**Live in Community**

 Small Group Study

**Volume Overview**

**Stand Firm**

Put on every piece of God’s armor so you will be able to resist the enemy in the time of evil. Then after the battle you will still be standing firm. ([Ephesians 6:13](https://ref.ly/logosref/Bible.Eph6.13))

*The world thinks of power as action. Powerful people are able to take control, able to change things. But Jesus blessed the meek, the hungry, and the poor. There is a power this world overlooks. There is power in standing firm in faith. Christians have long stood their ground, not to gain this world’s power but as witnesses to a better world to come. So we stand strong, committed, and bear witness to the world.*

**Session Overview**

**Be Committed**

**Biblical Encounter:** Stephen Is Persecuted for His Faith ([Acts 6:2–15](https://ref.ly/logosref/Bible.Ac6.2-15); [7:51–60](https://ref.ly/logosref/Bible.Ac7.51-60))

**Outcome:** Remain committed to serving God, even in the face of persecution or death.

*In this session, we’ll explore what it looks like to stand firm for God, even when circumstances are grim. We live in a culture where many have decided that truth isn’t absolute. They think the closest we can come to truth is found in what most people agree to be true. When we believe the Bible to be the source and standard for truth, we are going to stand out, and not always in a popular way. In this session, we’ll look at some people who came up against their hostile culture and stood strong in their faith.*

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| First time leading *Live* for Adults? Check out the [Facilitator Guide](https://0b769b0ed3569ef9d18b-f88d8272f61086866d50d048b43ef630.ssl.cf2.rackcdn.com/sites/biblengagementproject/Listen_Facilitator_Guide.pdf). |

To access session content and videos from a computer, visit: [BibleEngagementProject.com/downloads](https://bibleengagementproject.com/downloads)

**Engage**

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| **QUESTION**Which of these activities would be hardest for you: jumping off a tall platform using a bungee cord, taking a late-night walk through a dark alleyway, or giving a public speech in front of a large crowd? |

We all have fears in life. Some we learn to live with, and some we just avoid at all costs. One fear many people experience is public speaking. No one wants to experience stage fright, forget their speech, or stumble and make a fool of themselves. Even worse, in today’s culture we’re pressured to be careful that what we say publicly doesn’t offend or anger anyone. We have all seen the backlash when the world decides a person is offensive. But what might happen if we were required to defend our faith in a public forum? The Bible is full of stories of men and women who did that and stood firm, no matter what it cost them.

**Watch**

As we watch this video, think about your answer to this question: What would it look like for you to be even more publicly committed to Jesus?



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| **QUESTION**What would it look like for you to be even more publicly committed to Jesus? |

**Consider What the Bible Says**

Jesus was clear about what it might cost to follow Him. In [John 15:20–21](https://ref.ly/logosref/Bible.Jn15.20-21), He pointed out that if people persecuted Him, His followers would be persecuted too. People don’t like to be told they are guilty of anything. They don’t want what the Bible says about sin, heaven, and hell to be true.

Many of us felt this way before we encountered Jesus and His peace and forgiveness. So, we should not be surprised when the world gets very angry at us like they did at Jesus and His disciples.

But Jesus was also clear that He would help us. He promised to send the Holy Spirit, who would live in us and be our Encourager and Advocate. In [John 16:33](https://ref.ly/logosref/Bible.Jn16.33), Jesus reassured us that even though we will have troubles in the world, we can find peace in Him because He overcame the world. This is wonderful news!

So, what does following Jesus into persecution really look like? The Book of Acts is a very important part of the Bible. It’s a bridge between all that Jesus did and said and the letters to the churches that came later. Every chapter in Acts tells the story of how the new Church grew and spread out from Jerusalem. Throughout Acts, we can see how the earliest followers of Jesus took His words of encouragement to heart as they experienced persecution and trouble while witnessing to others. We can see how God helped them stay steady in their faith.

**The First Leaders Are Chosen**

Read [Acts 6:2–7](https://ref.ly/logosref/Bible.Ac6.2-7).

After the initial excitement of the Day of Pentecost wore off, the followers of Jesus learned to live with and work with one another, much like people do in churches today. Some of the people had their feelings hurt, thinking that discrimination was happening. So, the twelve apostles told the group of believers to choose seven more leaders for the church. Their job would be to make sure widows were properly looked after, so the apostles could devote themselves to prayer and teaching.

Stephen was one of the seven. The Bible tells us that Stephen and the others were well respected and full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom. This new assignment was the perfect place for them to grow as followers of Christ. Taking responsibility to help others grow in their faith helps Christians mature and become steady. Stephen’s new role probably helped him grow even stronger in his faith as he served others.

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| **QUESTION**What are some ways that the Church today and the Early Church in this passage are similar? |

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| **QUESTION**How do you think you would have reacted if you were chosen to lead by serving like Stephen was? |

The good news of Jesus continued to spread, and the Church continued to grow. But with that growth came the persecution that Jesus had told them about.

**Trouble Comes**

Read [Acts 6:8–15](https://ref.ly/logosref/Bible.Ac6.8-15).

As Stephen’s faith grew, he continued to be “full of faith and the Holy Spirit,” and “full of God’s grace and power” (verses [5](https://ref.ly/logosref/Bible.Ac6.5) and [8](https://ref.ly/logosref/Bible.Ac6.8)). He performed miracles and signs among the people. Some of the Jews from the synagogue started debating with him. But because Stephen was so full of wisdom from the Spirit, none of them could match him. They wanted to find a way to outwit him, so they turned to fraud, persuading men to lie about what Stephen had said.

Many people today develop their own ideas of right and wrong and of how to be justified. They don’t want it to be true that Jesus is the only way to eternal life. ([John 14:6](https://ref.ly/logosref/Bible.Jn14.6))

When these opponents couldn’t stand up against Stephen’s wisdom and resorted to deception, they stirred up a crowd, including elders and teachers of religious law. Sound familiar? People with an agenda against God still cause trouble. They use false news reports, carefully selected pieces of conversation, and outright lies to make a crowd angry. For Stephen, it meant being arrested.

Remember that Jesus warned us that people would hate us just as they hated Him. We can also remember that God promised to bless us when we endure persecution ([Matthew 5:11–12](https://ref.ly/logosref/Bible.Mt5.11-12)). When Stephen was arrested and brought before the religious leaders, the leaders couldn’t help but notice that his face shone like an angel’s.

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| **QUESTION**What do you think other Christians were thinking and talking about after Stephen’s arrest? |

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| **QUESTION**How do you think Stephen’s understanding of God’s promises changed through this experience? |

**The Death of Stephen**

Read [Acts 7:51–60](https://ref.ly/logosref/Bible.Ac7.51-60).

When Stephen was persecuted, God was faithful to help him. Jesus taught us, as recorded in [Luke 12:11–12](https://ref.ly/logosref/Bible.Lk12.11-12), that the Holy Spirit would give us the words to say if we were ever brought before rulers and authorities. Stephen found this to be true. He preached an incredible sermon and issued a stern rebuke to his accusers. This, of course, made them even angrier. Then Stephen looked up and proclaimed that he saw Jesus standing at God’s right hand in heaven, which made the crowd furious. Remember, it’s really Jesus that the angry crowd hates, not just us.

Stephen’s life and death were a great testimony of the love and faithfulness of God. [Acts 8:1](https://ref.ly/logosref/Bible.Ac8.1) tells us of one of the witnesses to Stephen’s death—a young man named Saul (also known as Paul) who agreed completely with the killing of Stephen. Like Stephen and Paul (who was merely an observer in the crowd when Stephen was stoned), we are likely to encounter persecution as we walk closely with Jesus. But we don’t have to fear it. As Paul would one day write, we can trust that God works everything together for the good of people who love and trust Him ([Romans 8:28](https://ref.ly/logosref/Bible.Ro8.28)).

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| **QUESTION**If you had been an observer that day, what thoughts might have gone through your mind? |

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| **QUESTION**How can we depend on God even when we face persecution or death? |

**Did You Know?**

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| *Although Stephen is the first martyr for the gospel mentioned in the New Testament, he would not be the last. Two others, James and Antipas, were mentioned by name with countless others being referenced and alluded to in the nearly seventy years between Stephen’s death and the close of the New Testament era. Scriptures note some of the ways they died, including being stoned or put to death by sword. History also tells us that some believers were crucified, flayed, burned alive, fed to wild beasts, and bludgeoned. The record of how they embraced their belief in Jesus in spite of their lives being threatened and taken is a testament to the bravery of these early believers.* |

**Reflect**

**Remain committed to serving God, even in the face of persecution or death.**

The story of Stephen challenges us to be bold enough to stand in the face of opposition and then depend fully on God when we face persecution of any kind. Jesus taught about this kind of trouble and let us know that we shouldn’t be surprised by it. His plan is greater than we sometimes understand, and we can trust that He’s at work in our life. As we learn to believe and depend on Him, we can help others see His goodness through our steady commitment to God. We can be sure that He is always with us, even when we face persecution.

**Listen to God**

Let’s pause and listen to what God might want to say to us about what we have read and shared. Be silent for a few moments and reflect on the following questions. Respond to the one that most resonates with what God is saying to you now. Then complete the others during Day 1 of your devotion time this week.

**Personal Reflection Questions**

*Record your answers to the following questions in the space provided or in your personal journal.*

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| **QUESTION**Do you think Stephen continued to grow as he served others? If so, how? |

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| **QUESTION**If you had been Stephen, how do you think you would have responded to persecution and arrest? |

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| **QUESTION**How do you think Stephen’s death impacted the Church then? How does it impact us as believers now? |

**Activate**

As Christians, growing strong and steady in our faith involves serving others. As we serve, we grow. To help others, we must commit our time and energy. We must be committed to seeking God through prayer and studying His Word. God will help us become steady and strong to face whatever life brings.

**Challenge**

This week, watch for an opportunity to take responsibility to help others in your church. Perhaps it’s as simple as opening your home for your small group. Or perhaps it would be helping or taking a meal to someone in need. You can find many ways to serve Christians around you. Take on some responsibility to share the love and hope of Jesus with someone else.

**Prayer Requests**

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| Note any requests from the group and pray together. Also remember to pray for them during the week. |

When we walk with God, we learn through His Word and through experience to trust Him and His presence and wisdom in our life. We can learn to remain steady in Him and to stand firm in our faith as we seek Him. This week’s devotions will further explore how to remain committed to God and to stand firm in our faith when we face opposition from others.

**Live on Your Own**

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| *Before you begin each devotion, pray and ask God to speak to you through His Word. Record your answers to the following questions in the space provided or in your personal journal.* |

**Day 1: Stephen Is Persecuted for His Faith**

Read [Acts 6:2–15](https://ref.ly/logosref/Bible.Ac6.2-15); [7:51–60](https://ref.ly/logosref/Bible.Ac7.51-60).

Look back over Live in Community and complete your responses to the Personal Reflection Questions. Plan how to complete the Activate component if you haven’t already done so. If time permits, reread the Scripture too.

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| **QUESTION**What is God saying to you about remaining committed to serving Him even in the face of persecution or death? |

**Live on Your Own**

**Day 2: A Young Mother’s Faith**

Read [Exodus 2:1–10](https://ref.ly/logosref/Bible.Ex2.1-10).

The Israelites ended up in Egypt centuries before this passage. Joseph first went there as a result of persecution by his own brothers. But God was with Joseph, and he became second-in-command of that nation, only answering to Pharaoh. Joseph’s good planning during the time of famine eventually led his family to Egypt.

Finally, Joseph’s entire generation was gone, and a king came to power who had no memory of Joseph. This new king was uncomfortable with the growing number of Israelites. He was worried that they would rise up and take over. So, the new Pharoah decided to control the population and mandated that all Hebrew baby boys were to be killed. Imagine how terrifying this was for the Israelites!

But one young mother trusted God in a profound way. She put her son in a basket, technically following the king’s command by placing the baby in the river. God provided a way for the baby to be saved by none other than the princess herself. That young mother’s faith, despite such terrible persecution, allowed Moses to be saved. He, in turn, was the one who eventually led the entire nation of Israel out of Egypt.

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| **QUESTION**What do you think Moses’s mother might have been thinking as she placed her baby in a basket in the Nile River? |

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| **QUESTION**What about this part of Moses’s story most challenges you? |

**Live on Your Own**

**Day 3: A Prophet’s Lesson**

Read [1 Kings 19:1–18](https://ref.ly/logosref/Bible.1Ki19.1-18).

Elijah had just won an incredible showdown with all the priests of Baal. Elijah stood up against all the idol worshippers and trusted the Lord. God sent down fire and all the people were reminded how great God is. But it made the wicked queen furious, and she vowed to kill Elijah.

So how did he respond? Elijah ran away and hid in fear and discouragement. After such a great victory, Elijah suffered a humbling and painful time. But did God turn His back on Elijah? No! Instead, He met Elijah right where he was—doubts and all.

First, God strengthened Elijah with rest and food. Next, God reminded Elijah that people who really know Him don’t always need showy reminders of His presence, like fire or wind or earthquakes. Instead, He is with us and speaks to us. God gently reminded Elijah that, even in a time of great rebellion, people still loved and feared Him. God will never leave us, and He will be with us wherever we go.

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| **QUESTION**If you had been Elijah, what would you have done when you heard Jezebel’s threats? |

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| **QUESTION**How does God’s response to Elijah challenge any fears and doubts you might have? |

**Live on Your Own**

**Day 4: Three Young Men Stand Strong**

Read [Daniel 3:1–30](https://ref.ly/logosref/Bible.Da3.1-30).

The king of Babylon had a huge statue erected for his subjects to worship, and he commanded that they all bow to it. But three young Israelite men had a very different idea of what they would do. In the face of tremendous pressure and impending death, these three refused to bow down to worship the idol. Even when the furious king gave them one more chance to disavow God, they wouldn’t do it. They chose the punishment of death rather than denying God. What faith!

Remember these men were captives and had no guarantee that they would ever see their homeland or families again. No one else in the crowd around them seemed to care and just bowed to the statue. But these three knew that to compromise their faith would mean spiritual death, which was far worse than physical death. Then, to everyone’s amazement—especially the king’s—they weren’t burned up or affected in any way. And Someone walked in the fire with them! The faith of three young men humbled a proud king.

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| **QUESTION**What thoughts probably went through their heads as the young men determined how to respond to the king’s orders? |

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| **QUESTION**What impact do you think it made that the three friends decided as a group to remain standing? |

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| **QUESTION**If you had been faced with this challenge, what do you think you would have done? |

**Live on Your Own**

**Day 5: Suffering Brings Glory**

Read [Isaiah 53:1–12](https://ref.ly/logosref/Bible.Is53.1-12).

This passage describes a Person who endured great pain and injustice. This Person was despised, rejected, full of sorrows and grief. He was whipped, beaten, pierced, and crushed. He was oppressed, treated harshly, and unjustly condemned. He was struck down by others. He was buried like a criminal, but in a rich man’s grave. Many thought this Person’s punishment was for His own wrongdoing, but this Man suffered for everyone else’s bad deeds.

Anyone who hears this life story might think it was a great tragedy. But all of this was done according to God’s plan for this Person’s life, for this Scripture is about Jesus. He willingly endured this terrible injustice and persecution so that we could be reconciled to God forever.

When we endure any kind of persecution, we can remember that Jesus is familiar with such pain. We don’t have to be surprised or shocked by trials. We can take joy in knowing that Jesus understands and walks through them with us ([1 Peter 4:12–16](https://ref.ly/logosref/Bible.1Pe4.12-16)).

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| **QUESTION**What phrases in the Isaiah passage particularly stand out to you? |

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| **QUESTION**What is God saying to you about enduring persecution in your own life? |