

The Apostles Were Arrested (Acts 5)

In Acts 5, we find the apostles performing many signs and wonders through the power and grace they received from the Holy Spirit. The healing power of the Holy Spirit displayed through Peter, in particular, was so compelling that people laid the sick in the path of his shadow. United in purpose, the apostles also continued their mission to share the gospel with those around them, and as a result, they filled Jerusalem with their teaching! However, with the favor of their community came the opposition of the Jewish leaders who grew jealous of the apostles' ministry.

How did the early church navigate the ups and downs of their ministering experiences? What choices did they make when faced with rejection and suffering?

Instead of cowering to the demands of the religious leaders to stop sharing the gospel, the apostles rejoiced in being counted worthy of mistreatment in Jesus' name. They continued to be faithful to Jesus' command to share the gospel and, leaving directly from the presence of the Sanhedrin, they made a daily practice of preaching and teaching the good news of Jesus Christ in the temple and from house to house.

Even when the apostles experienced persecution and shameful mistreatment, the power of God at work was evidenced in their boldness to continue to preach the name of Jesus. Amidst many uncertainties and challenging circumstances, they remained steadfastly assured of the power of the gospel to save anyone who believes. On this truth they placed their hope as they rejoiced in their suffering.

As you prepare to discuss this session with your kids, consider all that the apostles endured as they sought to share God's Word so that people might hear and believe in the name of Jesus. If you find yourself in a difficult circumstance, thank God for their example of endurance despite times of trouble. Help your kids understand that when we face rejection and suffering, Christ remains near to us, just as He did to His church so long ago. We, too, can count it all joy as we face trials and trust that Jesus is worth giving our lives to.

The Church Handled a Problem

(Acts 6)

Acts 6 relays a time when a complaint within the church led to an opportunity for delegation and good deeds. As the apostles continued spreading the word of Jesus and His resurrection, more people began to believe the good news and the church grew in number. Amid this growth, the task of caring for the Hellenistic widows was being neglected.

How did the apostles handle this complaint between the different groups of believers in their church? How did they choose to pursue unity despite the different needs and giftings of those in their community?

In this chapter, we witness how the apostles chose not to ignore the critiques of the Hellenistic Jews. Instead, the members of the Twelve sought to bring more individuals into service opportunities for God's glory—a proposal that pleased the whole church. From this newfound service initiative came the deacon ministry!

The apostles' approach to this complaint was rooted in their desire for unity within the body of Christ and the proclamation of the gospel. They instructed the church to select seven men of good character, sound wisdom, and obedience to the Holy Spirit to care for the widows in need of help. With this delegation of duties, the disciples could continue their work of prayer and preaching the Word. As the deacons served and the apostles preached the Word, the gospel reached even further, and a large group of priests came to faith in Jesus.

Help kids see how they can serve within their church—even now as children! Explain how your work as a Bible study leader is fulfilling the Great Commission in this moment! We all have the important job of sharing God's Word with others. God is pleased by our obedience and service and may choose to use it to take the gospel even further.

Stephen Was Arrested

(Acts 6-74)

Acts 6 and 7 detail the story of Stephen, the first follower of Jesus martyred for his unwavering boldness in proclaiming Jesus as Lord. Despite the rejection Stephen faced, he remained firm in his gospel witness to those in the Sanhedrin. Recounting the stories of the Old Testament, Stephen declared God's faithfulness to bring the Messiah into the world, even through the rebellious nation of Israel.

How was Stephen able to boldly declare the gospel and endure persecution? What parallels can we make between Jesus and Stephen that encourage us in our faith?

When asked for confirmation of the accusations against himself, Stephen's response was to walk the high priest through the Old Testament's accounts of God's promises. Stephen made known the rebellion of the Jewish people—how they rejected God's Word and resisted the Holy Spirit. He spoke of what God declared back then and how God's promises came to completion in the death and resurrection of His only Son, Jesus. Stephen believed the promises of God and had faith in the Righteous One who died for the sins of the world. Stephen was able to face such terrifying persecution and death because he was filled with the Holy Spirit.

As Stephen stood among the Jewish leaders, Scripture tells us that "his face was like the face of an angel." While the leaders' countenance only displayed anger and outrage, Stephen mirrored the ways of Jesus on his face, in his boldness, and through the forgiveness he prayed over the Sanhedrin members' sins. As Jesus' followers, we also will face opposition from others. Yet, while we await the return of Christ, we can reflect His love and truth to those around us.

Consider what it looks like for followers of Jesus to be so filled with the Holy Spirit that they remain on mission for the gospel no matter the cost. How could God use our faithful witness of the gospel to save even those most hostile to the good news? Explain to your kids that when we find our comfort and hope in Jesus, we can withstand rejection we may face, as we exchange the momentary approval of man for the eternal favor and blessings of God.

The Church Spread Out (Acts 8)

The story of the Ethiopian official's baptism began with an angel giving a command to Philip, an apostle of Jesus Christ. Philip's on-the-spot obedience led him to clarify the Scriptures and point the Ethiopian official to Christ. As a result of Philip's desire to live on mission, the Lord provided an opportunity for the gospel to spread further throughout the world.

In what ways did the context of Acts 8 seem inopportune for spreading God's Word? How did Philip's willingness to be led by the Holy Spirit play a part in this story of practical evangelism?

In the beginning of today's reading, we see the rippling effects of Stephen's stoning (Acts 7). Severe persecution broke out against the church in Jerusalem, and all but the apostles scattered while Saul ravaged the church. However, as these believers dispersed, they continued living on mission, preaching the Word of God boldly rather than cowering to their circumstances.

Making his way down the road God chose for him, Philip came across this traveling eunuch who needed someone to explain the meaning of Isaiah 53. Just as we read in Romans 10 that we cannot believe God's truth without hearing or having it preached, the Ethiopian official declared that he needed a guide. While Philip did not know everything about the mysteries of God, he trusted that the Holy Spirit guided him down that desert road with divine purpose.

As you teach on the Lord's faithfulness amidst His people's trials, emphasize the simplicity of this story: a follower of Jesus stepped confidently into a situation where the Lord had gone before him. How can you show your kids that He will do just the same for them today as they share the gospel with others—just as you are relaying His truths to them in this story?

Teach kids that all who hear the good news of Jesus Christ and believe in Him are welcomed into God's kingdom. Like Philip, may we trust and obey the leading of the Holy Spirit for the sake of making the gospel known to others.