

THE CROSS

Salt of the Earth: Palestinian Christians in the Northern West Bank

Study Guide (leader version)

<http://www.saltfilms.net>



Summary: This session focuses on witness and service. Jesus tells us we are “the salt of the earth” and “the light of the world.” He tells us to take up our crosses and follow him. We’ll examine these passages as we see how they shape the life of Afaf, a retired schoolteacher living in Nablus. She shares her deep faith and her desire to serve in Christ’s name.

Supplies: Everyone should have a Bible. Bring copies of this session’s student guide.

3 **Prayer and introduction**

min Greet everyone. If your class is following the Daily Walk, you may invite people to share any reflections they may have from the previous week.

Hand out the student guides and introduce today’s study:

Today, we’ll be focused on Christian witness and service.

We’ll meet Afaf (a-FAF), a retired schoolteacher living in Nablus.

Invite someone to open the session in prayer or use the sample prayer at right.

Sample Prayer

Merciful God, open your scriptures to us, let them breathe new life and love into our witness and service. In Christ’s name we pray. Amen.

3 **Scripture**

min Invite someone to read Matthew 5:13-16 aloud.

Invite someone else to read Matthew 16:24 aloud.

20 **Questions**

min In groups of 2 to 4 discuss:

1) *What do you think Jesus meant by “salt” and “light”? How are you and your congregation salt and light?*

2) *What does it mean to carry our cross? Is carrying our cross different from being salt and light? How do you and your congregation carry the cross of Christ?*

Leader Notes Matthew 5

For Middle Eastern Christians, most of whom live as religious minorities in their lands, this passage has especially strong meaning. Just as a very small amount of salt can transform a whole meal, a small Christian presence can transform the society. Just as a single candle can be seen in the darkest place, their presence shines light wherever they are.

11
min

Film
Show “The
Cross” segment
of the film.

Leader Notes film

Nablus has a population of more than 100,000, including approximately 700 Christians. It is known Biblically as Shechem or Sychar, one of the cities of refuge. Here, Jacob is believed to have dug a well (Genesis 33), and Joseph's remains were brought

back from Egypt to their final resting place. At Jacob's Well, Jesus spoke with the Samaritan woman about the need for "living water" (John 4). Above Nablus, on Mt. Gerizim, lives the modern remnant of the ancient Samaritans; between Nablus and a community near Tel Aviv, they number just over 600.

Afaf is a retired schoolteacher. She has never married and lives alone in the home where she nursed her parents in their last years. She shares her favorite scripture passage, Matthew 16:24, which she's cross-stitched on a wall-hanging.

On Sunday morning she leaves home and goes to the street to hail a taxi to go to church. She is a member of the Anglican (Episcopalian) church in Nablus. The congregation (in the midst of building a new church) worships 3 weeks of the month in a chapel (converted from a home) in Rafidia and once a week in the old Anglican compound at the old city gates. In the film, Afaf is headed to the chapel in Rafidia, which in the past was a distinct town (with a relatively large Christian population) but over the years has become essentially a neighborhood of Nablus. When she arrives, Fr. Husam Naoum, the Anglican priest, is ringing the bell for worship.

As Afaf reads Ephesians 3:13-21 in the service, we also hear her reflect on what the Anglican Church has meant to her development as a Christian, through the guidance of clergy and encouragement to read scripture and Christian books.

While we see Fr. Husam Naoum preaching in the service, we hear him reflect (in his office) for us on the state of the Palestinian Church. He says the church sees itself as salt of the earth as it faces difficulties of being a minority and the devastation of the current situation. The work of the church is to bear and implement the message of the gospel. The Palestinian church is one part of the Body of Christ around the world. “What makes us really so special as Christians is that we are all one, because we are unified with the blood and the body of our Lord Jesus Christ.” We see the congregation receive communion and conclude the service.

Back at home, over fruit and tea, Afaf shares more reflections of her life in Christ. Since childhood, she has discerned that her desire is to be “the person who removes difficulties from the ways of others.” She notes that Paul instructed us to “weep with those who weep and rejoice with those who rejoice” (Romans 12:15). She asserts that people can serve God every moment of their lives—not just priest or nuns, but all of us. Each person has the ability to serve. We must, as Christ, deny ourselves for the benefit of others.

Afaf regularly helps Mother Theresa's Missionaries of Charity, who have a number of convents in the Middle East, including one in Nablus. There, they care for severely

Leader notes film continued

disabled children from birth to 7 years old and for older women. Some of the women and children have no family, others have such severe problems that care for them has become too much for their families. Most of them are from Muslim families. Afaf brings chocolate sweets for the women and tells them a “Joha” story. (Joha is a well-known trickster character in Arab folklore.) Joking, she asks if she should tell it in Arabic or English. As she tells the story to the women, we hear her reflect on the importance to her of being a Christian in Palestine: Jesus lived his whole life there. He told parables using the plants and animals that still surround people there. She says that unlike goats, sheep need a leader, and will get lost without their shepherd. We are like the sheep, she says. “The center of faith is Jesus Christ and the example he set for all of us.” After telling the story, she helps the Sisters of Charity at lunchtime by feeding a five year old boy with severe mental disabilities and limited use of his limbs. As she feeds him, she sings to him.

The film ends back at Afaf’s home, where she prepares coffee and gives thanks for the opportunity to talk about Jesus Christ. As a farewell, she sings “God be with you ‘till we meet again,” a hymn her mother used to sing.

10 Questions

min As a group discuss:

How does Afaf seek to be salt and light? To carry her cross?

What can we learn from her about witness and service?

4 Closing and prayer

min Solicit prayer concerns from the group and then close in prayer, using your own or the sample prayer at right.

Remind the group of “Daily Walk” opportunities, and plans for next meeting.

Sample Prayer

Lord, we pray for Afaf, her witness, her church, and her community. We pray for us, our witness, our church, and our community. Teach your believers how to be the salt of the earth. Show us how to let our light shine. Help us to be cities on a hill. Prepare us to share your Good News in all the world. In Christ’s name, Amen.

<h2>Daily Walk</h2> <p>An invitation to daily prayer and witness</p>	
<p>Daily Prayer: <i>Frame your daily walk with this series in prayer—feel free to use your own prayer or the one provided:</i> Lord of all, we pray for the power of your Spirit to fill your Church, encouraging and preparing us for witness and service for your kingdom. In Christ's name. Amen.</p>	<p>Daily Action: Available online: http://www.saltfilms.net/guides/cross-student.pdf</p> <p>Day 1) <i>Read Scripture:</i> James 2:14-26.</p> <p>Day 2) <i>Hear from a Holy Land Christian:</i> Roman Catholic Patriarch Michel Sabbah' 2005 Pentecost homily. http://www.lpj.org/Patriarchs/Sabbah/Pent_eng_05.htm</p> <p>Day 3) <i>Learn more:</i> "Arabic Speaking Christianity: A glorious past and a challenging present and future," by Rev. Dr. Kenneth Bailey. http://www.saltfilms.net/guides/bailey.html</p> <p>Day 4) <i>Be inspired:</i> Work of the Palestinian Bible Society http://www.biblesociety.org/sr_29/sr29_18.htm#Bethlehem</p> <p>Day 5) <i>Share:</i> Take time to tell someone new about how you've been moved this week by this Study Series. Invite him/her to pray with you.</p> <p>Day 6) <i>Act:</i> Consider the needs of your community: where is Christian service and witness needed? Find one thing you can do to help, and make concrete plans to accomplish it.</p>