

LEAD SHEET

ACTS : Heroes of the Story - WK. 2

STEPHEN

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THIS MONTH'S FAITH SKILL:

NAVIGATE THE BIBLE

If you want to know God better, read His Word!

GETTING STARTED

General Discussion:

- Have any of you ever been bullied? What was that like?
- Have any of you ever been a bully? Why did you act the way you did?
- Why is bullying bad? What damage can it do?
- Can anything good come from bullying, if so, what?

Today we are not talking about bullying per se, but rather persecution. In the life of Stephen, we see a beautiful picture of faithful living, opposition, boldness, and a willingness to die for one's faith.

DIGGING IN

Stephen is a hero of the faith few people know much about. That is going to change for you today as we take a quick look at Stephen's entire life: his role in the Church, persecution, message, and eventual death.

All 13 biblical references to Stephen are found in the book of Acts. All but two are in Acts 6-8.

Read Acts 6:1-7

Discussion Questions:

1. What is happening in this passage? (*The Church is growing and it's needs are great, the apostles select seven men to help carry the load.*)

2. Where do we first read of Stephen? (*Verse 5.*)

3. How is Stephen described by Luke in this passage?
(*“A man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit.”*)

Stephen’s primary role in the early Church was to help care for widows. Sometime later, trouble begins for him.

Read Acts 6:8-15

Discussion Questions:

1. How is Stephen described in verse 8?
(*“A man full of God’s grace and power.”*)

2. What is Stephen known for doing? (*Performing great wonders and signs among the people.”*)

3. Did Stephen face opposition? (*Yes, but his opponents could not gain an advantage because of the wisdom the Holy Spirit gave him.*)

4. What did his opponents do in response? (*Stirred up people to lie about him so that the Sanhedrin would arrest him.*)

5. According to verse 15, what was noticed by everyone who saw Stephen? (*He had the face of an angel.*)

In Acts 7:1, the Sanhedrin asked him if the drummed-up charges about him speaking falsely about Moses, etc. are true. Stephen's answer is long and we are not going to read it all. However, it led Stephen to talk about Jesus and the Jewish leaders’ rejection of Him. We are going to talk about the problems that this caused for Stephen.

Read Acts 7:51-53

Discussion Questions:

1. What does Stephen call the Sanhedrin? (*“Stiff-necked” with “uncircumcised hearts,” resisting the Holy Spirit.*)

2. Who does he accuse them of murdering?
(*The “Righteous One,” or Jesus.*)

These are harsh allegations. Telling a Jewish leader that he is uncircumcised is the ultimate insult. Spending fifty verses of Scripture lecturing these leaders on Moses probably did not sit well with them either. Their response is swift and violent.

Read Acts 7:54-60

Discussion Questions:

1. How did the Sanhedrin feel about Stephen's preaching and confrontation? (*They were furious, "gnashing their teeth" at him.*)
2. Do you think Stephen knew he was in danger at this point? (*Seemingly, but he is not afraid.*)
3. In verse 56, what did Stephen say in response? (*He says he saw Heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.*)
4. How did the Sanhedrin respond and why? (*They cover their ears and yell loudly while charging him, because this was considered blasphemy.*)
5. What did the Sanhedrin do next? (*They drug Stephen out of the city and stoned him to death.*)
6. What did Stephen do as this was happening? (*He prays to Jesus that He would not hold this sin against them, and then he dies.*)

It is incredible that his preaching cost Stephen his life. More incredible, is how Stephen responds, asking for forgiveness for them as he dies.

MAKING IT REAL

General Discussion:

- What is most remarkable about Stephen's martyrdom?

(Allow for discussion.)

- Why do you think it is hard for us to grasp Stephen's willingness to die for the Gospel? *(It could be our lack of faith or that we do not see this type of persecution in our own lives. etc.)*

- Stephen is the very first Christian to die for preaching about Jesus. Do you have any idea how many martyrs there have been since his death? *(Allow for discussion.)*

Conservative estimates say that between 5,000-10,000 people die for their faith around the world annually. There have been times in history where that number was much higher. Even taken on the low end, over the past 2,000 years we can estimate that over ten million people have died for their faith in Christ.

General Discussion:

- Does that number surprise you, why or why not?

(Allow for discussion.)

- What kinds of qualities do you think it takes to be willing to die for your faith? *(Conviction, courage, etc.)*

- Do you think you possess these qualities, why or why not? *(Allow for discussion.)*

Persecution is something that happens a lot today. However, the people who are being killed for their faith are not necessarily some sort of super Christian. They are just convinced that this life is not the end. More than that, like Stephen, they are willing to forgive the people who persecute them.

General Discussion:

- When you hear stories like this, what do you feel: Encouraged, Guilty, Inspired? Why do you think you feel that way? *(Allow for discussion.)*

- What role does persecution have on the Church? From our past studies in Acts, how does the Church change following Stephen's murder? *(It spreads and grows even more rapidly.)*

- Do you think we should pray for persecution to stop, why or why not? *(This is a tough question, but it is really just meant to get students thinking.)*

The point is not whether or not there is persecution. There probably always will be. The thing we should take away is that persecution has never slowed the Church down—not once in the history of Christianity.

General Discussion:

- How did Stephen's story and this conversation change you?

- In light of what you know now, how might you live differently?

- In light of what you know now, how might your prayers change?

CLOSING PRAYER

Spend some time praying for students (and asking them to pray for one another) to be bold. Spend time praying for the persecuted around the world. Pray for forgiveness for those doing the persecuting. Pray that Christ's Church continues to grow.