



Religious Freedoms Under Fire

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Focus Religious freedom is a constitutional right. That freedom is under attack today in the United States.

Fun What is your favorite way to spend the Fourth of July? What is your favorite memory celebrating the Fourth of July?

Review Key Scripture: Joshua 1:9

1. Before a totalitarian government takes over, the first thing to be attacked is religious freedom.

The United States Constitution guarantees religious freedom. History shows that when a totalitarian government begins to take over, it won't allow people to bow to anything higher than government itself. The attack on religious freedom is the first step before freedom of speech is taken away. In Czechoslovakia, for example, religious freedom was attacked first and then freedom of speech, and then the totalitarian government took away all freedoms. The same pattern took place in Nazi Germany. The United States is seeing the same warning signs today.

2. In the United States, the attack on religious freedom is on the rise.

Last year, First Liberty Institute handled 374 cases on religious freedom in the United States. There have been numerous cases where pastors' sermons have been subpoenaed. Recently a Christian couple in Oregon was fined \$135,000 because of their religious conviction that marriage is between one man and one woman. They were also ordered not to talk about their views. A coach was fired for taking a knee on the football field and told he could not pray in public where anyone could see him. A woman was told she could not pray in her own home.

There are numerous cases like this around the United States where people are being persecuted for their Christian faith.

3. Christians must be bold and stand up for their faith.

Joshua 1:9 encourages us to be bold and courageous. This country was founded by people who were bold and who stood for religious freedom. It is important for us to take a stand in the early stages of losing religious freedom before it is too late. The First Liberty Institute has been successful because lawyers, who are believers, give their time to defend religious freedom. But it also takes citizens standing up for their freedom so there is someone to defend. It is also critical that we take seriously the mandate to pray daily for religious freedom in our country.

Group Dynamics Idea The Fourth of July is a perfect time for park visits, BBQs, pools, time together, and fireworks. Use this opportunity to build community by attending a fireworks show as a group or going to a neighborhood Fourth of July celebration together. In this relaxed and fun atmosphere, you can get to know each other better and build friendships.

Discuss

1. What does independence and religious freedom mean to you?
2. What would the United States look like if there was no freedom of religion? How would that affect your daily life?
3. What would happen if Christians never stood up or weren't bold when their religious freedom was attacked?
4. Have you ever experienced persecution for being a Christian? How did that situation make you feel? How did you respond?
5. What is the right way to respond when your religious freedom is under attack? What is the wrong way to respond?
6. Read 1 Timothy 2:1–4. What does the Bible say we must do for all people in authority? What is the effect when we pray for our leaders? What happens if we don't pray for our government?

7. How can you encourage one another to be a light for Jesus and stand for what is right?

Take Home As we conclude, remember the following:

- Religious freedom is a foundational part of a free society.
- Today in the United States, religious freedom is under attack.
- We must be bold and strong and stand for our religious freedom.

Prayer Heavenly Father, we praise You and thank You for allowing us to live in a country where our Constitution protects our religious freedom. We pray for our leaders and all authoritative figures that they would defend our religious freedom. We pray for righteous judges who are believers to be placed in the right positions. We ask that you give us boldness to stand for You. In Jesus' name, Amen.

New Leader Tip There are many types of people who attend small groups. Not everybody shares the same political views, so be sensitive to that. It is okay to discuss what the Bible says and what the Constitution says. If there are people in your group who were raised with different opinions, you can still have healthy conversations without being divisive. Focus on the truth and do not get sidetracked into other potentially divisive political conversations.