

# THE POWER OF THE HOLY SPIRIT



Date: 06.01.25 | Stephen - The Church Spread Out  
Scripture: Acts 6:1-8:3

## LEVELS OF BIBLICAL LEARNING

### Middle School Students:

- God is eternal and has existed for eternity past and will exist for eternity into the future.
- Each person who comes to faith in Christ receives the Holy Spirit and is given a spiritual gift.
- Jesus promised that God would send the Holy Spirit to minister to God's people in a special way.
- The Holy Spirit intercedes before the Father on our behalf.
- The Holy Spirit inspired and guided people to write the Bible.

### High School Students:

- God is eternal, and although He is not bound by time, He chooses to operate in it to relate to us.
- Each person who comes to faith in Christ receives the Holy Spirit and is endowed with a spiritual gift to be used to serve in the church.
- Jesus promised that God would send the Holy Spirit, and the Spirit has come to convict, teach, comfort, lead, strengthen, and seal us, as well as to produce fruit within and through us.
- The Holy Spirit intercedes before the Father on our behalf when we do not know how to or what to pray.
- The Holy Spirit inspired and guided people to write the Bible and used the personalities and voices of men to communicate the very words of God.



### MEMORY VERSE

And Peter said to them, "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself." - Acts 2:38-39

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## **INTRODUCTION TO THE LESSON**

**Play 2 Truths and a Lie.** A leader will gather the students together and tell them 3 statements about themselves. Two of the statements will be true and one will be a lie. Have the students guess which statement they think is a lie. Play several rounds with different leaders or allow the students to take turns leading as well.

**Say:** In our game, some of the things we told each other about ourselves were not true. Has anyone ever said something untrue about you? How did you respond? Why did you respond that way?

Today, we will learn about a follower of Jesus named Stephen. The Jewish leaders told lies about Stephen, but he chose to keep preaching the gospel.

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## BACKGROUND INFO FOR LEADERS

Empowered by the Holy Spirit, the early church began its mission with remarkable courage, boldly proclaiming the identity of Jesus and performing miracles to validate their message. One of the first recorded signs was Peter's healing of a lame man at the temple gate (Acts 3:1), which drew a large crowd to Solomon's Portico, a well-known gathering place for early Christians (Acts 3:11). This public miracle caught the attention of the religious authorities, resulting in the arrest of Peter and John and their appearance before the Sanhedrin (Acts 3:1–4:22).

Despite this opposition, the believers did not respond with fear. Instead, they prayed for greater boldness, asking God to empower them to speak His word and perform signs and wonders in Jesus' name (Acts 4:30). God answered their prayer powerfully. The apostles continued to perform miracles, and the gospel spread with increasing impact.

The Spirit not only empowered bold testimony but also cultivated deep love and unity among believers. They shared their resources freely, not out of compulsion but genuine care (Acts 4:32–37). Yet, the church was not immune to internal sin. When Ananias and Sapphira lied about their giving, God's judgment resulted in their sudden deaths, striking fear into the hearts of all (Acts 5:1–11).

Even as external threats grew, including arrest, intimidation, and suffering, the apostles remained unwavering in their proclamation of Jesus. Their faithfulness, combined with miraculous signs and sacrificial unity, inspired awe, drew many to faith, and continued to provoke opposition. As Acts 5:42 testifies, "Day after day, in the temple courts and from house to house, they never stopped teaching and proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the Messiah."

With rapid growth came practical challenges. One pressing issue arose in the daily distribution of food: some widows, particularly Greek-speaking Jews, were being overlooked (Acts 6:1). This may have stemmed from cultural or language barriers between Hellenistic and Hebraic Jews.

The apostles, devoted to prayer and the ministry of the Word, acted swiftly. They

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instructed the church to appoint seven Spirit-filled men to oversee this task (Acts 6:2–4). These men, likely chosen from among the Greek-speaking believers, were well-equipped to meet the community’s specific needs. Though this passage doesn’t formally establish the office of deacon, it introduces foundational principles of servant leadership. The Greek words *diakonia* (service) and *diakoneo* (to serve) used in Acts 6 connect directly to the later role of deacons (1 Timothy 3:10, 13).

The proposal pleased the whole group. The apostles prayed, laid hands on the chosen men, and commissioned them (Acts 6:5–6). Among them were Stephen and Philip, who would soon play pivotal roles in the church’s expanding mission. This Spirit-led solution preserved unity and justice, allowing the apostles to remain focused on their calling. As a result, the church flourished. “The number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly, and a large number of priests became obedient to the faith” (Acts 6:7).

Among the seven, Stephen stands out early as “a man full of God’s grace and power” who performed great wonders and signs (Acts 6:8). He is the first non-apostle recorded to perform miracles, signaling a new phase in Spirit-empowered ministry. Full of faith, wisdom, and the Holy Spirit, Stephen’s work extended beyond food distribution to bold gospel preaching, particularly in Greek-speaking synagogues (Acts 6:9–10).

Unable to refute his Spirit-filled wisdom, his opponents accused him falsely of blasphemy—echoing the charges made against Jesus (Acts 6:11–14). He was dragged before the Sanhedrin, where Luke records that his face shone “like the face of an angel” (Acts 6:15), symbolizing divine favor.

In response to the high priest, Stephen delivered the longest speech in Acts (Acts 7). He recounted Israel’s history, highlighting God’s faithfulness and Israel’s repeated rejection of His messengers—from Abraham and Joseph to Moses and, ultimately, Jesus. Stephen concluded by accusing the council of resisting the Holy Spirit and betraying the Righteous One (Acts 7:51–53).

Enraged, the Sanhedrin dragged Stephen out of the city and stoned him. As he died, Stephen prayed for his killers and committed his spirit to God, mirroring Jesus’ final moments (Acts 7:59–60). Luke notes that the executioners laid their garments at the feet of a young man named Saul, who would soon emerge as a significant figure in God’s redemptive plan (Acts 7:58).



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Stephen's martyrdom marked a significant turning point. Persecution broke out in Jerusalem, scattering believers throughout Judea and Samaria (Acts 8:1). Though the apostles remained in the city, others fled, carrying the gospel with them. Saul intensified his persecution, going house to house to arrest Christians (Acts 8:3), a season of violence he would later reflect on with sorrow (Acts 22:4–5; Gal. 1:13).

Yet, this persecution only served to spread the message further. Instead, what was meant to destroy the church became how its mission expanded, fulfilling Jesus' command to be His witnesses "in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8).

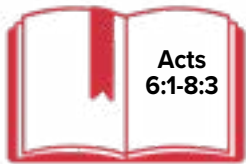
Stephen's faithful witness, both in life and death, helped propel the church outward. He was followed by Philip, who brought the gospel to the Samaritans (Acts 8), and eventually by Saul, later known as Paul, who became the apostle to the Gentiles (Acts 9). Stephen's Spirit-filled courage became the seed of a global movement.

Stephen's confrontation with the Sanhedrin was not merely a defense but a prophetic indictment. He exposed their resistance to God's purposes and their spiritual blindness. While their rage revealed hardened hearts, Stephen's radiant face, forgiving spirit, and heavenly vision testified to the transforming power of the Holy Spirit.

His death was not an end but the beginning of something far greater. Through Stephen, we see the cost of faithfulness and the power of a life fully surrendered to God. Though rejection is inevitable for those who follow Jesus (John 15:19-21), like Stephen, we are called to respond with truth, grace, and hope, trusting in God's eternal reward rather than people's fleeting approval.



## LOCATE THE SCRIPTURE & TELL THE STORY



Remind your group that we are studying the New Testament. The book of Acts is about God sending the Holy Spirit to permanently dwell within Jesus' disciples and other believers after He ascended back to heaven. With the help of the Holy Spirit, those who followed Christ told many people about Jesus, helped others, and started the first churches. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, the message of Jesus began to spread all over the world.

TELL  
THE  
STORY



Read directly from Scripture, use The Jesus Storybook Bible, The Biggest Story Bible, or the summary provided in the lesson

Tell the story:

In the time after Jesus' resurrection and return to heaven, more and more people believed in Him, but some of the believers complained. The Greek-speaking Jews thought the widows (women whose husbands had died) were being overlooked when the daily food was given out.

The twelve apostles said, "It isn't right for us to stop preaching about God to take care of all these daily concerns. So, brothers and sisters, choose seven men to care for this."

The apostles said that the men should be of good character. These seven men would take care of the believers' daily business, and then the apostles could devote themselves to prayer and preaching. Both jobs were important.

Everyone agreed this was a good idea, so they chose seven men. One of these men was Stephen. These men stood before Jesus' apostles, who prayed for them and laid their hands on them.

Put the events in order, draw a comic strip, build it with blocks or playdough, act it out, etc...

So the twelve apostles kept preaching about God. More and more people heard the truth about God, and more and more people in Jerusalem believed in Him. The church in Jerusalem grew as more disciples were made. God blessed Stephen, one of the men chosen to care for the believers' daily business. God gave him power to do great wonders and signs.

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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.

But the Jews lied about Stephen; they said he had spoken against God. The people dragged Stephen to the Sanhedrin, 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, 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 angered the Jewish leaders, and 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.

This story can be difficult to hear because it teaches us how a follower of Jesus, Stephen, was killed because of his faith in Jesus. Even though followers of Jesus will face suffering, we can trust that Jesus is with us. He understands our suffering because He suffered on the cross for our sins. Let’s thank God for Jesus’ sacrifice.

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**Re-tell the Bible Story:** Have students retell the story as best they can.

## **Share the GOSPEL:**

The apostles believed that everyone in the church had an important job to do: serve God's people and help spread the gospel. Jesus wants us to serve others so that the message of His death and resurrection can be heard and believed all around the world.

Jesus told His followers that they would be persecuted—hated, hurt, or even killed—for loving Him. Yet, He also said that those who suffer for His sake are blessed. We can endure suffering in this life because Jesus suffered first. He died for our sins, rose again, and is now waiting for us in heaven.

God's plan for His Son, Jesus, included suffering. Jesus was arrested, beaten, mocked, and crucified—all to pay for our sins. He also warned His followers that they, too, would face persecution for following Him. But we can endure with hope, knowing that because of Jesus' sacrifice and resurrection, He is making all things new.

In today's story, we are reminded that we can face persecution with courage and hope through Stephen's life. Jesus is with us, and one day, there will be no more suffering for those who trust in Him.



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## QUESTIONS TO REBUILD THE STORY

**In Acts 6, the church faced a problem. What was the problem within the early church? (6:1).** As the gospel spread, the early church grew rapidly. Many people who spoke different languages joined the early church, which might have led to misunderstandings. Some complained that the widows were not being served the daily food distribution.

**The apostles and believers within the early church knew that this problem needed to be solved. What did the apostles say they needed to focus on? (6:4).** The apostles knew they needed to focus on prayer and sharing the good news with those who had not heard. They knew they must have help from other believers within the church.

**The church selected men of good character who were filled with the Holy Spirit to care for widows, other believers, and the daily business of the church. What happened after the church appointed these men? (Acts 6:7)** God grew the church as many more people were able to hear the gospel being preached through the apostles.

**What is one command God has given all believers, no matter how they serve the church? (Acts 1:8)** God commands all believers to share the gospel with others. Service opportunities are a way for us to demonstrate the sacrificial message of the gospel and to teach the good news of Jesus to others.

**The seven men chosen to serve were men of good character. How can we be people of good character? (Galatians 5:22-23)** If we have trusted Jesus as our Savior, we should strive to live in a way that brings Him honor. He has called His followers to be His witnesses to the world. The character of Christ develops in us through the power of the Spirit as we obey the Word of God. The inward work of the Spirit is displayed through our lives' outward words and actions. True believers will see the fruit of the Spirit in their lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

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**Stephen was a faithful follower of Jesus who obeyed the Lord's command to go and share the good news with the world. The religious leaders argued with Stephen and wanted to silence him from sharing the gospel. What did they do to try to stop Stephen? (Acts 6:11-14).** The leaders arranged for people to lie about Stephen. When the leaders asked Stephen to defend himself, Stephen began to preach about Jesus.

**What stories from the Old Testament did Stephen share to show the religious leaders that Jesus is the Messiah God promised?** Stephen spoke about God's promise to Abraham, Joseph in Egypt, Moses and the burning bush, Joshua's conquering of the promised land, and even how Solomon built God's temple. Stephen reminded the Jewish leaders that even though God's plan was at work to send Jesus into the world, His people rejected His prophet's messages.

**Who did Stephen say the religious leaders rejected? (Acts 7:52).** Stephen reminded the Jewish leaders that they had rejected and murdered Jesus, God's perfect Prophet and Savior.

**The Jewish leaders became incredibly angry. They began to attack and stone Stephen. Who did Stephen see as he was being stoned? (Acts 7:55).** As Stephen was being killed for preaching about Jesus, he saw heaven and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. This gave Stephen hope as he faced death. We can have the same kind of hope Stephen had. If we have trusted Jesus as Savior, we can face any persecution or death knowing that Jesus is waiting for us in heaven.

**Why was Stephen able to speak and even die with boldness and power? The Holy Spirit empowered Stephen.** Stephen had no power apart from the Lord. Through faith in Jesus, the same Holy Spirit dwelling in Stephen also lives within them.

**How was Stephen able to forgive those who stoned him?** Through the Spirit at work, believers can forgive others just as they have been forgiven through Jesus. One mark of a Christian who has been transformed by God's grace is the desire to forgive others as they have been forgiven- even their enemies.

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**What type of persecution do Christians today face for their faith in Jesus?**

**Is Jesus worth following, even if we face persecution?** YES! Jesus gives us life and forgiveness. Even the best of this world doesn't compare to Jesus, and all that we may lose on this earth doesn't compare to all we gain in Christ. Jesus offers us an eternity of joy with Him!

**How can we pray for persecuted Christians?**

**Read Matthew 5:44 and Luke 23:34. How did Stephen display the same forgiving spirit as Jesus toward his enemies?**

**What does this story teach me about God or the gospel?**

**What does the story teach me about myself?**

**Are there any commands in this story to obey? How are they for God's glory and my good?**

**Are there any promises in this story to remember? How do they help me trust and love God?**

**How does this story help me live on mission?**

Application (include Mission Measures where applicable) - See Attached Application Questions. Choose the questions that work well with this section of scripture and tailor them to fit the age group of your students.

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## **PRAYER PROMPT:**

Lord, You know everything we have to face here on earth. Thank You for always being with us and giving us hope through Jesus. Help us live faithfully for You and to share the gospel with others so they can have hope through Jesus. In Jesus' name, amen.

## **MISSIONS EMPHASIS:**

Our Creek Families will collect money in the funnel for United Christian Ministries in May and June.

## **REVIEW UNIT VERSE:**

**Acts 2:38-39**

**38** And Peter said to them, "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. **39** For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself."

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## ATTRIBUTES OF GOD

**ATTENTIVE** - God hears and responds to the needs of his children.

**COMPASSIONATE** - God cares for his children and acts on their behalf.

**CREATOR** - God made everything. He is uncreated.

**DELIVERER** - God rescues and saves his children.

**ETERNAL** - God is not limited by time. He exists outside of time.

**FAITHFUL** - God always keeps his promises.

**GENEROUS** - God gives what is best and beyond what is deserved.

**GLORIOUS** - God displays His greatness and worth.

**GOOD** - God is what is best and gives what is best. He is incapable of doing harm.

**HOLY** - God is perfect, pure, and without sin.

**IMMUTABLE/UNCHANGING** - God never changes. He is the same yesterday, today, and tomorrow.

**INCOMPREHENSIBLE** - God is beyond our understanding. We can comprehend Him in part but not in whole.

**INFINITE** - God has not limits in His person or on His power.

**JEALOUS** - God will not share his glory with another. all glory rightfully belongs to him.

**JUST** - god is fair in all his actions and judgements. He cannot over-punish or under-punish.

**LOVING** - God feels and displays infinite, unconditional affection toward his children. His love for them does not depend on their worth, response, or merit.

**MERCIFUL** - God does not give his children the punishment they deserve.

**OMNIPOTENT/ALMIGHTY** - God holds all power. nothing is too hard for God. What He wills He can accomplish.

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## ATTRIBUTES OF GOD

**OMNIPRESENT** - God is fully present everywhere.

**OMNISCIENT** - God knows everything, past, present, and future - all potential and real outcomes, all things micro and macro.

**PATIENT/LONG-SUFFERING** - God is untiring and bears with His children.

**PROVIDER** - God meets the needs of his children.

**REFUGE** - God is a place of safety and protection for his children.

**RIGHTEOUS** - God is always good and right.

**SELF-EXISTENT** - God depends on nothing and no one to give him life or existence.

**SELF-SUFFICIENT** - God is not vulnerable. He has no needs.

**SOVEREIGN** - God does everything according to His plan and pleasure.

**TRANSCENDENT** - God is not like humans. He is infinitely higher in being and action.

**TRUTHFUL** - Whatever God speaks or does is truth and reality.

**WISE** - God knows what is best and acts accordingly. He cannot choose wrongly.

**WORTHY** - God deserves all glory and honor and praise.

**WRATHFUL** - God hates all unrighteousness.

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## Application Questions

LOOK UPWARD



- How does this story apply to your relationship with God?
- What does it teach you about Him- His will and His heart?
- What aspect of His character is He inviting you to experience and enjoy?
- How will you benefit by applying the truths of this story in your relationship with God?
- What practical steps can you take to live out these truths in your relationship with God?

LOOK INWARD



- How does this story apply to your heart and your own spiritual growth?
- What does it teach you about yourself, your needs, or your goals in life?
- In what aspects of your personal life is God inviting you to grow and mature?
- How will you benefit by applying the truths of this story inwardly?
- How will those around you benefit?
- What practical steps can you take to allow these truths to help you grow spiritually?

LOOK AROUND



- How does this story apply to your relationship with others?
- What does it teach you about how to see others and relate to them?
- What is god inviting you to do differently in your relationships?

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## Application Questions

### LOOK OUTWARD >>>

- How does this story apply to your ministry and mission in life- to your role in God's kingdom, in society, and in the world?
- What does it teach you about God's purposes for the world?
- What part of His mission is He inviting you to participate in?
- How will you benefit by applying the truths of this story in your ministry?
- How will the world benefit?
- What practical steps can you take to live out these truths in the world?

### LOOK FORWARD >>>

- How does this story apply to your future, both in this age and in eternity?
- What does it teach you about God's plan for your life, now and forever?
- What aspects of eternity is God inviting you to participate in?
- How will you benefit in the future by applying these truths now?
- How will God's kingdom benefit?
- What practical steps can you take to impact eternity now with these truths?