



LESSON 77

3rd and 4th Grade

Principle: Christians face persecution.

Bible Character(s): Stephen and Saul

Scripture Reference: Acts 7:1-8:3



PERSONAL PREPARATION: Before this weekend, read through Acts 7:1-8:3.

Stephen was arrested for allegedly blaspheming against God, and made to stand before the Sanhedrin and speak his defense. He boldly turns himself from being the accused into the accuser by proclaiming the disobedience of the men of the Sanhedrin. Stephen spoke of men from the Old Testament in his bold speech, men whose lives pointed to Jesus as the Savior. After a fascinating defense and recount of the events of history in God's plan, Stephen is stoned to death, with his final words being "Lord, don't charge them with this sin." Stephen's character traits, knowledge of scripture, his boldness and his forgiveness are seen in this text. How can we cultivate similar character traits? Do you have situations in your life where you have been bold in sharing your faith and belief in Jesus Christ? If so, come prepared to share with the campers. Give them an opportunity to see how boldness plays out in your life, not just under persecution. Share your own struggles and fears about sharing your faith with others.

PLUG IN TIME - 5-10 minutes as the kids begin to arrive

Arrive early to check the supplies in the bin and review the lesson. Write today's principle on the whiteboard. Remember to greet all campers upon arrival; meet their parents; welcome and introduce all visitors. Create a welcoming cabin for all campers!

Ask the Campers...

Ask campers to think of times that someone made fun of them, and also times that they've made fun of someone else. **How did you feel when you made fun of someone? Did that person deserve to be made fun of? What about when someone made fun of you; how did you feel? Does anyone ever deserve for someone else to make fun of him/her?**



BIG GROUP TIME - 35-40 minutes

As you line up, remind campers we are going to have fun as an entire Camp Grace group! We are going to live out GRACE by **Glorifying God** through worship, **Respecting All Leaders**, and **Accepting Responsibility** to listen with attentive ears, minds, and hearts – fully **Celebrating Christ** with passion! We should **Encourage Others** to do the same, by not distracting them from their worship of God.

The Bridge to Small Group

Today we will look at Stephen's response to persecution. We will focus on how God equipped him to deal with the persecution he faced as well as his forgiveness towards those who killed him.

Small Group Time - 25-30 minutes

Getting Started

If your cabin did well in Big Group, acknowledge it. If not, take a couple of minutes to talk about how they can do better next time.

What did you learn in Big Group? How did Macho Knee Brace think we need to handle persecution? Was he right? (He thought we would need to wrestle, or fight, those who persecute us to keep from getting harmed like Stephen was but we do not need to do that.) What did Macho Knee Brace learn about sharing our faith? (We need to obey Jesus' command to share our faith with others, and trust that God will use it for good.)

Last week we learned about Ananias and Sapphira. Can anyone remember what they did? (They sold their land, kept half of the money, and lied about it to the apostles and God.) What happened to them? (They died because they lied; God punished them to death for their sin.) What happened to Ananias and Sapphira shows us the danger of being greedy when we want something more than trusting God with it. It also shows us that God takes our sin seriously. God wants us to love Him and obey His commandments. He wants us to trust that His plan for us is better than what we could do on our own. A greedy heart reveals that we are selfish and not trusting God.

Today we are continuing our study in the book of Acts. In Acts 6, the early church was growing. The disciples gathered the believers together to choose seven more people to be leaders in the church. One of these people was a man named Stephen, who was "full of faith and the Holy Spirit" (Acts 6:5) and who "performed amazing miracles and signs among the people." (Acts 6:8) There were many people that did not like what Stephen and the disciples were doing. They did not believe that Jesus was the Messiah. They arrested Stephen and brought him before the Jewish leaders, called the Sanhedrin, or High Council. They questioned Stephen, and he boldly answered by telling them that Jesus was the Messiah. He talked about Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph and Moses, and explained how these men's lives help show that Jesus is our Savior.

Let's begin reading in Acts 7 to see how Stephen ended his speech to the High Council.

Acts 7:51-53

51 "You stubborn people! You are heathen at heart and deaf to the truth. Must you forever resist the Holy Spirit? That's what your ancestors did, and so do you! 52 Name one prophet your ancestors didn't persecute! They even killed the ones who predicted the coming of the Righteous One—the

Messiah whom you betrayed and murdered. 53 You deliberately disobeyed God's law, even though you received it from the hands of angels."

Stephen spoke the truth to these people. He accused the High Council of persecuting appointed leaders of God, including Jesus, and deliberately disobeying God. He knew that he could be killed for saying all of this; yet he knew that it was the truth.

Let's see how the High Council responded to Stephen.

Acts 7:54-56

54 The Jewish leaders were infuriated by Stephen's accusation, and they shook their fists at him in rage. 55 But Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, gazed steadily into heaven and saw the glory of God, and he saw Jesus standing in the place of honor at God's right hand. 56 And he told them, "Look, I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing in the place of honor at God's right hand!"

Stephen knew the Jewish leaders were very mad. Would you be scared if you were standing in front of a group of people who could kill you for what you were saying? (Allow responses.) Was Stephen scared? (Allow responses.)

Let's look at Stephen's focus.

Stephen's Response



The purpose of this activity is to see what strengthened Stephen to stand before persecution and suffering.

Supplies:

Statement cards (1 set per bin)

True and False posters (1 set per bin)

Put the posters face-up on the table or floor. Have the campers each pull out a card from your hand. Which statements are true of Stephen? Which are not true? Have the campers place the cards on the correct poster.

Tie It Together



Stephen was willing to give up his life to tell others the truth and glorify God in doing so. He was willing to do this because he fully believed that trusting Jesus Christ was the only way to have true life. He was full of the Holy Spirit because of his belief. God gave him exactly what he needed to face this crowd of people. God allowed him to see the Father's glory and the Son of Man (Jesus) standing at the Father's right hand. That would be pretty amazing to see! What are you willing to give up? (Allow responses.) Do you really believe that telling others about Jesus is worth it? (Allow responses.) Do you believe that God will give you the strength you need to do what He wants you to do? (Allow responses.)

Let's see how the High Council responded to Stephen's words.

Acts 7:57-58

⁵⁷ Then they put their hands over their ears and began shouting. They rushed at him ⁵⁸ and dragged him out of the city and began to stone him. His accusers took off their coats and laid them at the feet of a young man named Saul.

Have you ever seen someone put his hands over his ears and say “lalala” loudly so he couldn’t hear what someone was saying? (Allow responses.) That’s pretty much what these Jewish leaders did! Then the members of the High Council stoned Stephen. That means they surrounded him and threw large rocks at him. Here is an example of a rock that might have been used to stone Stephen. (Show large rock to the campers.) How do you think it would feel to have rocks like this thrown at you, over and over by many people? (Allow responses.) It would be very painful, wouldn’t it? Stephen suffered a great deal because of his faith. We will also suffer. Probably no one will throw large stones at you, but what are some ways you think we could suffer for Christ? (Allow responses.) Someone might make fun of you, you might lose some friends, or others might think you are weird. Do you think suffering is worth it to share about Jesus? (Allow responses.)

Let’s look at Stephen’s response to those who were stoning him.

Acts 7:59-60

⁵⁹ As they stoned him, Stephen prayed, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.” ⁶⁰ He fell to his knees, shouting, “Lord, don’t charge them with this sin!” And with that, he died.

Stephen forgave these people for killing him. Do you think you would have been able to respond this way? (Allow responses.) How do you react when others do things that hurt you? Can you forgive them? (Allow responses.)

Forgiveness?



The purpose of this activity is to see that we can respond with forgiveness just as Stephen did.

Supplies:

White Board

Pieces of scrap paper (30 per bin)

Roll of painters tape (1 per bin)

Help the campers think of times they have been hurt by others when they have stood up for what they believe in or made a decision that caused others to make fun of them. If they can’t think of situations, here are some examples that you could use (telling others about Jesus, obeying your teacher, sitting with an unpopular kid in class, not giving in to bad peer pressure, etc.) Write their examples on the white board.

Then, split the campers into two teams and have each team take one side of the room. Give each team 15 pieces of scrap paper (if they’re not already wadded, have them wad the paper into balls as you do the next step). Put a line of tape down in front of each team. Give the campers two minutes

to throw the paper balls into the other team's section. They will continue to try to get all the balls on the other team's side within the two minutes. At the end of the two minutes the team with the least amount of balls on its side wins the game. (Be sure to explain that they should not throw balls at each other, but onto the other team's side.)

Tie It Together



Whenever someone makes fun of you or thinks you are weird, it hurts. You might not hurt physically, as Stephen did, but it does hurt when others say mean things and make fun of you. We are called to forgive others, even when they hurt us. This is very hard to do, but when we believe that Christ died for us and that He loves us, it is easier to forgive others for hurting us. Stephen so fully believed in Christ that he was able to forgive the Jewish leaders for hurting him.

Christ-like Forgiveness



The purpose of this activity is to see that faith and trust in Christ can help you be willing to forgive.

Supplies:

Foam ball or sponge in a zippered bag (1 per bin)

Bowl of water (1 per bin)

As you talk to the campers, reread Stephen's last words (Acts 7:59-60). Squeeze the foam ball or sponge and fill it with water. As you discuss how he so easily forgave out of an overflow of his heart, squeeze the sponge and ask the campers what their hearts are filled with. How do the campers think they would respond? (Please squeeze out the excess water and put the ball or sponge back in the bag so items in the bin do not get wet.)

Tie It Together



Stephen's heart was filled with the love of Jesus, and you can see that in his response when he was stoned. We have talked about how our words are an overflow of our hearts. How amazing is it that as he was stoned and killed, forgiveness was flowing out of him. He was not full of anger for what they were doing to him, but forgiveness. Stephen's words and the forgiveness he so freely offered those hurting him show that he was full of the Holy Spirit and shared Christ's amazing love. What is your response when people hurt you? What is in your heart? (Allow responses.)

Let's continue in Acts 8.

Acts 8:1-3

¹ Saul was one of the witnesses, and he agreed completely with the killing of Stephen. A great wave of persecution began that day, sweeping over the church in Jerusalem; and all the believers except the apostles were scattered through the regions of Judea and Samaria. ² (Some devout men came and buried Stephen with great mourning.) ³ But Saul was going everywhere to destroy the church. He went from house to house, dragging out both men and women to throw them into prison.

What is persecution? (Allow responses.) It is being mistreated or hurt by others because of what you believe. We do not worry about persecution like what Stephen endured.

Let's take a closer look at what it looks like to follow Jesus, including persecution we might face.

True or False?



The purpose of this activity is to examine the life of a believer.

Supplies:

Teachers Guide – “True or False Scenarios” side (2 per bin)

Go through each of the True or False scenarios. Read a statement and ask the campers if it is true or false in describing the life of a believer. Then, look up the scripture references and read them.

Tie It Together



When a person chooses to follow Jesus, does their life suddenly become easy, happy and full of good things all of the time? (Allow responses.) No! The Bible clearly shows us that to follow Jesus means you will experience suffering and persecution. Jesus suffered greatly while on earth in sacrificing Himself for our sin. To become more like Jesus, which is what God wants for all believers, we must experience suffering too so that we can learn obedience and faithfulness to God's plan, and live with the hope of eternal life. Do you think we face persecution like Stephen did? (Allow responses.) In America, we have the freedom to believe whatever we want to believe. We do not have to worry about risking our lives to believe in Jesus or share our faith. There are people in other parts of the world that still suffer like Stephen though. They are bold in sharing their faith, despite the physical persecution they might receive. If we do not face persecution like Stephen did, what ways might we be persecuted for talking about Jesus? How might others hurt our feelings or mistreat us for sharing our faith? (Allow responses.) How can you be bold and strong in sharing your faith with your family and friends, just like Stephen and many people around the world? (Allow responses.)

Be Bold. Be Strong



The purpose of this activity is to look at Stephen's boldness and to review God's promises about being with us.

Supplies:

Teachers Guide – “Bold and Strong Verses” side (2 per bin)

Read the verses aloud (or have a camper read them out loud).

Tie It Together



Stephen did not respond to the High Council with anger at being arrested. He spoke the truth to them. Though he knew the charges against him were not true, Stephen did not answer by

trying to protect himself. Instead, he answered with an overview of the Old Testament and showed how the Old Testament points to Jesus Christ as Lord. He was bold and strong! We can also be bold and strong. We can react the same way Stephen did because Christ can change us as well. Who are some people in your life that you could boldly tell about Jesus? (Allow responses.)

Prayer Time

Spend a few minutes in prayer. Thank God for what Jesus did for us, and ask Him to help us be bold and strong in sharing our faith with others, despite any persecution we may face.



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