

Family Lesson 77

Principle: Christians face persecution.

Bible Character(s): Stephen and Saul

Scripture Reference: Acts 7:1-8:3

1. Worship - Choose your favorite songs from the [Spotify playlist](#) found on the curriculum resource page. Have fun, sing loudly, and follow along with the motions!

2. Bible Lesson - Read through the lesson with your family. The bold font is meant to be read aloud along with the Scripture references.

Bible Lesson

Last week, we learned about **Ananias and Sapphira**. Can anyone remember what they did? (They sold their land, kept half of the money, and lied about it to the apostles and God.) **What happened to them?** (They died because they lied; God punished them with death for their sin.) **What happened to Ananias and Sapphira shows us the danger of being greedy when we want something more than trusting God with it.** It also shows us that God takes our sin seriously. God wants us to love him and obey his commandments. He wants us to trust that his plan for us is better than what we could do on our own. A greedy heart reveals that we are selfish and not trusting God.

Today, we are continuing our study in the book of Acts. In Acts 6, the early church is growing. The disciples gather the believers together to choose seven more people to be leaders in the church. One of these people is a man named **Stephen**, who is “full of faith and the Holy Spirit” (Acts 6:5) and who “performed amazing miracles and signs among the people.” (Acts 6:8) There are many people who do not like what Stephen and the disciples are doing. They do not believe that Jesus is the Messiah. They arrest Stephen

and bring him before the Jewish leaders, called the Sanhedrin, or High Council. They question Stephen, and he boldly answers by telling them that Jesus is the Messiah. He talks about Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, and Moses, and he explains how these men’s lives help show that Jesus is our Savior.

Let’s begin reading in Acts 7 to see how Stephen ends his speech to the High Council.

Acts 7:51-53

⁵¹ “You stubborn people! You are heathen at heart and deaf to the truth. Must you forever resist the Holy Spirit? That’s what your ancestors did, and so do you! ⁵² Name one prophet your ancestors didn’t persecute! They even killed the ones who predicted the coming of the Righteous One—the Messiah whom you betrayed and murdered. ⁵³ You deliberately disobeyed God’s law, even though you received it from the hands of angels.”

Everything that Stephen says is true. He knows that he could be killed for saying all of this, but he says it anyway because he knows that it is the truth.

Let’s see how the High Council responds to Stephen.

Acts 7:54-56

⁵⁴ The Jewish leaders were infuriated by Stephen’s accusation, and they shook their fists at him in rage. ⁵⁵ But Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, gazed steadily into heaven and saw the glory of God, and he saw Jesus standing in the place of honor at God’s right hand. ⁵⁶ And he told them, “Look, I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing in the place of honor at God’s right hand!”

Stephen knows the Jewish leaders are very mad. Would you be scared if you were standing in front of a group of people who could kill you for what you were saying? (Allow responses.) Is Stephen scared? (Allow responses.)

Let's look at Stephen's focus.

Read through the following statements. Which statements are true of Stephen? Which are not true? You could have your child stand on one side of the room for true statements and the opposite side of the room for false statements.

- saw the Son of Man (Jesus) standing at God's right hand
- was unforgiving
- full of God's grace and power
- saw God's glory
- did not see Jesus
- did not have any courage
- full of the Holy Spirit
- had a merciless heart
- was blind to God's glory
- did amazing miracles and signs among the people

Stephen is willing to give up his life to tell others the truth and glorify God in doing so. He is willing to do this because he fully believes that trusting Jesus Christ is the only way to have true life. He is full of the Holy Spirit because of his belief. God gives him exactly what he needs to face this crowd of people. God allows him to see the Father's glory and the Son of Man (Jesus) standing at the Father's right hand. That would be pretty amazing to see! What are you willing to give up? (Allow responses.) Do you really believe that telling others about Jesus is worth it? (Allow responses.) Do you believe that God will give you the strength you need to do what he wants you to do? (Allow responses.)

Let's see how the High Council responds to Stephen's words.

Acts 7:57-58

⁵⁷ Then they put their hands over their ears and began shouting. They rushed at him ⁵⁸ and dragged him out of the city and began to stone him. His accusers took off their coats and laid them at the feet of a young man named Saul.

Have you ever seen someone put his hands over his ears and say "lalala" loudly so he couldn't hear what someone was saying? (Allow responses.) That's pretty much what these Jewish leaders do! Then, the members of the High Council stone Stephen. That means they surround him and throw large rocks at him. How do you think it would feel to have rocks like this thrown at you over and over by many people? (Allow responses.) It would be very painful, wouldn't it? Stephen suffers a great deal because of his faith. We will also suffer. Probably no one will throw large stones at you, but what are some ways you think we could suffer for Christ? (Allow responses.) Someone might make fun of you, you might lose some friends, or others might think you are weird. Do you think suffering is worth it to share about Jesus? (Allow responses.)

Let's look at Stephen's response to those who are stoning him.

Acts 7:59-60

⁵⁹ As they stoned him, Stephen prayed, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." ⁶⁰ He fell to his knees, shouting, "Lord, don't charge them with this sin!" And with that, he died.

Stephen forgives these people for killing him. Do you think you would have been able to respond this way? (Allow responses.) How do you react when others do things that hurt you? Can you forgive them? (Allow responses.)

Whenever someone makes fun of you or thinks you are weird, it hurts. You might not hurt physically, as Stephen did, but it does hurt when others say mean things and make fun of you. We are called to forgive others, even when they hurt

us. This is very hard to do, but when we believe that Christ died for us and that he loves us, it is easier to forgive others for hurting us. Stephen so fully believed in Christ that he was able to forgive the Jewish leaders for hurting him.

Let's continue in Acts 8.

Acts 8:1-3

¹ Saul was one of the witnesses, and he agreed completely with the killing of Stephen. A great wave of persecution began that day, sweeping over the church in Jerusalem; and all the believers except the apostles were scattered through the regions of Judea and Samaria. ² (Some devout men came and buried Stephen with great mourning.) ³ But Saul was going everywhere to destroy the church. He went from house to house, dragging out both men and women to throw them into prison.

What is persecution? (Allow responses.) **It is being mistreated or hurt by others because of what you believe. We do not worry about persecution like what Stephen endured.**

Let's take a closer look at what it looks like to follow Jesus, including persecution we might face.

Go through each of the scenarios with your child to examine the life of a believer. Read a statement and ask them if it is true or false in describing the life of a believer. You can even have them stand for "true" and sit for "false." Then, look up the Scripture references and read them out loud.

True or False Scenarios:

1. **Believers will be persecuted. 2 Timothy 3:10-12, Acts 4:21-22, Romans 8:17**
2. **Everyone loved Jesus, so believers will be loved by all. Luke 21:17, John 15:18-19**
3. **Those who are persecuted should be sad. Matthew 5:10-12, Luke 6:22-23, Romans 8:18**
4. **Believers need to follow Jesus daily. Luke 9:22-23**

5. **Jesus is with you when you suffer for him. 2 Corinthians 1:5, Hebrews 2:18**

When a person chooses to follow Jesus, does their life suddenly become easy, happy and full of good things all of the time? (Allow responses.) **No! The Bible clearly shows us that following Jesus means you will experience suffering and persecution. Jesus suffered greatly while on earth in sacrificing himself for our sin. To become more like Jesus, which is what God wants for all believers, we must experience suffering too so that we can learn obedience and faithfulness to God's plan and live with the hope of eternal life. Do you think we face persecution like Stephen did?** (Allow responses.) **In America, we have the freedom to believe whatever we want to believe. We do not have to worry about risking our lives to believe in Jesus or share our faith. There are people in other parts of the world that still suffer like Stephen, though. They are bold in sharing their faith, despite the physical persecution they might receive. If we do not face persecution like Stephen did, what ways might we be persecuted for talking about Jesus? How might others hurt our feelings or mistreat us for sharing our faith?** (Allow responses.) **How can you be bold and strong in sharing your faith with your family and friends, just like Stephen and many people around the world?** (Allow responses.)

Let's look at Stephen's boldness and review God's promises about being with us by reading these verses.

Proverbs 28:1

The wicked run away when no one is chasing them, but the godly are as bold as lions.

Joshua 1:9

"This is my command – be strong and courageous! Do not be afraid or discouraged. For the Lord your God is with you where you go."

2 Corinthians 3:11-13

So if the old way, which has been replaced, was glorious, how much more glorious is the new, which remains forever! Since this new way gives us such confidence, we can be very bold.

Matthew 28:18-20

Jesus came and told his disciples, "I have been given all authority in heaven and on earth. Therefore, go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you. And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

Ephesians 6:19-20

And pray for me, too. Ask God to give me the right words so I can boldly explain God's mysterious plan that the Good News is for Jews and Gentiles alike. I am in chains now, still preaching this message as God's ambassador. So pray that I will keep on speaking boldly for him, as I should.

Stephen did not respond to the High Council with anger at being arrested. He spoke the truth to them. Though he knew the charges against him were not true, Stephen did not answer by trying to protect himself. Instead, he answered with an overview of the Old Testament and showed how the Old Testament points to Jesus Christ as Lord. He was bold and strong! We can also be bold and strong. We can react the same way Stephen did because Christ can change us as well. Who are some people in your life that you could boldly tell about Jesus? (Allow responses.)

Prayer

Spend a few minutes in prayer to close your family time. Thank God for what Jesus did for us, and ask him to help us be bold and strong in sharing our faith with others, despite any persecution we may face.

Activity

ersecution we may face.

5. Activity: "Christ-like Forgiveness" - the purpose of this activity is to see that faith and trust in Christ can help you be willing to forgive.

Supplies:

Foam ball or sponge in a zippered bag

Bowl of water

As a family, reread Stephen's last words (Acts 7:59-60). Squeeze the foam ball or sponge and fill it with water. As you discuss how he so easily forgave out of an overflow of his heart, squeeze the sponge and ask your child what their heart is filled with. How do they think they would respond?

Stephen's heart was filled with the love of Jesus, and you can see that in his response when he was stoned. We have talked about how our words are an overflow of our hearts. How amazing is it that as he was stoned and killed, forgiveness was flowing out of him. He was not full of anger for what they were doing to him, but forgiveness. Stephen's words and the forgiveness he so freely offered to those hurting him show that he was full of the Holy Spirit and shared Christ's amazing love. What is your response when people hurt you? What is in your heart? (Allow responses.)

