



A FALSE ACCUSATION

LESSON 74 → Acts 6:1-15; 7:54-60

Gia's experience in the classroom helped her learn how to respond to persecution.

“**M**rs. Lee, Gia dumped all my papers on the floor!” Carson called out in mock despair. The class suddenly became still. Gia could feel her face turning bright red as everyone turned to see what was happening.

Gia was new at school, and it hadn't been easy to make friends. Sometimes the other

kids hesitated to include her in their activities because they could tell she was different. She was a Christian. Gia had just tried to keep up with the rest of the class and slip by unnoticed . . . but now this!

Typing had been an uncomfortable class for Gia from the first day. Mrs. Lee had treated her coolly and had never tried to make her feel welcome. Now,

Mrs. Lee was asking if she had, in fact, knocked the papers deliberately on the floor.

“Why, no, Mrs. Lee!” the shocked girl replied quietly. “Pick them up anyway!” the teacher demanded.

Gia stood frozen for a moment, then she stooped down and began to scoop the papers into a pile while everyone silently



WHEN THINGS GET HARD, I LOOK TO JESUS.

He that findeth his life shall lose it: and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it. — Matthew 10:39

watched. Inside she felt wronged and wanted to protest, but she was afraid if she opened her mouth she wouldn't be able to hold back her tears (which was probably just what Carson wanted).

Carson was the class show-off, and Mrs. Lee should have known he was pulling a prank! But she had taken his side and allowed Gia to be humiliated in front of the entire class. It was hard to take.

Arriving home, Gia unloaded on her mother. "I was so embarrassed, Mom!"

"Well," her mom said, "it wasn't very fair, Honey, but maybe the Lord has a lesson for you to learn from this situation." Gia looked at her mother in amazement as she continued. "People won't agree every time with the way you believe or act. There will always be some who will be rude and try to make you look guilty and focus attention on you, just like today."

"What makes people that way?" asked Gia. "Why can't people just let me be good if I want to, and they can be bad if that's what they want?"

"Gia, usually if you don't bother people they won't give you any trouble. But, sometimes a Christian's life condemns people for the way they are living. Instead of taking care of the problems in their own

lives, they strike out at the one who's doing the right thing. They try to make him look bad so they don't feel so guilty about themselves."

Through the days that followed, Gia thought often about her mother's words. Then the next Sunday the Sunday school lesson was about Stephen and how he was persecuted. Stephen had preached to some people whose hearts were hard. They didn't appreciate it when he told them that they were turning their backs on God and His Word and not living right, that they were only pretending to be religious. Instead of repenting, they decided Stephen must be done away with.

Stephen was arrested and brought before a council. The people, elders, and scribes had been stirred up by Stephen's accusers, and false witnesses were brought to tell lies about him.

The council could see, by the heavenly glow on Stephen's face, that he was innocent. They asked if the accusations against him were true. Stephen used that opportunity to launch into yet another powerful sermon. He didn't hesitate to tell the people how bad they were. They became so angry they gnashed on him with their teeth! Stephen looked up and saw Jesus standing on the right hand of

God. When he told the crowd what he was seeing, they deliberately closed their ears to his voice. Enraged, they dragged him out of the city and began to stone him. As the heavy stones struck him, Stephen knelt and asked God not to hold this sinful act against the people. Then he died.

By the end of the Sunday school class time, Gia didn't feel like her problem was nearly as serious as she had thought before. Maybe Mrs. Lee has some bitterness in her heart that has caused her to persecute me, thought Gia. It was still painful to think of the way she had been embarrassed in front of the other kids, but if Stephen could ask forgiveness for the people taking his life, surely she could forgive someone for causing an ugly scene! So, asking God to help her to forgive, Gia felt His love come into her heart for the ones who had wronged her.

God's Word tells us there is a special reward for anyone who suffers persecution for His sake, and He promises to be close in a special way during those times. We can see how this was especially true in Stephen's life. His example helped Gia through an unhappy experience. It will help you, too, when similar things happen in your life.

Here are three letters from some Christian friends who need advice on how to handle persecution. Using the Bible verses given, can you give them the advice from the Lord?

WHAT SHOULD I DO?

Dear . . .

While I was at school the other day some kids called me names and made fun of me because I was reading my Bible. Do I still have to love them and include them in my prayers? -Tucker

Dear . . .

Last Saturday when I went shopping with my friends, I found that they were taking some things without paying for them.

I told them it was wrong, but they laughed at me and made fun of me. I feel just awful. Can you give me some encouragement?

Scarlett

DEAR . . .

I AM SO AFRAID TO TELL MY FRIENDS ABOUT THE LORD ANYMORE AFTER WHAT HAPPENED. I TRIED TO TELL A GOOD FRIEND ABOUT JESUS A WHILE AGO AND NOW HE WON'T EVEN TALK TO ME. HE EVEN SAYS BAD THINGS ABOUT ME TO OTHER PEOPLE.

I JUST CAN'T UNDERSTAND. PLEASE HELP!

JAMES

Tucker:

(Matthew 5:44)

Scarlett:

(Matthew 5:12)

James:

(1 Peter 2:20)

