

A SERVANT SPEAKS

Stephen
Acts 6–7
AD 34–36

OVERVIEW

BIBLE TRUTH

The Holy Spirit helps us serve God.

BIBLE VERSE

Be kind to one another. Ephesians 4:32

LEARNER GOAL

I understand that the Holy Spirit helps me believe and moves me to serve others.

LAW & GOSPEL

We don't want to hear about our sin, selfishness, or unbelief.

Through God's Word, we hear that we are forgiven, and the Spirit moves us to believe and serve others.

SCRIPTURE SNAPSHOT

The Twelve select Stephen as one of the first seven deacons in the Early Church. Synagogue leaders twist Stephen's words, falsely accusing him of blasphemy. Stephen's testimony before the high priest recalls Israel's rejection of God's promise and their rejection of Jesus, the promised Savior. When Stephen says he sees a vision of Jesus standing at the right hand of God, the enraged officials cast Stephen out of the city and stone him.

LESSON PREP

BASIC Read Acts 6–7 and study notes in *The Lutheran Study Bible*.

MORE TIME Read the leader devotion, found in the digital resource center.

IN DEPTH Read the article "The Work of the Spirit" in *TLSEB*, page 1876.

SUPPLY LIST

FOR THIS LESSON

- Teddy grahams, mini twist pretzels, and mini marshmallows
- Three bowls and small cups
- Puppets
- Poster board

FOR EVERY LESSON

- Bible
- Device with prepped music
- Copies of downloadable activity page
- Copies of Enduring Faith Page
- Supply Box

LAUNCH

Plan your lesson by reading through the options in each section. Choose the activities that will best fit your learners, and mark those boxes to guide you as you teach the lesson.

BEGIN

- Follow the Order of Opening Worship, use the Lesson Opening, or do both (part of the planning resources in the digital resource center).
- Sing songs using music found in the digital resource center, or sing your own favorite songs.

PRAY

Dear Jesus, help us listen and learn more about You and Your love for us. Amen.

SAY

- I'm glad to see you all here again today. Who was a helper this week? What did you do? Today, we're going to hear about a helper named Stephen who showed love for others and told them about Jesus.
- Who takes care of you when you're hungry? In our Bible story today, some people don't have enough food to eat. Let's find out how God takes care of them.

LEARN

Show your Bible, and remind the children that all the stories in God's Word are true.

TELL THE BIBLE NARRATIVE

Choose one of the options on the next page to tell the Bible narrative.

DO THIS!

Use one or both of the following activities to talk about the Bible narrative after you've read it.

- FOR CHILDREN WHO ARE YOUNGER** To help children learn the details of the events of these two chapters, ask children to work together to draw an emoji, a face showing an emotion, to describe each of the elements of this story on a piece of white paper. Use the text in bold to help you identify key points. Then reread the narrative to the class and have them hold up the emojis in proper order, reviewing the key points as you go.
- FOR CHILDREN WHO ARE OLDER** Acts 6–7 may be too long and complex a passage for most elementary students to read aloud directly from the Bible. If you want students to read from their Bibles, have them find passages such as **Acts 6:2–5**; **Acts 7:51–54**; and **Acts 7:55–56** to review the narrative.

TALK ABOUT IT

Choose the questions that best fit the learning level of your group.

- How did the Early Church help care for people who were hungry?
- Who was Stephen?
- What did some angry men do to Stephen?
- We may not be threatened with death like Stephen, but it can still be hard sometimes to tell others about Jesus. How does the Holy Spirit help you stand up for your faith when people challenge your beliefs?

KEY DISCUSSION POINTS

Guide discussion using these key points.

- The Early Church was growing and needed people to help the needy. Stephen was chosen to be a helper. He was full of the Holy Spirit. Stephen also preached well and did miracles.
- This narrative is a great opportunity to talk about the many ways God's people can serve others and witness.
- The Holy Spirit gives us kind hearts as well as the strength to tell the truth of Jesus even to those who don't want to hear it and who may not like us.



CHRIST CONNECTION

Though Satan still attacks the Church, nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus, our Lord.

BIBLE NARRATIVE FOR YOUNGER CHILDREN

STORYTELLING DIRECTIONS: Draw faces on two plates, and use them to show happy and sad moments in the story.

After Jesus went back to heaven, His friends told others how Jesus came to be our Savior. The new believers got together every day to sing and pray and learn more about God's love. They shared their food and clothes. They cared for one another. And do you know what? More and more people came to believe in Jesus. **God's family, the Church, was growing!** Each day, food was given out. **But after a while, there were so many people that some women and little children were not getting any.**

When Jesus' friends, the disciples, heard about the people who were hungry, they called a meeting.

They said, "Jesus told us to share His Good News with all people. He told us to love and care for one another." Let's choose helpers. The helpers can share our bread and figs and fish with everyone. They can make sure the poor people in our church get enough to eat."

"Yes," said the others. "Let's choose seven helpers to take care of everyone in our church. **Stephen should be one of the helpers. He's wise and he loves Jesus.**"

"Stephen is a good choice," agreed the others.

So the people chose seven helpers to make sure all the poor people had food. The people brought the helpers to

Jesus' disciple friends. They prayed for Stephen and the other helpers.

Stephen and the other helpers did a good job. They made sure all the children and their mothers had food to eat.

God helped Stephen show love for others by giving them food to eat. **Stephen liked helping and showing God's love to others.** He liked to tell how Jesus came to be our Savior too. He told them, "God sent Jesus to die on the cross to pay for your sins." People listened to Stephen. Many more people believed in Jesus and became part of God's family, the Church.

Some men did not believe in Jesus. They did not want Stephen to talk about Him. One day, Stephen tried to tell them about Jesus. This made them angry, so **they started to throw stones at Stephen.** God was with Stephen, though. When Stephen looked up, he saw Jesus in heaven. Stephen knew that soon he would be with Jesus. Stephen knew that Jesus forgave his sins. He wanted God to forgive these mean men who were hurting him too. **He prayed, "Dear God, please forgive these men for hurting me."** **God helped Stephen show kindness and love for others. He helped him tell about Jesus and forgive those who were mean to him.**

BIBLE NARRATIVE FOR OLDER CHILDREN

As the twelve apostles taught about Jesus in the temple, many Jews believed and were baptized. **The Early Church started to grow very quickly.** Among the Christians, **there were many widows**, women whose husbands had died and who didn't have money to take care of themselves. The Christians took up offerings to buy food for them. This helped some of the widows, but not all of them.

When the apostles learned about it, they were concerned. **They wanted to make sure everyone who needed help got it, but Jesus had sent them to preach the Good News, not to serve food.** They said, "Brothers, pick out seven men who are full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we will appoint to this duty." These men would make sure every person got help. One of those seven men was named Stephen.

Stephen was full of grace and power from the Holy Spirit. He did great miracles, just like the apostles were doing. When some Jews who didn't believe in Jesus started arguing with him, the Holy Spirit made Stephen so wise he proved they were wrong. **Sadly, they didn't believe Stephen. They just got more angry with him.**

They took Stephen to the high priest, Caiaphas, and also to the same Jewish court that had decided to put Jesus to death. The Jewish court looked at Stephen and noticed that

his face was glowing, which showed that he had talked with God.

The Holy Spirit made Stephen very wise. Stephen told the Jewish leaders about all the times in the Old Testament when God had raised up a leader for His people Israel but the Israelites had refused to follow him. He talked about leaders like Joseph, Moses, and King David—and how the Israelites had grumbled against them and refused to obey them. **And now, when God had sent His own promised Son, they had done even worse to Him—they had betrayed and murdered Jesus.**

When the priests and other leaders heard this, they got so mad they put their fingers in their ears, rushed together at Stephen, dragged him outside, and picked up big stones and rocks to throw at him and kill him.

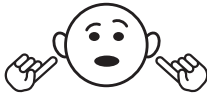
As Stephen was being stoned, he prayed to Jesus, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." He said, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them." Then Stephen died, and his spirit went to heaven.

LIVE

Choose from the following activities and crafts to help connect Bible learning to life.

Action Rhyme

Do this action rhyme together: **I have little ears** (*point to ears*) **that hear of Jesus' love** (*hug self*). **I have little lips** (*point to mouth*) **to tell about His love** (*cup mouth*). **I have little feet** (*point to feet*) **to follow Jesus' way** (*walk in place*). **I have little hands** (*hold out hands*) **to serve Him ev'ry day** (*fling arms wide*). Act out ways to serve others.



Bible Verse Actions

Say, **The Bible tells us** (read from Ephesians 4:32): **"Be kind to one another." Stephen showed love for others and told about Jesus. Let's think about ways we can be kind to one another.** Act out situations for the children to guess, or whisper the situation to a child to act out (e.g., cold, hungry, thirsty, hurt, lonely/scared). How can they help? Say, **We show our love for Jesus when we do kind things for others.**



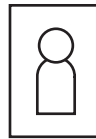
Old Testament Review

Stephen's recounting of the Old Testament story of God's people includes Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, David, and Solomon. Review the Old Testament narrative. Mix up the names and see if students can put them back in order. Or ask students to tell all they know about each of these people.



Portrait of a Servant

Guide students to make a portrait of Stephen on a piece of white paper using both words and pictures together. Brainstorm words that describe Stephen and write those where students can see and copy them. Encourage students to make their portrait in their own way. Let students share their art by explaining it to the group.



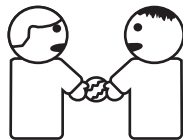
Serve a Snack

Set out teddy grahams, mini twist pretzels, and mini marshmallows in separate bowls. Have children portion the ingredients into small cups for one another. Talk about how Stephen showed love for hungry people by giving them food.



Help Us Forgive

Use two puppets to tell a story about fighting over a toy. Ask, **What did Stephen do when people were mean to him? Jesus helps us forgive others.** Say, **Think about Jesus dying on the cross to forgive us. When we say the Lord's Prayer, we think about the people who have hurt us and ask God to forgive them and help us to forgive them too.**



Helping Others

Ask children to think about how we can show love for others. Ideas: Set out a basket to collect baby items for disadvantaged mothers. Collect canned food for the food pantry, and have children use markers to draw crosses on the cans. Have children choose a project and make a poster, asking church members to donate to the cause.



LEAVE

SAY

The Holy Spirit helps us serve God. What are some of the ways you can serve God?

PRAY

Dear Jesus, thank You for sending the Holy Spirit to help all the people throughout history and today who speak your Word even though people hate them for it. Help us to have the courage to share Your Word with others, especially when people don't like us for being Your child. In Your name we pray, Jesus. Amen.