Reminders:

- If you are going to use a movie clip, ALWAYS PREVIEW IT! No exceptions! You are responsible for what you show your group! Our writers will always try to provide “clean clips” and warn you of nearby questionable words or content, but all art forms are subjective. Only you can determine what to show your group. Number one rule: watch it first.
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Goal:

To explore the paradoxical ideas of strength in weakness and blessing in suffering.
Setting the Stage:
To kick off today’s discussion, explain to your students that countless faithful Christians have witnessed with their lives. Whether as living martyrs dying to self and living to Christ, or true martyrs giving up their life in witness to God, these are the heroes of our faith. There are many from whom we might learn. To begin this discussion of the power of suffering in Christ, have your students research the following martyrs and living witnesses:

- Leymah Gbowee (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Leymah_Gbowee)
- André and Magda Trocmé (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/André_and_Magda_Trocmé)
- Óscar Romero (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Óscar_Romero)

Divide your students into four groups. These groups will each learn all they can about one of these witnesses in 15 minutes. Then, ask each group to give a brief introduction of their witness to the larger group. (Please know about these people before leading this portion of the lesson. At the very least, read the above articles before the lesson. You may wish to seek out further information online or in the extra resources provided below.) If you are confident that your students will have devices with them on which they can access the Wikipedia article for these witnesses, then allow them to use those. If many of your students do not carry such devices, or if you are opposed to using such devices in your setting, then print the Wikipedia articles about the witnesses and provide them for the students.

Additional resources on or by these witnesses:
• Film: *Romero*, directed by John Duigan (Paulist Pictures, 1989)


• Film: *Pray the Devil Back to Hell*, directed by Gini Reticker (Fork films, 2008)

**Return of the Jedi**

**Overview:**

*Return of the Jedi*, the sixth episode of the *Star Wars* saga, draws the drama of Darth Vader to a climactic conclusion. Luke Skywalker and company set out on back-to-back rescue missions. First, Luke frees his friend Han Solo from imprisonment at the palace of Jabba the Hutt. Then, while the Rebel Alliance battles against the new Death Star, Luke seeks out his father, Darth Vader, in an attempt to free him from enslavement to the Emperor and the dark side of the Force. This daring mission into the darkest reaches of the Empire nearly destroys both Luke and the Rebel Alliance.

**IMPORTANT NOTE:** *Return of the Jedi* is rated “PG” for “sci-fi action violence.” There are a number of scenes that are potentially disturbing and/or frightening. These scenes include when the Emperor shocks Luke (nearly to death), the scene revealing Anakin Skywalker’s face, and the deaths of Yoda and several Ewoks. Leaders should preview clips prior to showing them to the group. Also, it would be helpful if the leader has seen the entire movie.

**Scripture:**

Matthew 5:7–12; Daniel 3
In the passage from Matthew, Jesus teaches that those who suffer and are persecuted are blessed. This is a strange and difficult saying. The context does not offer much by which to interpret these words. The form of Jesus’ statements makes it clear these are not conditional promises, as if he were saying, “If you suffer, then you will be blessed.” Rather, they are a statement of being. In the kingdom, those who are poor, who suffer, and who are persecuted, are happy or blessed.

In Daniel 3, Nebuchadnezzar gave his kingdom a new object of worship. Seemingly ungrateful, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego refused to give up the God they knew for a new god. Though faced with death in the fire, they remained faithful to their Lord. They resolved to remain faithful regardless of the consequences. Whether their Lord saved them or allowed them to die, faithfulness in suffering was preferable to a life of compromised faith. Nebuchadnezzar seems to have been humbled by his encounter with the Lord of Israel. This encounter leads him closer to a recognition of God as sovereign in the following chapter.

**Movie Clip:**

“Vader Redeemed”

**DVD Time:** Start the clip at the beginning of chapter 43 (time: 1:55:09) as the Emperor says, “If you will not be turned, you will be destroyed.” After Luke sits down with Vader (time: 1:57:32), skip to the beginning of chapter 46 (time: 1:59:35) as stormtroopers run down a hallway. Stop the clip at the end of chapter 46 (time: 2:01:57) as Luke bows his head. **Note:** Even though the effects are dated, this is still a graphic scene and could be disturbing to young or sensitive viewers. Please show this clip at your discretion.
**Introduction to Clip**

Throughout his encounter with Darth Vader and the Emperor, Luke Skywalker’s aim has been to save Vader, turning him back to the light side of the Force. Immediately prior to this scene, the climactic dual between Luke and Vader ended when Luke disarmed Vader. Luke then tossed aside his own weapon. Here, Luke refuses to resist to the Emperor. He chooses to suffer—even to the point of death—to redeem his father.

**Key Comments and Principles from Clip**

- Emperor: “If you will not be turned, you will be destroyed.”
- Emperor: “Young fool, only now, at the end, do you understand.”
- Luke: “Father, please!”
- Vader: “You were right about me. Tell your sister you were right.”

**What Did You See?**

After viewing the clip, ask the group these questions:

- What spiritual elements did you see?
- Which words, phrases, or images were the most powerful to you? Why?
- Where do you see Christ represented in this scene?
- What do you think of Luke in this scene? What feelings did you experience as you watched him?
- What do you think of the Emperor in this scene? What feelings did he elicit from you?
- Vader tells Luke to tell his sister that he was right. What was Luke right about?
- Has Vader really returned to the light side of the Force? Why or why not?
What led Vader back to the light side of the Force? Explain.

Who held the power in this scene? Why?

What Did You Read?
In this lesson, it is beneficial to read the Matthew passage and discuss, and then to read the Daniel passage and discuss. After reading each respective Scripture passage, ask the group the appropriate following questions:

- Regarding the passage from Matthew, what are the key elements in this Scripture?
- What catches your attention in these verses?
- How do these statements from Jesus make you feel? Are you comfortable, uneasy, confused, happy, etc.? Why do you think you feel that way?
- How do these sayings line up with your experience of the world?
- In response to the Daniel passage, summarize the story of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego.
- What caught your attention in this story?
- Why did they refuse to worship the golden image?
- What was their response to the threat of being thrown into the fire? What was Nebuchadnezzar’s response when they came out of the fire?
- So, what was the outcome of their sacrifice?

What Does It All Mean?
Tie the movie clip and Scriptures together by asking the following questions:

- What connections do you see between the film clip and our Scriptures?
Jesus claimed that the peacemakers and those who are persecuted are blessed. In what way was Luke blessed through his suffering? In what way were Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego blessed through their suffering?

In what ways are you drawn to the “dark side” or invited to bow down to “golden images”? In what ways do you suffer as you resist these compulsions? If you do not currently resist, in what ways might you suffer if you do begin to resist?

By resisting the Emperor, Luke saved Vader. By resisting Nebuchadnezzar, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego helped him to see the truth of God. Who might you save by resisting the powers that draw you away from the God of light?

Creative Activity:
Before your meeting, look into the current justice concerns in your community or state. Be ready to provide a few issues if your students are unaware of any. Some issues to consider include poverty, race relations, immigration, or unemployment. Some means of engaging these issues include letter writing, meeting with people already active against these issues, doing research to learn more, visiting people impacted by the issue, or meeting with political and economic leaders.

To introduce this activity to your students, explain that Leymah Gbowee was active to bring peace to Liberia. André and Magda Trocmé cared for those who fled Nazi Germany. Óscar Romero watched over and led those who suffered under an oppressive regime in El Salvador. Wang Zhiming promoted the gospel of Christ amid the Cultural Revolution in China. Share with your group that there are concerns in our community we can begin addressing. Let’s see what issues we can think of in this community, and

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consider how we might get peacefully involved in standing against evil in our community.

With your students, brainstorm a set of justice issues that impact your community. Write these on a white board or large paper. After several issues have been listed, brainstorm ways you might begin to stand against the evil that enables each issue. Encourage your students to specifically consider how they might engage these issues peacefully. Pick one or two issues that your group will address. Ask for volunteers to follow up on this lesson and begin to organize the actions that your group deems most appropriate. Before your group leaves, pray with them, asking God to be speaking to them individually about what it means to peacefully, yet boldly, live for his redemptive purposes in this broken world.

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