**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.

*This session focuses on Stephen, an early Christian who was “full of faith and the Holy Spirit” (*[*Acts 6:5*](https://ref.ly/logosref/Bible.Ac6.5)*). He was highly respected and chosen as a leader in the church. His ministry also included miracles and preaching. But not everyone liked what Stephen did. A group of people plotted against him, and he was arrested and eventually stoned to death. In the face of persecution and death, Stephen could have easily given in to the pressure and walked away from his faith. Instead, he remained faithful to serving God—no matter the cost. Maybe you’ve found yourself in a situation where your faith was tested, and it was tempting to walk away. Stephen’s courage challenges us to be committed to Jesus—no matter what it may cost us.*

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| ***You Will Need*** *• Wall (interior or exterior)* *• Smartphone or timer* *• Small bag of individual candies****Getting Ready*** *• Clear a wall with enough room for each student to have a space to stand along the wall(s).* • ***First time leading* Live *for Youth? Look here for 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**

**Welcome**

*Take this time to welcome everyone, introduce new students, learn names, and thank everyone for coming. Your friendliness here can create a comfort level that encourages student participation later.*

**Opening Prayer**

*Prayer thoughts: Pray for each student in your group, and consider taking individual prayer requests, too. Ask God to help everyone focus as you explore His Word and apply it to your lives. Pray that God would open hearts and minds to hear from Him.*

**Introduction**

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| **QUESTION**What is something you’ve started or tried to do in the past but haven’t finished? Why didn’t it get finished? |

We’ve all given up early on something—sports, playing an instrument, completing a class, eating healthy, working out, or learning a new skill—to name a few. It’s hard to stay committed. When things get difficult, it’s easy to let go of our commitments. It’s similar in our faith, too. The Bible tells us that we will face challenges, trials, and even persecution as we walk with Jesus. Today’s story reminds us that even in the face of life-threatening challenges, it’s possible to remain fully committed to Jesus.

**Group Activity**

**Push through the Pain!**

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| ***You Will Need*** *• Wall (interior or exterior)* *• Smartphone or timer* *• Small bag of individual candies****Getting Ready*** *• Clear a wall with enough room for each student to have a space to stand along the wall(s).* *• NOTE: If you have a student with a physical limitation that prevents participation in this activity, consider a contest to extend arms at shoulder height or use a previous activity instead.* |

Let’s kick things off with a little, friendly competition to see who can push through challenges. It’s simple. We’ll see who can do a wall-sit for two minutes. If you can last until the end, you’ll walk away with a reward.

• *Have students stand along the wall and begin wall-sits as you start a two-minute timer.*

• *Feel free to have fun with it as time passes. For example, bribe students to quit early for a single piece of candy.*

• *When time expires, give several pieces of candy to each student who made it the whole time.*

Congratulations to those who made it to the end! It’s difficult to push through uncomfortable situations like this one. The desire to give up can be strong. The longer you stay committed to something difficult, the harder it gets.

The same can be true in your faith journey, too. The longer you walk with Jesus, the more challenges and trials you’ll face. When persecution and difficulties come, it can be tempting to walk away or be less committed. In today’s Bible story, we’ll meet a man who faced extreme persecution, but he didn’t give up when things got tough. Let’s watch today’s video to see what we can learn when it comes to courage and perseverance.

**Watch**

**Consider What the Bible Says**

*Ensure each student has access to a Bible, preferably the same version.*

After Jesus’ resurrection, many people were being saved, miracles were being performed, and the Church was growing rapidly. This was a very good thing, but it meant that there were more people with needs to care for. The disciples decided to appoint new leaders to help with the tasks and duties of a growing ministry. One of those new leaders was named Stephen. As we’ll see in our Bible story, Stephen was a godly man who exhibited courage and perseverance, no matter how impossible the situation seemed.

**Stephen Was Chosen to Lead**

Read [Acts 6:1–7](https://ref.ly/logosref/Bible.Ac6.1-7).

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| **QUESTION**If you were in charge of choosing people to run a food program for widows, what qualities would be important for them to have? |

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| **QUESTION**According to verse [5](https://ref.ly/logosref/Bible.Ac6.5), what qualities did Stephen have that made him a good fit for this role? |

Notice how this passage doesn’t tell us if Stephen was chosen because he was organized, likable, or smart. Those are important qualities, but the most important characteristic of Stephen was his spiritual strength and character. Stephen was the kind of person who was open to everything the Holy Spirit wanted for him.

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| **QUESTION**What do you think it looks like for someone to be full of faith and the Holy Spirit? |

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| **QUESTION**Can you think of someone you know whose life fits that description? |

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| **QUESTION**Do you think Stephen thought his life would change as a result of his new leadership position? How? |

Maybe Stephen thought that his new role would make his life harder. After all, new leadership roles often mean more expectations. What happened next to Stephen was totally unexpected, though, and it required him to remain faithful in the face of grave danger.

**Stephen Was Arrested**

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

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| **QUESTION**According to verse [8](https://ref.ly/logosref/Bible.Ac6.8), Stephen did more than distribute food. What else was he known for? |

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| **QUESTION**What did the lying witnesses accuse Stephen of doing? |

To *blaspheme* is to speak extreme defamation, disrespect, or slander toward someone. In this case, the liars said Stephen did that about both God and one of God’s greatest leaders—Moses.

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| **QUESTION**What emotions do you think Stephen felt when he was arrested? |

God was using Stephen to perform miracles and signs in the name of Jesus. And in response, people claimed Stephen was disrespecting the same God he was serving! Not everyone was a fan of what Stephen did, and his story took a harsh, unfair turn. Stephen was falsely accused and arrested, even though he did nothing but good.

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| **QUESTION**What types of opposition do Christians face in our community today? |

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| **QUESTION**If you were in Stephen’s position, how do you think you would have responded? |

After Stephen was arrested, everyone was probably anxious to see how he would respond to the accusations against him. Would he lash out in anger because of the lies that were being spread? Would he fold under pressure and deny any association with Jesus? Or would he stand firm in his faith no matter what? Let’s keep reading to find out.

**Stephen Remained Committed to Serving God**

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

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| **QUESTION**If you had been there listening to Stephen, what would you have been thinking? |

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| **QUESTION**What were Stephen’s last words before his death? |

Stephen’s last words were a prayer, but not a prayer for himself. He prayed for the people who had mistreated him. That’s what Jesus did too. From the Cross, Jesus also prayed for the people who were killing Him. ([Luke 23:34](https://ref.ly/logosref/Bible.Lk23.34))

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| **QUESTION**How do you think Stephen might have responded if he hadn’t had strong faith in Jesus? |

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| **QUESTION**Does it surprise you that God didn’t save Stephen from death? Why do you think God allowed him to die? |

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| **QUESTION**What does this teach us about when we go through hard times and God doesn’t respond exactly how we expect or hope for? |

When we face hard times, it’s natural for us to want God to put an end to it immediately. Nobody likes to walk through challenges. But in Stephen’s situation, God didn’t take him out of his suffering by saving him and letting him live. The chapter ended with Stephen’s death. That doesn’t mean that God gave up on Stephen, though. He still used Stephen’s death in big ways, and the Church kept growing because of it.

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| **QUESTION**How might the Holy Spirit have been at work in Stephen’s situation? |

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| **QUESTION**How do you think Stephen’s courage affected the believers who witnessed his death? |

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| **QUESTION**How do you think you would have responded if you were in Stephen’s position? |

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| **QUESTION**When we face opposition to our faith, how can we fix our eyes on Jesus like Stephen did? |

Stephen’s response to others’ accusations was powerful. He gave a long speech and accused the Jewish leaders of disobeying God on purpose. Stephen ended this confrontation just like he started it—full of faith and full of the Holy Spirit. He remained committed to serving God all the way to his 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 the 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.**

Stephen’s life and death remind us that it’s possible to stay committed to serving God—no matter what. He was lied about, arrested, harassed, and even killed, but he never stopped living for Jesus. We are called to live that way, too.

Imagine the effect of Stephen’s faith on the people around him—including us today. How many other Christian leaders were encouraged to live more courageous lives? What if the men who killed Stephen eventually got saved because of his courage? It’s safe to say that Stephen’s life made a bigger impact than he could have ever imagined.

We can live full of faith and full of the Holy Spirit, just as Stephen did. We can remain committed to Jesus in the face of opposition, just as Stephen did. And we can leave our mark on the world for Jesus, just as Stephen did.

**Listen to God**

Let’s take time to consider how our life demonstrates a real trust in the Bible. These questions are meant to serve as a conversation between you and God. Sharing your responses with the group is completely voluntary.

• *Pause for a few moments of silent reflection after reading the questions. Then ask students if they want to share. Sharing your personal response may also be helpful to the students.*

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| **QUESTION**How does Stephen’s story challenge you to remain committed to God in the face of opposition? |

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| **QUESTION**Are you facing challenges in your own life or doubts in your faith? How can we help? |

**Activate**

God wants you to live with a Spirit-empowered boldness, just as Stephen did. You may not face severe persecution or death, but you can live boldly at your school, in your home, and everywhere you go. Every day this week, ask God to give you one opportunity to live boldly for Him.

**Conclusion**

Stephen faced all kinds of challenges—people lied about him, arrested him, and ultimately killed him—but he never gave up on his commitment to Jesus. He stood firm because he trusted Jesus. That same Jesus wants us to trust Him in every area of our life, too. We can be full of faith and full of the Holy Spirit, just as Stephen was. In life’s darkest moments, we can be encouraged that Jesus is with us and challenging us to stay committed to Him.

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| **Salvation Opportunity***Include this if you think there may be some in the group who do not have a personal relationship with Jesus.*Ultimately, we will never be able to trust Jesus when we face difficulties if we don’t trust Him with our entire life. Jesus wants a relationship with you. He loves you, and He proved that when He died on a cross for you. Now, He wants you to trust Him with your life. Are you ready for such a commitment?**Is anyone here that we can pray for who doesn’t have a relationship with Jesus or wants to renew their relationship with Him?***Take a moment to acknowledge those who respond, and thank them for their desire to make things right between themselves and God. Pray with them as you close in prayer or after the group time is over. Following group time, talk more about where they are in their walk with God and how you might be able to help.* |

**Prayer**

Powerful God, thank You for being trustworthy in the good times and the bad. Lead us to be full of faith and full of the Holy Spirit as Stephen was so that we can remain committed to You in every part of our life. Help everyone facing doubts or unsure about their commitment to You to be strengthened. In Jesus’ name, we pray. Amen.

**Dismissal**

Hey! You haven’t forgotten about the Bible Engagement Project app, have you? I hope not. It has five personal devotions for you to connect with God over this next week. Please take advantage of them. See each of you next time!