News Story Summary

In July, the U.S. State Department hosted the second Ministerial to Advance Religious Freedom forum. The meeting was the largest human rights event the US State Department has ever held. As a part of the conference, twenty-three people were invited to share their stories (or their loved ones’ stories) of religious persecution. Ten of those people were Christian survivors persecuted in ten different nations which included: China, Cuba, Malaysia, Iraq, Nigeria, North Korea, Sudan, Turkey, Vietnam and Eritrea (country in northeast Africa bordered by Sudan). The survivors told stories of being arrested, long-term imprisonment, torture, physical and sexual abuse, and starvation. (For more on this story, search the Internet using the phrase, “persecuted Christians tell stories at State Department.”)

Focus Attention

To supplement (or replace) the Focus Attention idea, say: The title of today’s lesson is “Endurance.” Ask: How would you define endurance? What are some examples of physical endurance? What are some examples of religious or spiritual endurance? Then say: Most of us in the U.S. enjoy freedom to express our religious beliefs without repercussions. Unfortunately, people in other countries must endure persecution. Share a summary of the news article. Say: While you and I may not face this level of hardship, we do need to be prepared for challenges we face as believers.

Challenge

To supplement the Summarize and Challenge idea, recall the news story about persecution. Say: Many of us may feel helpless to do anything about persecution of Christians. However, there is something very powerful we can do. Create smaller groups. Assign one of the countries mentioned in the article to each of the smaller groups. Direct the groups to pray for Christians in the country assigned to them. Challenge the group to continue praying for those Christians during the week.