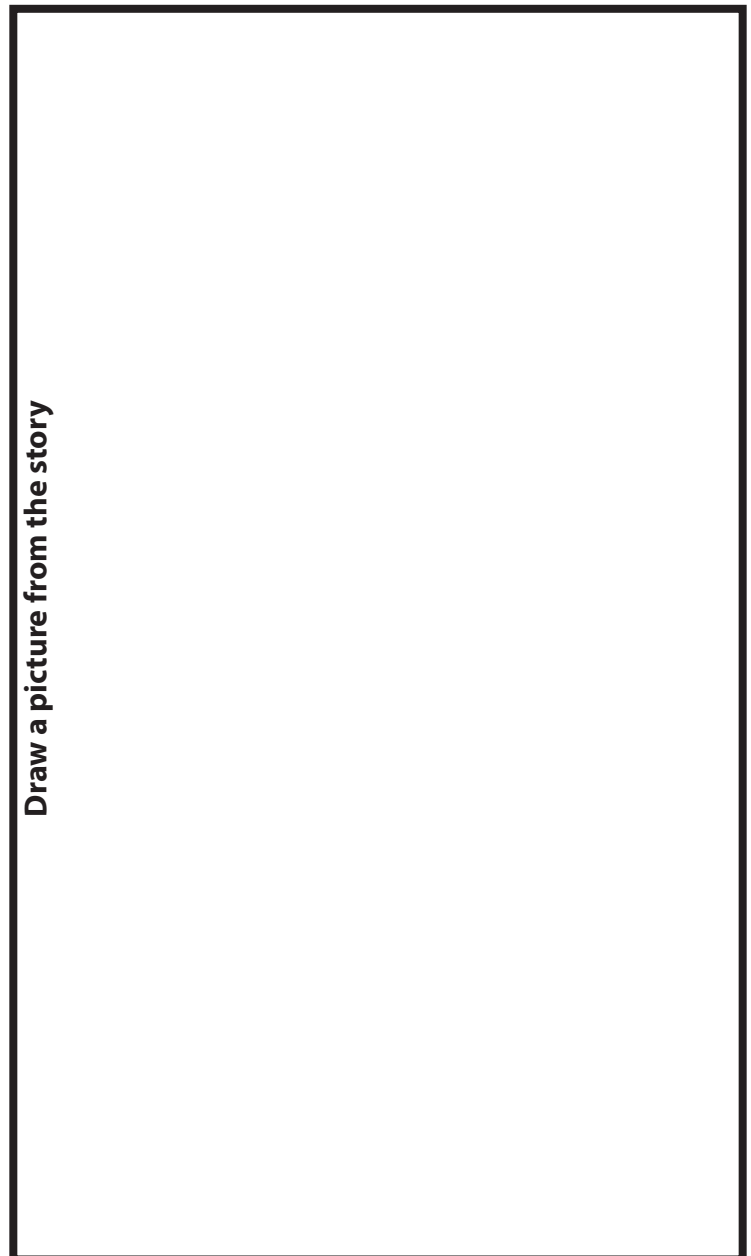
"...for a little while you may have suffered grief in all kinds of trials. These have come that your faith—which is of greater worth than gold which perishes though refined by fire—may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed."

What about you and me? The Lord has told us that all of God's people will face suffering that has been planned for them, according to His good plan. Many of God's people may never know persecution like what Ignatius, Polycarp and many other Christians in the Roman Empire faced. But some, even now do face terrible sufferings like these. How can God's people today endure sufferings like these? The same way as Ignatius and Polycarp did long ago: by remembering that they will only have to endure what their

good God has allowed. He will help them endure their sufferings, not by their own strength but by God's—and He is always strong enough to give them what they need.

How can we be God's people? By turning away from our sins and trusting in Jesus as our Savior. Then, like Polycarp and Ignatius and those other believers, we can know the wonderful, one, true God. And we can rest that God will be at work doing great things for our good and His glory through all our sufferings.

Let's praise God for being so careful in what sufferings He plans for His People; and, for always giving them strength to endure them. Let's ask Him to help us to turn away from our sins and trust in Jesus as our Savior. Let's ask Him to give us strength and even joy in our sufferings and to honor Him in them.



Draw a picture from the story

SOME QUESTIONS FOR YOU

1. A Question about the Bible Truth, True or False:

Gospel means good news of salvation through Jesus.
Answer: True.

2. Crack the Case Questions:

a. Who was the Atheist Under Attack? Who did he refuse to confess as God?

Answer: Polycarp. He refused to confess that the Roman king was God.

b. How did he show he suffered only according to God's good plan?

Answer: He had known God's faithfulness to him for many, many years. He knew God would only allow this suffering if it was for his good and God's glory.

3. Fill in the missing words from the Bible Verse:

1 Peter 1:6-7

"...for a little while you may have suffered ___ in all kinds of trials. These have come that your faith—which is of greater worth than ___ which perishes though refined by fire—may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when ___ ___ is revealed."

Answers: grief; gold; Jesus Christ.

AN ACTS PRAYER FROM OUR STORY

A=Adoration, C=Confession, T=Thanksgiving, S=Supplication

A God, we praise You for being the Freer of People from their slavery to sin.

C God, we confess that like Onesimus and Philemon we are sinners. Like Onesimus, we want to live life our own way and are willing to do things the wrong way to get what we want. Like Philemon, we think a lot about the good, rich things we enjoy more than You. We need a Savior!

T God, we thank You that Your forgiveness is so great that even the worst of sinners can be forgiven by You. Thank You for working out Your good plans to save Your people, even when they least expect it.

S God, work in our hearts! Help us to turn away from our sins and trust Jesus as our own Savior. Send Your Holy Spirit to change our hearts so that we love You and live to please You with our lives, more and more.

BIBLE TRUTH HYMN

How Firm a Foundation

PFI NIV Songs 12, Tracks 34,35

Verse 3

"When thro' fiery trials thy pathway shall lie,
 My grace, all sufficient, shall be thy supply;
 The flame shall not hurt thee; I only design
 Thy dross to consume, and thy gold to refine.

Verse 4

"The soul that on Jesus hath leaned for repose
 I will not, I will not desert to his foes;
 That soul, tho' all hell should endeavor to shake,
 I'll never, no, never, no, never forsake!"

*Words: John Rippon's Selection of Hymns
 Music: Joseph Funk's Genuine Church Music*

God's people know all God has an unbreakable plan to use all things in their lives for their good. He has planned that even their "fiery trials"—the hardest things that happen to them—that God will use them all to make them like Jesus. They do not have to like the fiery trials, but they can praise God for how He will use them for their good and His glory.

BIBLE VERSE SONG

For a Little While

PFI NIV Songs 12, Track 36

For a little while you may have suffered
 Grief in all kinds of trials.
 These have come that your faith,
 May be proved genuine, be proved genuine.

Refrain:

Faith! Faith! Which is of greater worth than gold,
 Which perishes though refined by fire.
 Faith! Faith! Which is of greater worth than gold,
 Which perishes though refined by fire.

For a little while you may have suffered
 Grief in all kinds of trials.
 These have come that your faith,
 May result in praise, glory and honor. *Refrain*
 First Peter One, six through seven.

Words: 1 Peter 1:6-7, NIV 1984 Music: Constance Dever ©2011

God's people suffer, but only according to God's perfectly wise and good plan. He will only use their sufferings for His glory and their good. What kind of good? He will use their sufferings to grow their faith in Him, making it stronger, truer, and deeper. That's what this verse calls proving faith genuine. What other kind of glory? God has planned for all their sufferings to result in praise, glory and honor. That's because God is the one who perfectly planned their sufferings and gave them the strength to endure them. We may think gold and riches are worth a lot in this world—and they are because we can get many things with them. But, how God's people will thank God and praise Him for all the great things He did through their sufferings! For through them, God will give them something worth far more than all the gold in the world could get them.