

January 17, 2021

Recap from last week:

Last week, January 10th, we watched as two people had a hard time sharing what they had with others in need. This week, we'll hear about a man who preached about Jesus even when facing death.

Stephen's Sermon



Bible Story & Activities

Gospel Points for Little Ones:

- God was with Stephen.
- Stephen told about God's plan to send Jesus.
- Stephen said that Jesus is the Messiah.

Bible Story

(from Acts 6 – 7)

Parent tip: If your kids are younger, you're welcome to try focusing on just the words **in bold**.

Stephen was one of Jesus' followers. God blessed Stephen and **gave him power to do great wonders and signs**. One day, **some Jews began to argue with Stephen. The Holy Spirit helped Stephen speak with wisdom**, so no matter how hard the Jews tried, they could not win the argument.

The Jews lied about Stephen; they said he had spoken against God. **The people dragged Stephen to** the Sanhedrin (san HEE drihn), **the Jewish court, and told more lies**. "We heard Stephen say that Jesus will destroy the temple and change the laws that Moses gave us," they said.

"Is this true?" the high priest asked Stephen.

Stephen began to preach about Jesus. He reminded the court about Abraham. God had made promises to Abraham and his son Isaac. **He reminded them about Joseph and Moses**. God kept Joseph safe when his brothers tried to hurt him, and God used Joseph to help all His people during a famine. When God's people lived in Egypt, God called Moses to rescue His people from Pharaoh. **Moses led God's people away from Egypt, but they turned against Moses and against God. God did not give up on His people, though**. He was working out a plan. **God worked through Joshua and David and Solomon**.

The religious leaders knew these stories from the Old Testament. **Stephen told them these stories to explain that Jesus was the Messiah God had promised!** But just like their ancestors rejected and killed the prophets in the Old Testament, these Jewish leaders had rejected Jesus and murdered Him!

Stephen's words made the Jewish leaders so angry! Stephen was filled with the Holy Spirit. He looked up to heaven and saw Jesus standing there.

"Look!" he said. "I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!"

The Jewish leaders screamed at the top of their lungs. They **covered their ears and rushed at Stephen. They threw him out of the city and began throwing stones at him. Stephen called out**, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit!" Then he said, **"Lord, do not hold this sin against them!" After this, Stephen died**.

Christ Connection: Stephen was killed because he was a Christian. Jesus told His followers that they would be persecuted—hated, hurt, or even killed—for loving Him. Jesus also said that those who suffer for Him would be blessed. We can face suffering in this life because Jesus suffered first. He died and then rose again, and He is waiting for us in heaven.

Family Activities

The following activities are all different options that help kids understand the story. Feel free to choose the activities that work best for your family!

Family Discussion Starters:

- Why did the people want to get Stephen in trouble?
- Why were the religious leaders angered by the things Stephen said to them about Jesus?
- How might we suffer because of our belief in Jesus?
- Why is Jesus worth any suffering we may face?
- How can we love people who don't believe the gospel?
- Why can we be brave when people are mean to us because we love Jesus?
- Have you ever faced suffering or persecution because of your faith? How did you react or how would you react?
- Do you ever feel afraid or embarrassed to talk about Jesus? Why or why not?

Paint Crosses on Stones (this activity is great for all)

You will need: smooth stones, washable paint, brushes, smocks/plastic tablecloth and tape (optional)

Tape a plastic tablecloth to the table. Provide smocks to protect clothing and a smooth stone to each child. Invite children to paint their stones one color and paint a cross on the stone with another color. Set the stones aside to dry. Wipe hands immediately. Talk about the Bible story as children work.

How is this relevant?

Parents can lead by saying: The Jewish leaders made Stephen leave the city, and they threw rocks at him. People hurt Stephen because he followed Jesus. Jesus told His disciples that people would hurt them for loving Him. Let this painted rock remind you that when people are mean to you because you love Jesus, you can be brave because people hurt Jesus too.

Say it Loud and Proud (this activity is great for toddlers and up)

You will need: paper, pencil or pen

Have the family sit on the floor in a circle. Write a message about Jesus on a piece of paper and wad it into a ball. Give the paper ball to a family member. Play music while the family passes the paper around. When you stop the music, the person holding the paper will stand up and proudly say the message to the group. (If your children are younger, you can whisper the message to them and have them repeat loudly). Play as time allows, changing the message periodically.

How is this relevant?

Parents can lead by saying: You spoke up and told about Jesus. Stephen spoke up and told the Jewish leaders that Jesus is the Messiah and they were wrong to reject Jesus. This made the leaders angry. They were so angry that some of the people hurt Stephen because he followed Jesus. Jesus told His disciples that people would hurt them for loving Him. When people are mean to us because we love Jesus, we can be brave because people hurt Jesus too. Jesus died and came back to life, and one day we will live with Him forever.

Make Word Art (this activity is great for toddlers and up)

You will need: paper, glue, bowls and decorative items such as pom-poms, buttons, cheerios, pasta, sequins or beads

Write the word BRAVE in large block letters on several pieces of paper (one paper for each child). Place decorative items in separate bowls. Show children how to glue the items on the inside of the lines of the word brave. Set aside to dry. Talk about the Bible story as children work.

How is this relevant?

Parents can lead by saying: God made Stephen very brave. The religious leaders got angry at what Stephen said about Jesus. They made Stephen leave the city, and then they threw rocks at him. People hurt Stephen because he followed Jesus. When people are mean to us because we love Jesus, we can be brave because people hurt Jesus too. Jesus died and came back to life, and one day we will live with Him.

Key Passage Activity (this activity is great for older preschool and up)

You will need: dominoes, masking tape and a marker

Parent tip: If your kids are younger, you're welcome to try focusing on just the words **in bold**.

We who are many are one body in Christ and individually members of one another. **Romans 12:5**

Before the activity, write the words of the key passage on separate strips of masking tape, including the reference. Attach the words to dominoes. Lead kids in reading Romans 12:5 aloud together. Invite kids to arrange the dominoes in order by standing the dominoes on end, about an inch apart. When kids finish, lead them to say the key passage together. Then invite a child to push over the first domino and watch them all fall down.

How is this relevant?

Parents can lead by saying: Stephen stood before the leaders and spoke the truth about Jesus. Those of us who love and follow Jesus are part of the church. Our key passage reminds us the church is one body made up of all of those who believe in Jesus. What is the church? The church is all Christians everywhere, who gather together in their communities to worship and serve God.

Take a Stand (this activity is for great for older preschool and grade school)

You will need: 2 hula hoops or masking tape, index cards, pen or pencil, a bag

Prepare two sets of cards—actions cards and statement cards. Write simple group actions on several index cards. (Sample actions: Do 10 jumping jacks, give someone a high-five, jump as high as you can, say the alphabet as quickly as you can, and so forth.) Put the action cards in a bag. Then, write several statements on separate cards. (Sample statements: I think that dogs are the best animals in the world. My favorite food is pizza. Math is my favorite subject in school.) Position two hula hoops on the floor, several feet apart. Instruct kids to stand. Explain that you will read a statement. If kids agree, they should put one foot in hula hoop #1. If they disagree, they should put one foot in hula hoop #2. After kids have moved to a hoop, draw an action card for kids at hoop #1 to complete. Then play again with another statement and another card. Each time, children in hoop #1 should complete the action. *(You can use masking tape to make two circles on the floor if you don't have hula hoops).*

How is this relevant?

Parents can lead by saying: Did any of you disagree with the statement just so you could avoid doing the action? In our Bible story this week, a man took a stand for what he believed even though it cost him his life! People hurt Stephen because he followed Jesus.

Upgrade (this activity is great for older preschool and grade school)

You will need: paper, pencils and a variety of items (such as a small ball, candy, bicycle, first aid kit, action figure and a doll)

Place a variety of items around the room. Provide the kids with paper and pencils. Instruct the kids to list the items least to most valuable. Encourage the kids to think about more than just the price, but also how much they would want to own or use each item. Compare lists.

How is this relevant?

Parents can lead by saying: For some of you, trading one of those items for another might be an easy choice. You might see it as an upgrade to give up a ball to get a bicycle. In a way, that helps us think about the choices Stephen made in our story this week. What did Stephen give up? [His life.] What did Stephen gain? [He got to be with Jesus in heaven, he got to stand up for the truth, he got to be a part of God's plan to spread the gospel, and so forth.] Stephen understood that Jesus is more valuable than anything, even our lives! For believers, even death is an upgrade because we get to be with Jesus forever.

Is this True? (this activity is great for grade school)

You will need: 2 Bibles

Divide family into 2 teams. Explain that you will read a statement and then give a Bible verse. Family members should race to find the verse and determine if the statement is true or false. If false, they should correct the statement. Use the following statements or include your own:

- I heard that God told Abram never to leave his home. Is this true? (Gen. 12:1)
- I heard that God promised to give Abram a big family. Is this true? (Gen. 15:5)
- I heard that Joseph's brothers sold him to traders going to Jerusalem. Is this true? (Gen. 37:28)
- I heard that Joshua led the Israelites across the Nile River. Is this true? (Josh.3:17)
- I heard that David defeated a giant with a sword. Is this true? (1 Sam. 17:50)

How is this relevant?

Parents can lead by saying: The Jews lied about Stephen and said he had spoken against God. Yet Stephen preached about Jesus no matter what. Stephen was killed because he was a Christian and spoke the truth. Jesus told His followers that they would be persecuted—hated, hurt, or even killed—for loving Him. We can face suffering in this life because Jesus suffered first. He died and then rose again, and He is waiting for us in heaven.

On-the-Spot History (this activity is great for grade school)

You will need: index cards, pen or pencil, gift bag, timer (optional)

Before this activity, write on separate index cards items or events that have an origin. (Examples: ice cream, birthday cakes, shaking hands, Independence Day and so on) Put the cards in a gift bag. Have a child pull a card from the bag and begin speaking about the history of the item or event. Consider timing kids for 30 or 60 seconds. Emphasize that kids can make up the story if they do not know the true history. Encourage creativity. Applaud them for their efforts.

How is this relevant?

Parents can lead by saying: Was it hard or easy to tell about the history of something? In our Bible story this week, a man named Stephen preached to a crowd about the history of God's people. Stephen said that the Old Testament pointed to a coming Savior, and that Savior is Jesus. Stephen preached about Jesus no matter what.

Look at Clouds (this activity is great for all)

No supplies necessary

If weather permits, take the family for a walk to look at the clouds. Retell the Bible story.

How is this relevant?

Parents can lead by saying: God was with Stephen, even when the people tried to hurt him. Stephen looked into the sky and saw Jesus in heaven! We can remember that Jesus suffered for us to save us from our sin. He died and then rose again, and He is waiting for us in heaven.

Serve a Snack

You will need: graham crackers, cream cheese, dried cranberries

Serve graham crackers spread with cream cheese for snack. Offer children dried cranberries to arrange in a cross shape on their crackers. Talk about how Jesus told His disciples that people would hurt them for loving Him. People hurt Stephen because he followed Jesus. When people are mean to us because we love Jesus, we can be brave because people hurt Jesus too. This is also a great time to do the "Discussion and Bible Skills" section or the "Family Discussion Starters".

Discussion and Bible Skills

Have a member of the family reread the Bible story above. Ask the following questions. Lead the family to discuss:

Preschool:

1. Who loved Jesus and served the church? (*Stephen*)
2. Why did some Jews tell lies about Stephen? (*They did not like him and wanted to get him in trouble.*)
3. How did the Jewish leaders feel when Stephen told them they were wrong to kill Jesus? (*They were angry.*)
4. Who did Stephen see when he looked up to heaven? (*Jesus standing at God's right side.*)
5. What is the church? (*The church is all Christians everywhere.*)

Grade School:

1. What was Stephen accused of? (*blasphemy, saying something untrue and dishonoring about God; Acts 6:11*)
2. What did Stephen preach about? (*Stephen used Israel's history to explain Jesus is the Messiah; Acts 7:51-52*)
3. What did the religious leaders do to Stephen as a result of his preaching about Jesus? (*killed him, Acts 7:57-60*)
4. Have you ever faced persecution for your faith? *Guide kids to think about ways they may feel persecuted. Be sensitive to their experiences while taking care not to minimize the harsh persecution Christians face in other parts of the world.*
5. How can we stand up boldly for Jesus in the face of persecution? *Discuss the strength and power available to believers through the Holy Spirit. Remind kids that He can help us be bold in hard times. Encourage kids to*

trust God and have faith that He turns all things to good, even when we don't see the good results.

6. *What should we do if we are persecuted? Talk through what Stephen did. Help the kids see that Stephen did not fight his enemies, but instead asked God to forgive them for killing him. Remind kids that Jesus promised troubles and persecution would come. Encourage kids to pray for boldness in hard times, not just for things to get easier.*

Parents can lead by saying: Stephen preached about Jesus no matter what. We may not face the same kind of persecution. But whatever we face, trusting God is the best option. We can pray for boldness in the face of persecution and that God will use our trials to bless His church.

Journaling (this activity is great for older preschool and grade school)

You will need: paper, pencils, crayons, or markers

Take some time at the end of the lesson and activities to sit down and allow kids and family members to reflect on what they heard and learned. Give each member of the family a piece of paper and writing utensils. Allow them some time to think about and answer the following questions:

- What does this story teach me about God or about the gospel?
- What does this story teach me about myself?
- Whom can I tell about this story?

If your children are younger, help them process the questions and encourage them to draw their answers if they'd like to. Lead your family in prayer when you are finished, taking prayer requests from each family member that feels like sharing. If you feel like your child is ready to accept Christ, check out the Gospel Plan on the kids' page of our website. Please let us know so we can celebrate this with you and provide you with additional resources.