

(1) When you reflect deeply on the intense suffering that so many Christians around the world endure for the sake of Jesus, what impact does it have on you? Do you feel gratitude that you do not live in a country where this sort of things happens? Do you feel anger? Does it motivate you to pray more for those who are exposed to this sort of treatment? Do you get confused about why God permits this to occur?

(2) What does John tell us in this passage about the experience of those Christians who have died? In what ways might this text serve to encourage and strengthen those of us who have lost loved ones?

(3) Read aloud Acts 20:20-27. Does Paul's perspective on life and death strike you as extreme? Or do you agree with him? What do you think Paul means when he says that he does not account or regard his life as "of any value nor as precious" to himself, if only he "may finish" his course "and the ministry" that he received from Jesus? Does this reflect your own perspective on your own life? If not, why not? If it doesn't, what might you do to cultivate this attitude in your heart?

(4) Is it ok for Christians to pray for justice against unbelievers, or is this evidence of a lack of love? How might we both show mercy and love to those who oppose the Christian faith at the same time we pray for God's justice and vengeance to fall on them? Is this possible? Read 2 Thessalonians 1:5-10 and apply Paul's words to your answer.

(5) How did it strike you to hear John say that there is a specified number of martyrs who must suffer death for their faith before God's purposes on earth can be completed? What lessons do we learn from this about the sovereignty of God?