



The Stoning of Stephen

Lesson Aim: To see how God is working in all things for the greater good.

THE WORSHIP

Who God Is: The Spirit Who Gives Us Power

THE WORD

What He Has Done: God strengthened Stephen and spread the gospel.

Scripture Focus: Acts 6:8-15; 7:51-60; 8:1-4; Romans 8:28 **Key Verse:** Acts 7:59-60

Christ Connection: Genesis 50:20; Daniel 7:13-14

THE WAY

The Big Question: Why do bad things happen to good people?

UNIT 1 FOCUS VERSE

"You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." Acts 1:8

Unit 1: The Promise of the Spirit			
	Bible Story	What He Has Done	Lesson Aim
1	The Promise of the Holy Spirit, Acts 1:1-11	Jesus promised to send the Holy Spirit.	To know the Holy Spirit's power helps us to be witnesses.
2	Pentecost: The Holy Spirit Comes, Acts 2:1-8, 16-17, 25, 30, 32-33, 36-41	Jesus kept His promise to send the Holy Spirit.	To know that all who believe in Jesus receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.
3	Peter and John Defend Jesus' Name, Acts 3:1-12, 16; 4:1-4, 7-12, 18-21	God healed the man when Peter called on Jesus' name.	To understand the power of Jesus' name.
4	The Stoning of Stephen, Acts 6:8-15; 7:51-60; 8:1-4; Romans 8:28	God strengthened Stephen and spread the gospel.	To see how God is working in all things for the greater good.
5	Philip and the Ethiopian, Acts 8:4-8, 26-40	God led Philip to teach the Ethiopian about Jesus.	To know the Holy Spirit makes us ready to tell others about Jesus.

LEADER'S ENCOURAGEMENT This week, read Revelation 6:9-11. Please join us in praying, "Thank You, Lord, for filling Stephen with Your Spirit. In the same way, fill the students with Your Spirit so they may serve others and defend their faith no matter what. Amen."

Lesson Aims are based on reflecting God's character as we participate in His actions to, for, and in the world.

Take Home Elements: The Journal Entry, Action Card, and Family Discussion Card may be sent home to encourage students to reflect on the lesson. The Journal Entry is an in-depth personal study. The Action Card is a visual reminder of the Bible story, God's action, and how we can join into that action. The Family Discussion Card gives parents and guardians a way to engage their students in what they are learning.

Leader's Tip: For larger gatherings, teach THE WELCOME, THE WORSHIP, and THE WORD in a large group setting and divide into small groups for discussion with THE WAY.



Getting started

THE WELCOME

Suggestion: Choose a game that focuses on ideas such as scattering, persecution, or truth.

ACTIVITY OPTION 1: BELIEVERS & PERSECUTORS

Purpose: To introduce how God spread the gospel by scattering believers throughout the world.

Supplies: Blindfold

Preparation: Mark the play area. Designate a start line and a finish line at opposite ends of the play area. Designate an area for a prison.

In our story, we will read how God spread the gospel by scattering believers throughout the world while they were being persecuted. To be persecuted means to be mistreated because of who you are or what you believe. It would have been difficult for believers to travel and avoid capture. Let's see whether you can avoid capture.

Directions:

1. Mark or point out the borders of the play area.
2. Divide the group into two groups: Believers and Persecutors.
3. The Persecutors are to scatter throughout the play area. Once the game begins, they cannot move.
4. Blindfold one of the Believers at the start line and spin him or her a few times.
5. On your signal, the other Believers must direct the blindfolded Believer through the play area. If the blindfolded Believer is touched by a persecutor, they are imprisoned. If the blindfolded Believer makes it to the finish line, their team gets a point.
6. Depending on the amount of time you have, repeat steps 4-5 for three or more players.
7. Have the groups switch sides and repeat steps 3-6.
8. The team with the most points wins.

Options: To increase the difficulty, have believers hop on one foot or walk backwards. If the first player gets through the play area easily, allow the Persecutors to move before the next Believer walks through.

ACTIVITY OPTION 2: CLUSTERS

Purpose: To introduce how believers were persecuted because of who they were and what they believed.

Supplies: None

Directions:

1. Have students stand.
2. Call out a characteristic such as "Find everyone who was born in the same month as you" and have students form groups as quickly as possible.
Other Ideas: Same shoe size, eye color, same number of siblings, same grade.
3. Continue playing with characteristics that students feel more strongly about such as "same sports team," "favorite singer, movie, or TV show (give them a choice of three popular ones)."
4. Play as many rounds as you like.
5. **Introduce the story with these points:**
 - **Persecution is defined of hostility or ill-treatment of others because of who they are or what they believe. Was there any persecution going on during our game?**
 - **In our Bible story, we will hear how believers were persecuted because of who they were and what they believed.**



The Spirit who gives us power

THE WORSHIP

Note to Leader: The instructions below are suggestions only. Adapt this time of worship to suit your environment, resources, and cultural expression. Encourage students to broaden their view of corporate worship by including a variety of expressions such as group prayer, group praise, silent meditation, singing, listening to music, reading scripture, collecting an offering, drama, dance, visual arts, and/or a physical exploration of nature or neighborhoods.

Ideas for Optional Visuals: _____

In today's Bible story, we will hear how Stephen, through the power of the Holy Spirit, did amazing things including boldly telling the truth about Jesus and praying for the very people who were trying to hurt him. Before he died, Stephen looked up and saw Jesus standing with God the Father. Let's worship Jesus now as we hear this description of who and what we too will see one day.

Read the Unit 1 Focus Verse: Acts 1:8.



Sing worship songs and guide students to focus on the Holy Spirit who gives us power.



Read Revelation 22:3-5.



Invite students to offer sentences of praise to God by completing the following sentence:
"Lord, we worship You for _____."



The stoning of Stephen

THE WORD Presentation

Note to Leader: Adapt this segment to your setting (Sunday School class, youth group, multi-age gathering, youth camp, retreat, etc.). In some settings, you may choose to have a student read the scripture aloud, and then have the leader, in his or her own words, briefly communicate the Teaching Points, the Christ Connection, and the Big Question. In other settings, a teacher, pastor, or other experienced speaker may present a lecture or extended message that includes those same elements.

Ideas for Optional Visuals:

You may choose to include an object lesson, video clip, drama, dance, song, or work of art to illustrate the teaching points.

Option 1: _____

Option 2: _____



TEACHING POINTS

Consider current culture and influences impacting your students, and adjust the teaching accordingly.

Read the suggested scripture and communicate each of the points noted.

Last time, we learned Peter called on Jesus' name to heal the man who couldn't walk. In today's story, we read Stephen was chosen by the disciples to make sure everyone, including the poor widows, had enough food each day. Being full of faith, Stephen believed in Jesus.

The leader or a student reads Acts 6:8-15.

- The Sanhedrin were a group of Jewish leaders in Jerusalem. They had previously warned the apostles to stop preaching in Jesus' name (Acts 4:18, 5:40).
- The accusations against Stephen were very serious. Nothing was more sacred to the Jews than their temple (God's house) and their law (God's Word). For them to say he was speaking against either was to accuse him of speaking against God Himself.

The leader or a student reads Acts 7:51-53.

- When the high priest asked Stephen if the accusations were true, Stephen reminded them of the Old Testament Scriptures that confirmed his teachings. Stephen boldly told them of the promises God made to Abraham, Moses, and the prophets, that were fulfilled by His Son, Jesus (Acts 7:1-53).
- Stephen chastised them for disobeying God and refusing to believe in Jesus as God's Son.

The leader or a student reads Acts 7:54-60.

- Instead of focusing on the men's anger or the fear of attack, Stephen looked up to heaven.
- Stephen was "full of the Holy Spirit," which meant he was empowered by the Spirit to live like Jesus.
- Jesus is sometimes called the Son of Man to acknowledge his humanity and to recognize his role as the Savior of the world.
- This vision must have strengthened Stephen for what was about to happen to him. Stephen was the first Christian martyr. Martyrs are people who are killed because of their beliefs.

THE WORD Presentation *continued*

The leader or a student reads Acts 8:1-4.

- To persecute is to mistreat someone because of who they are or what they believe.
- The angry members of the Sanhedrin stoned Stephen and persecution spread with the intention of silencing those who were spreading the truth about Jesus. But God used this persecution to scatter believers throughout the world to tell people about Jesus.

The leader or a student reads Romans 8:28.

- The stoning of Stephen was an evil act but through it God set into motion the spreading of the gospel and the saving of many lives.



Connecting the Old Testament, the New Testament, and Us

CHRIST CONNECTION

In the whole story of God, what's the connection between this New Testament story and the Old Testament?

- Almost 2000 years before Stephen, God used an evil act for His good. He used Joseph's jealous brothers to save lives during the famine (Genesis 45:4-7).

The leader or a student reads aloud Genesis 50:20.

- Jesus' death was another evil act which God used for good. When Jesus was on the cross He prayed, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing (Luke 23:34)." Even the killing of God's only Son by evil men was purposed by Him long beforehand to accomplish the salvation of the world.

The leader or a student re-reads Acts 7:60 aloud.

- Stephen's final words before his death were, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them." This showed how Stephen was filled with the Spirit and living like Jesus.
- Our becoming more like Jesus is some of the good God continues to accomplish until Jesus returns.



THE BIG QUESTION

Introduce and elaborate on this question. Students will answer it in their discussion group.

Why do bad things happen to good people?



THE WAY Discussion



GETTING STARTED Display and review the Discussion Group Covenant below:

**We will include everyone here, treating one another with respect and kindness.
We will encourage everyone here to express their thoughts and opposing views.**

Every student shares his or her best experience or greatest challenge of the past week.



READ IT AGAIN

Read Acts 6:8-15; 7:51-60; 8:1-4; Romans 8:28 silently or aloud.

When Stephen looked to heaven and saw Jesus and God the Father might have encouraged Stephen?

What were Stephen's last words before he died? How do you think Stephen was able to remain both so courageous and loving while being persecuted?

What happened to the church in Jerusalem on the day Stephen was stoned? How might Stephen's death have strengthened believers?



THE BIG QUESTION Invite students to share their answers.

Why do bad things happen to good people?



TAKE ACTION Lead students in a discussion using the questions below.

How might this story give you courage to be faithful in any situation?

How might this story change the way you look at sharing the truth about Jesus even when you are uncomfortable or fearful?

Can you share a Bible story or a personal experience in which an action which someone intended for harm was used by God for good?

Ask each student to complete this sentence: **God calls us to trust Him in our circumstances SO THAT others might _____.**



PRAY Share prayer requests and answered prayers.

Have students pray with partners, or have the whole group pray together.



FINAL FIVE MINUTES When only 5 minutes remain, begin this segment.

Give each student Action Card #4 and Journal Entry #4. **Take home today's Action Card as a reminder of how we can join in what God is doing. Use the Journal Entry as your personal devotional study. Complete your Journal Entries at home and keep them together in a notebook or in your Bible.** Optional: Provide parent or guardian with Family Discussion Card #4.

PROPHETS & PROMISES

JOURNAL ENTRY #4

The Stoning of Stephen

Acts 6:8-15; 7:51-60; 8:1-4; Romans 8:28

WHAT DOES IT SAY?

- **Pray!!!** Ask the Holy Spirit to show you what He wants you to learn from this passage.
- **Read Acts 6:8-15; 7:51-60; 8:1-4; Romans 8:28.**
- What do you learn about Stephen's character?
- What did Stephen see when he looked up to heaven?
- After Stephen was stoned to death, what happened in Jerusalem that day?

WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

- Write Romans 8:28 in your own words.
- How did Stephen's death cause God's kingdom to grow and for lives to be saved?

WHAT CAN I DO?

- Joseph's brothers left him in a pit and sold him into slavery. Read Genesis 50:20 to see how Joseph responded when they were reunited. Ask God to reveal to you a situation when a person's action which was intended for harm was used for good by God. Describe your feelings surrounding this experience.
- What questions would you like to ask God about why He allows bad things to happen to innocent people?
- Explain the connections you see between Genesis 50:20 and Romans 8:28.

Action Card #4/P&P

THE STONING OF STEPHEN

ACTS 6:8-15; 7:51-60; 8:1-4; ROMANS 8:28

GOD USED STEPHEN'S DEATH TO SPREAD HIS GOSPEL THROUGHOUT THE WORLD.

WE CAN TRUST GOD IS ALWAYS AT WORK FOR THE GOOD OF THOSE WHO LOVE HIM.

Action Card #4/P&P

THE STONING OF STEPHEN

ACTS 6:8-15; 7:51-60; 8:1-4; ROMANS 8:28

GOD USED STEPHEN'S DEATH TO SPREAD HIS GOSPEL THROUGHOUT THE WORLD.

WE CAN TRUST GOD IS ALWAYS AT WORK FOR THE GOOD OF THOSE WHO LOVE HIM.

Action Card #4/P&P

THE STONING OF STEPHEN

ACTS 6:8-15; 7:51-60; 8:1-4; ROMANS 8:28

GOD USED STEPHEN'S DEATH TO SPREAD HIS GOSPEL THROUGHOUT THE WORLD.

WE CAN TRUST GOD IS ALWAYS AT WORK FOR THE GOOD OF THOSE WHO LOVE HIM.

Action Card #4/P&P

THE STONING OF STEPHEN

ACTS 6:8-15; 7:51-60; 8:1-4; ROMANS 8:28

GOD USED STEPHEN'S DEATH TO SPREAD HIS GOSPEL THROUGHOUT THE WORLD.

WE CAN TRUST GOD IS ALWAYS AT WORK FOR THE GOOD OF THOSE WHO LOVE HIM.

Action Card #4/P&P

THE STONING OF STEPHEN

ACTS 6:8-15; 7:51-60; 8:1-4; ROMANS 8:28

GOD USED STEPHEN'S DEATH TO SPREAD HIS GOSPEL THROUGHOUT THE WORLD.

WE CAN TRUST GOD IS ALWAYS AT WORK FOR THE GOOD OF THOSE WHO LOVE HIM.

Action Card #4/P&P

THE STONING OF STEPHEN

ACTS 6:8-15; 7:51-60; 8:1-4; ROMANS 8:28

GOD USED STEPHEN'S DEATH TO SPREAD HIS GOSPEL THROUGHOUT THE WORLD.

WE CAN TRUST GOD IS ALWAYS AT WORK FOR THE GOOD OF THOSE WHO LOVE HIM.

Action Card #4/P&P

THE STONING OF STEPHEN

ACTS 6:8-15; 7:51-60; 8:1-4; ROMANS 8:28

GOD USED STEPHEN'S DEATH TO SPREAD HIS GOSPEL THROUGHOUT THE WORLD.

WE CAN TRUST GOD IS ALWAYS AT WORK FOR THE GOOD OF THOSE WHO LOVE HIM.

Action Card #4/P&P

THE STONING OF STEPHEN

ACTS 6:8-15; 7:51-60; 8:1-4; ROMANS 8:28

GOD USED STEPHEN'S DEATH TO SPREAD HIS GOSPEL THROUGHOUT THE WORLD.

WE CAN TRUST GOD IS ALWAYS AT WORK FOR THE GOOD OF THOSE WHO LOVE HIM.

Action Card #4/P&P

THE STONING OF STEPHEN

ACTS 6:8-15; 7:51-60; 8:1-4; ROMANS 8:28

GOD USED STEPHEN'S DEATH TO SPREAD HIS GOSPEL THROUGHOUT THE WORLD.

WE CAN TRUST GOD IS ALWAYS AT WORK FOR THE GOOD OF THOSE WHO LOVE HIM.

Action Card #4/P&P

THE STONING OF STEPHEN

ACTS 6:8-15; 7:51-60; 8:1-4; ROMANS 8:28

GOD USED STEPHEN'S DEATH TO SPREAD HIS GOSPEL THROUGHOUT THE WORLD.

WE CAN TRUST GOD IS ALWAYS AT WORK FOR THE GOOD OF THOSE WHO LOVE HIM.

Family Discussion #4/P&P

THE STONING OF STEPHEN

READ ACTS 6:8-15; 7:51-60; 8:1-4; ROMANS 8:28.

GOD STRENGTHENED STEPHEN
AND SPREAD THE GOSPEL.

WHAT CAN WE LEARN FROM STEPHEN ABOUT WHY
BAD THINGS SOMETIMES HAPPEN TO GOOD PEOPLE?

Family Discussion #4/P&P

THE STONING OF STEPHEN

READ ACTS 6:8-15; 7:51-60; 8:1-4; ROMANS 8:28.

GOD STRENGTHENED STEPHEN
AND SPREAD THE GOSPEL.

WHAT CAN WE LEARN FROM STEPHEN ABOUT WHY
BAD THINGS SOMETIMES HAPPEN TO GOOD PEOPLE?

Family Discussion #4/P&P

THE STONING OF STEPHEN

READ ACTS 6:8-15; 7:51-60; 8:1-4; ROMANS 8:28.

GOD STRENGTHENED STEPHEN
AND SPREAD THE GOSPEL.

WHAT CAN WE LEARN FROM STEPHEN ABOUT WHY
BAD THINGS SOMETIMES HAPPEN TO GOOD PEOPLE?

Family Discussion #4/P&P

THE STONING OF STEPHEN

READ ACTS 6:8-15; 7:51-60; 8:1-4; ROMANS 8:28.

GOD STRENGTHENED STEPHEN
AND SPREAD THE GOSPEL.

WHAT CAN WE LEARN FROM STEPHEN ABOUT WHY
BAD THINGS SOMETIMES HAPPEN TO GOOD PEOPLE?

Family Discussion #4/P&P

THE STONING OF STEPHEN

READ ACTS 6:8-15; 7:51-60; 8:1-4; ROMANS 8:28.

GOD STRENGTHENED STEPHEN
AND SPREAD THE GOSPEL.

WHAT CAN WE LEARN FROM STEPHEN ABOUT WHY
BAD THINGS SOMETIMES HAPPEN TO GOOD PEOPLE?

Family Discussion #4/P&P

THE STONING OF STEPHEN

READ ACTS 6:8-15; 7:51-60; 8:1-4; ROMANS 8:28.

GOD STRENGTHENED STEPHEN
AND SPREAD THE GOSPEL.

WHAT CAN WE LEARN FROM STEPHEN ABOUT WHY
BAD THINGS SOMETIMES HAPPEN TO GOOD PEOPLE?

Family Discussion #4/P&P

THE STONING OF STEPHEN

READ ACTS 6:8-15; 7:51-60; 8:1-4; ROMANS 8:28.

GOD STRENGTHENED STEPHEN
AND SPREAD THE GOSPEL.

WHAT CAN WE LEARN FROM STEPHEN ABOUT WHY
BAD THINGS SOMETIMES HAPPEN TO GOOD PEOPLE?

Family Discussion #4/P&P

THE STONING OF STEPHEN

READ ACTS 6:8-15; 7:51-60; 8:1-4; ROMANS 8:28.

GOD STRENGTHENED STEPHEN
AND SPREAD THE GOSPEL.

WHAT CAN WE LEARN FROM STEPHEN ABOUT WHY
BAD THINGS SOMETIMES HAPPEN TO GOOD PEOPLE?

Family Discussion #4/P&P

THE STONING OF STEPHEN

READ ACTS 6:8-15; 7:51-60; 8:1-4; ROMANS 8:28.

GOD STRENGTHENED STEPHEN
AND SPREAD THE GOSPEL.

WHAT CAN WE LEARN FROM STEPHEN ABOUT WHY
BAD THINGS SOMETIMES HAPPEN TO GOOD PEOPLE?

Family Discussion #4/P&P

THE STONING OF STEPHEN

READ ACTS 6:8-15; 7:51-60; 8:1-4; ROMANS 8:28.

GOD STRENGTHENED STEPHEN
AND SPREAD THE GOSPEL.

WHAT CAN WE LEARN FROM STEPHEN ABOUT WHY
BAD THINGS SOMETIMES HAPPEN TO GOOD PEOPLE?