

# THE WAY



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

Study Guide (leader version)

<http://www.saltfilms.net>

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**Summary:** This session looks at perseverance, in faith and in life's challenges. We'll meet Sylvia, a college student who talks about being a minority as a Christian, and who faces great obstacles as she pursues her education.

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**Supplies:** Everyone should have a Bible. Bring copies of this session's student guide. If you have a wall map, find and mark Tubas and Nablus on it. You might also want to download a West Bank closure map from the UN. Color printing is best, but not essential. [http://www.reliefweb.int/hic-opt/maps/Closure/mar/WB3\\_closure0304\\_600.pdf](http://www.reliefweb.int/hic-opt/maps/Closure/mar/WB3_closure0304_600.pdf). Take a look at the road closures on routes from Tubas to Nablus.

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### 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 will consider perseverance, in faith and in life's challenges. We'll hear about Christians living among a Muslim majority, from the perspective of a young woman named Sylvia who lives in a town called Tubas (too-BAHS) and studies at university in Nablus. We travel with her on her challenging route from home to school, and hear her reflect on being a religious minority.* If you have a map, you may point out the locations of Tubas and Nablus. Invite someone to open the session in prayer or use the sample prayer at right.

Sample Prayer  
*Merciful Lord, let us set aside every hindrance and sin that weighs us down and distances us from you. Give us strength and endurance to hear your word and do your will. In Christ's name we pray. Amen.*

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### 1 *Scripture*

*min* Invite someone to read Hebrews 12:1-12:3 aloud.

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### 15 *Questions*

*min* In groups of 2 to 4, discuss:  
1) *Share times in your life when you've felt disheartened, alone in your faith, or a minority in your community.*  
  
2) *Share times in your life when you've persevered. What enabled you to do so?*

### **Leader Notes** Hebrews

"Cloud of witnesses" refers to those who have gone before and who have been confirmed in their faithfulness by God. In the previous chapter of Hebrews, the author discusses those who lived by faith before the coming of Christ. Can we assume that the meaning today extends to the Christian faithful, a cloud of witnesses around us?

20  
min

**Film**  
Show “The Way”  
segment of the  
film.

**Leader Notes film**

Sylvia is a sophomore in college who lives in Tubas and studies at an-Najah University in nearby Nablus. Tubas has around 16,000 people, of whom four extended families (50-some people) are Christian. All of them are Greek Orthodox, and worship at Holy

Trinity Orthodox Church (where Fr. Tomie, the subject of “A Mantle” segment, is the priest). In a society where Friday is the day off (Friday is the day of prayer for Muslims), this church chose to have worship on Fridays as well. After church, Sylvia and her family go home for lunch.

Sylvia attends An-Najah University because it is the only university with a program in her chosen field, Pharmacy. Her father explains Sylvia’s home-to-school commute, which should be 20 minutes. But Israeli military restrictions on the freedom of movement for Palestinians have become so severe that it can take 6 to 8 hours to get from Tubas to Nablus on unofficial paths through the mountains. (Note that these are restrictions on movement within the Occupied Territories, not to or from or in Israel.) Consequently, instead of living at home and commuting to classes, Sylvia has rented an apartment in Nablus and comes home just on weekends (Thursday to Friday). When she returns to school on Saturday, she must leave very early. The Israeli military tries to prevent people from this unofficial movement, and so Sylvia’s parents fear that she might be hurt or arrested as she travels. However, they are also determined that she not be forced to give up her education. Her mother asserts that people need to be able to move about freely for education, health care, and many other things.

Saturday morning at 4:30 AM, we see Sylvia preparing to leave. Her brother, also awake, is pacing behind her, studying for his comprehensive high school exams. She gets into a 4x4 jeep, hired as a taxi by several students to take them on the roundabout route through the mountains to Nablus. The driver notices that some of his passengers are Christian and jokes that he is “half Christian,” since his mother is Spanish Christian and his father Palestinian Muslim. Religion is an official category of identity for Palestinians; their Israeli-issued IDs (which they are required to carry) indicate religion, determined by family of origin. In interfaith marriages, as in the case of the driver’s parents, the children are categorized by their father. It is not forbidden for a Muslim man to marry a non-Muslim woman, and it is not required for her to convert (although there may be many pressures for her to do so). Their children, however, would be categorized (regardless of their beliefs) as Muslims. Muslim women are not supposed to marry non-Muslim men. In Palestinian society, it is legal but fairly rare for a person to openly convert from Islam to Christianity or from Christianity to Islam.

Nablus is tucked between two mountains, Gerizim and Ebal, and consequently there are a limited number of roads that pass the mountains to get into the city. Since 2000, these entrances have been closed, destroyed, or controlled with checkpoints, as at Deir Sharaf, the officially permitted road from the north. At that checkpoint, Sylvia explains, treatment is unpredictable. In the past, most people could pass after having their government IDs checked. Now, sometimes only An-Najah students are permitted to pass,

*Leader notes film continued*

sometimes male students are allowed only if they are older than 35, and sometimes no one is allowed to pass. Consequently, Sylvia and other students take roundabout ways into the city. As the 4x4 approaches the city, we see some of these students, male and female, walking along the road. Without enough money for a ride, they hike into town.

Sylvia describes a previous trip to Nablus, on a different route through the mountains. As the van prepared to cross a valley on a settler-only bypass road, the driver spotted an Israeli military jeep. They waited some anxious moments until the jeep was out of sight before proceeding. They got across the valley and just as they were leaving the forbidden road, the van died. Passengers pushed the van off the paved settler-only road, over a berm of earth (piled there to prevent Palestinians from using the settler road), and onto the dirt mountain road. Eventually, they got the van running again and the passengers, all An-Najah students, re-boarded and continued on their way.

Sylvia describes her worst experience going to Nablus. Leaving before dawn, she and other students tried to pass over the mountains. Soldiers detained them from 4:00 AM to 2:00 PM. They shoved some young men to the ground. More than fifty students were there without food or water. (Most footage in this section was taken at another time, when students on their way to final exams at the Arab American University of Jenin were similarly detained for nearly 8 hours.) Finally, students were given back their IDs but not allowed to Nablus. Back home, Sylvia was so upset that she told her parents that she no longer wanted to succeed in school, and that she wanted to give up her education. In the end Sylvia does not give up; she was just venting her frustration. It is still upsetting to her, and makes her cry.

We catch up with her as she arrives, around 8:30 AM, at her rented apartment in Nablus. Her roommate, a Muslim girl named Inas from Tulkarem, has also had a long trip that morning, waking at 3 AM. They both take a nap before breakfast. After dressing and putting on their make-up, Sylvia and Inas walk to school. Sylvia explains that the two of them respect each other's beliefs and have become like sisters.

The largest university in Palestine, An-Najah has approximately 10,000 students. In the background a motto is on the University arch: "We challenge the present to shape the future." Sylvia goes to her Pharmacy laboratory class, which has only female students. This is because very few men want to study Pharmacy (classes at An-Najah are not segregated by gender). The topic that day happens to be pregnancy tests, which causes giggling when it comes time to get a sample of urine. Sylvia talks about how she feels as a Christian in a Muslim majority. She recalls that she was the only Christian in her class and one of only 4 in her school in Tubas. At An-Najah, she is the only sophomore in her major. She says she's used to it, but can also feel lonely. "One hand cannot clap alone." She goes to the school cafeteria, where she usually meets up with her friends between classes. There, she says many young Palestinians are trying to leave Palestine so they can escape the difficulties of living under the Israeli military. She thinks that the Christian population will decrease in Tubas, leaving only a few older people. She prays and asks people outside of Palestine to pray that God give them peace and freedom.

15 **Questions**

*min* As a group discuss:  
*How does Sylvia feel felt disheartened, alone, or a minority?*  
*What enables her to persevere?*  
*What can we learn from her and her communities?*

4 **Closing and prayer** Sample prayer  
*min* Solicit prayer concerns from the group and then close in prayer, using your own or the sample prayer at right.  
 Remind group of Daily Walk opportunities and plans for your next meeting.

*Lord Jesus Christ, we pray for Sylvia and the other Christians in Tubas.*  
*We pray for Christians who live as a minority in their own land.*  
*We pray for Christians who feel alone and disheartened in their faith.*  
*We pray for their comfort and perseverance.*  
*We pray for their neighbors and their enemies.*  
*In Christ's holy name, we pray. Amen.*

<p><b>Daily Walk</b>          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></p> <p>Merciful Lord, as we seek to follow your way, we pray that your glory would be revealed, and that all those created in your image would live in dignity and respect. Make us agents of your grace and witnesses to your glory. In Christ's name I pray. Amen.</p>	<p>Daily Action:          Available online: <a href="http://www.saltfilms.net/guides/way-student.pdf">http://www.saltfilms.net/guides/way-student.pdf</a></p> <p>Day 1) <i>Read Scripture:</i> Isaiah 40:3-5.</p> <p>Day 2) <i>Hear from a Holy Land Christian:</i> "What would you do if you were in my shoes," by Lutheran minister Mitri Raheb.  <a href="http://www.annadwa.org/news&amp;reports/e-newsletter/letter5.htm">http://www.annadwa.org/news&amp;reports/e-newsletter/letter5.htm</a></p> <p>Day 3) <i>Learn more:</i> B'Tselem's summary about freedom of movement  <a href="http://www.btselem.org/English/Freedom_of_Movement/">http://www.btselem.org/English/Freedom_of_Movement/</a></p> <p>Day 4) <i>Be inspired:</i> "Soldiers' Views from Huwwara Checkpoint," for Ecumenical Accompaniment Program in Israel and Palestine.  <a href="http://www.eappi.org/eappi.nsf/index/rep-lg-05021106.html">http://www.eappi.org/eappi.nsf/index/rep-lg-05021106.html</a></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> Support Machsom (Checkpoint) Watch, Israeli women working for human rights at checkpoints.  <a href="http://www.machsomwatch.org/">http://www.machsomwatch.org/</a></p>