

THE CONTINUING ACTS OF THE CHRIST



Week Eight - Stephen & the Story

A Note to the Parents/Teachers

This week we hear a pivotal story that connects us from Peter and a witness to the Jews to Paul and a witness to the Gentiles. However, this spreading of life to the nations happens through a death. We are introduced to Stephen and his martyrdom, where Saul (who becomes Paul) is present and overseeing his murder. This story reminds us how God is in control even in the worst moments and how through death comes life to many.

- **Big Idea:** God brings life through death, for all who trust Him

Starter

- **Evidences of Grace**

Ask kids to share ways they've seen God at work lately. Anything, big or small, which is good is from God. Take time to thank God together.

- **From Death to Life / Seed to Fruit**

Show the kids a plant and talk about how it was once a seed, that went into the ground, was broken apart (essentially died), before new life sprouted from it. Ask the kids what that reminds them of.

Sing Together

Story - from Acts 6:1-8:3

As a new community of Jesus followers was being formed, the Spirit of God was working in the people to share all they had and care for one another. However, sometimes people's selfishness and pride still got in the way — much like today. For example, when they all got together to eat there was a group of people who felt like their widows and vulnerable members were not being served. The food would run out and they wouldn't have any. The apostles were busy with things like preaching, praying over the people, teaching truth and protecting the community from lies, and visiting the sick. So they chose seven respected men of faith from the group not being served, and appointed them to oversee the service to the people. They made sure everyone was taken care of.

One of these men, Stephen, was full of grace and power from the Spirit and even did signs and wonders. Some of the Greeks in the area began arguing with him about Jesus in front of crowds, but the Spirit gave Stephen wisdom with his words and they couldn't argue against him. So instead, they began to spread lies about Stephen to get him in trouble with the Jewish religious leaders. They said he was speaking against God and His words.

So, the religious leaders got a crowd together to seize Stephen. They brought him before the council and questioned him. Then Stephen's face looked like that of a heavenly messenger and he began to retell the entire story of God to them: Starting with how God called Abraham long ago to leave his home and go to a new land, how God gave him children and his family grew into the nation of Israel, how the Israelites were made to be slaves in Egypt but God rescued them through Moses, then Israel rebelled against Moses and God by worshipping false gods, how their disobedience led to them wandering in the wilderness for forty years, then how they finally got into the land God promised Abraham and built a temple to God, but again, brought idols into the temple. Then Stephen looked straight at the religious leaders and said, *"You stubborn people are always resisting the Holy Spirit of God, just as your ancestors did! They hated the prophets who God spoke through because they wanted to live their own way and that is what you are doing now."*

When they heard this they were enraged, screamed at the top of their lungs, and came at him. They dragged him out of the city and threw stones at him until it killed him. But as Stephen was dying he looked up and saw Jesus in heaven next to the Father. He said, *"King Jesus, welcome me in your kingdom!"* And his body died.

Standing there was a man named Saul, a Jewish leader who agreed with the murder. Saul and others began to attack the community of Jesus followers. Saul would drag men and women out of their homes and put them in prison.

But God was still in control and wouldn't let His new community fall apart. In fact, God would eventually come to Saul and transform his heart, rename him Paul, and fill him with the Holy Spirit to go and preach Jesus to all the other nations, growing the community of God's people all over the world. Even through Stephen's death and the hard things that happened to the early Church, God actually worked to bring life to many!

[Dialogue Questions - you may use some or all]

- How did God provide for the community of Jesus followers at the beginning of the story?
- How did God care for Stephen when people were coming against him?
- How did God continue to work through the early Church when Saul and others started attacking them and putting them in prison?
- Do you believe God can still be in control when things are hard?
- How has God brought life through death for the whole world? *[Jesus!]*

Breakout Time

- **Prayer:**

God, help us to trust in you even when things are hard and to know that you bring life even through death. Thank you Jesus. Amen.

- **Craft:**

- Use the first coloring sheet attached
- OR the last coloring page and talk about Jesus' words that dying to self produces real life

BLESS Activity

For kids to do during the week

Because this Story is true, we want to be faithful to live in it. We ask Spirit to help us Bless, Listen, Eat, Speak, and Sabbath (rest & celebrate) in ways that tell the good news of God's Story.

This week, focus on the **Speak** rhythm.

Stephen had boldness to speak the truth of Jesus because he was filled with the Holy Spirit. Pray the Spirit would give you boldness to tell people about Jesus this week.



"Truly, truly, I say
to you, unless a
grain of wheat
FALLS INTO the EARTH
& DIES, it
remains alone;

but IF IT DIES,

it bears
much fruit.

Whoever loves his life, loses it.

[ESV]

JOHN 12:24-25 R

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