



Stephen Speaks God's Word



This week, we see a man relying fully on the Holy Spirit. Even in the most difficult of circumstances, this godly man was at peace. He did not back down, but spoke the truth of God's promises and provision. From his example, we learn how to be controlled by the Holy Spirit.

Day #1: One Body, Many Parts

As we continue to study in Acts, we see that the number of people who put their trust in Jesus continued to grow and grow. There were so many new believers that the apostles were unable to feed and take care of all of them. It looked as if the apostles would have to choose between taking care of the people and preaching the good news about Jesus.

+ So the Twelve gathered all the believers together. They said, "It wouldn't be right for us to give up teaching God's word in order to wait on tables. Brothers, choose seven of your men. They must be known as men who are wise and full of the Holy Spirit. We will turn this **important work** over to them. Then we can give our attention to prayer and to teaching the word." - Acts 6:2-4

The whole group thought this was a great idea. They chose seven men and presented them to the apostles. The apostles laid their hands on the seven men and prayed for them. The very next verse tells us, "So God's word spread." (Acts 6:7)

Look back at Acts 6:3. What word did the apostles use to describe the work of caring for others? Important. It was so important that the men were carefully selected, and the apostles prayed over the chosen men. Because the seven men stepped in to use their abilities to take care of others, the apostles kept studying and preaching, and God's word continued to spread. Even a large number of the Jewish priests became believers (Acts 6:7)!

It was very important for all the people to use their unique abilities to serve God in different ways, in order for God's plan to move forward. In 1 Corinthians, the apostle Paul uses the example of the human body. Each person needs all of his or her different parts to do different functions. The eye cannot do what the hand does. The hand cannot do what the foot does. We need all of the parts, working together to create a healthy body. No one part is more important than the other. This is the way it is with the body of believers. God gives each believer different gifts and abilities to use for His service. (1 Corinthians 12:14-26).

***** Think of your own church. If the Pastor was in the nursery feeding the babies, who would preach to the members? That does not mean taking care of babies is not important. Just the opposite, taking care of babies is very important! If no one took care of the babies, their parents would not be free to sit and hear the teaching of the Pastor.

Discuss the gifts God has given you. List ways you can use your abilities to serve others and serve God.

Day #2: Stephen

It is in Acts 6 that we are introduced to Stephen. He was one of the seven men chosen to feed and care for the other believers. The Bible says Stephen was wise, full of faith, and full of the Holy Spirit (Acts 6:3, 5).

+ Stephen was full of God's grace and power. He did great wonders and miraculous signs among the people. - Acts 6:8

Every day, more Jewish people began to believe in Jesus. This did not go unnoticed by the other Jews. A group of Jewish men began to argue with Stephen. These men thought they could discredit Stephen, or show him to be incorrect in what he said. But, their arguing did not go as they had hoped. Notice what the Bible says:

But he was too wise for them. They couldn't stand up against the Holy Spirit who spoke through him. - Acts 6:10

Stephen was known for being full of the Holy Spirit. Stephen's words were full of truth because the Spirit that lived inside of him **was truth** (John 14:17). What could mere men say to argue with the Spirit of the perfect God?

***** Often, we feel we are not smart enough or brave enough to tell others about Jesus. We are afraid we might say something wrong, so we don't say anything at all. We must remember that the same Holy Spirit that lived inside of Stephen lives inside of all believers today.

You put your faith in Christ and were given the promised Holy Spirit to show that you belong to God. - Ephesians 1:13b

Do not be afraid to discuss your faith with other people. Remember, **the arguments of men CANNOT stand up against the Holy Spirit!** The truth of the Holy Spirit is far **greater** than any false beliefs someone might have. Write the verse Acts 6:10 on a card and place it where you can see it every day. Trust that God will put you along side the very people He wants you to communicate His love with. And know that the Spirit will give you the words you need to share (Mark 13:11).

Day #3: False Accusations

Have you ever been falsely accused? That means that someone said that you did something wrong, when you really did not. This is a terrible feeling. Because we are created in God's image (Genesis 1:27), we are each created with a desire for justice and truth. Today we will see how Stephen was falsely accused.

Since the Jewish men could not argue fairly with Stephen, they decided to argue unfairly. They devised a plan to lie about him. This was not a new tactic, or plan. It was the same plan that was used against Jesus at His trial (Matthew 26:59-60).

+ Then in secret they talked some men into lying about Stephen. They said, "We heard Stephen speak evil things against Moses. He also spoke evil things against God." - Acts 6:11

The elders and religious leaders heard the lies about Stephen. As we have seen, these leaders were anxious to put a stop to the preaching about Jesus. We can imagine they were more than ready to find fault with any of the believers, especially a leader such as Stephen. They had Stephen arrested and brought before them. Then, more men agreed to lie about Stephen. They said Stephen would not stop saying terrible things about the Temple and the Law of Moses (Acts 6:12-14).

Try to imagine how Stephen felt. He was faithful, truthful, and godly. He

Day #3 continued:

served others generously. Everyone who knew Stephen knew he was a man of incredible character. But now, one man after another came to tell lies about him. Stephen certainly had the right to be very angry. And since he was on trial before ruthless men, Stephen could have feared that his life was in danger. Yet, Stephen did not appear to be angry or fearful.

Then all the council members stared at Stephen. They saw that his face looked like the face of an angel. - Acts 6:15

This was not the face of a man who was terrified or furious. Stephen allowed the Holy Spirit to guide his every step and every word. Knowing that he was right where God wanted him, there was no reason for anger or fear. Stephen relied on the teaching of Jesus. Jesus knew these trials would come. He taught His disciples:

*"You **will** be brought before synagogues, rulers and authorities. But **do not worry** about how to stand up for yourselves or what to say. The Holy Spirit will teach you **at that time** what you should say." - Luke 12:11-12*



Jesus does not want us to be afraid, but to live in perfect peace (John 14:27). Just as Jesus foretold, every believer will be questioned about his or her faith at some time. At those times, PRAY for God's Holy Spirit to give you the words to speak. We cannot make a mistake when we rely on the Spirit to control our words.

Day #4: Stephen Speaks

Many men spoke lies about Stephen in court. They were breaking the 9th Commandment which says, "You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor," (Exodus 20:16). They swore that Stephen had spoken evil against Moses and against God.



The high priest asked Stephen, "Are they telling the truth about you?" - Acts 7:1

How would you answer this question? Most of us would probably shout a resounding, "NO!" But Stephen answered according to the Holy Spirit's leading. Stephen gave his answer in the form of a speech. He spoke in great detail of the history of the Israelites, also known as the Jewish people. He told of the wonderful promises God had made to Abraham and how God had fulfilled them. He told how Abraham listened to God, and by faith, obeyed Him. He told of the events in Abraham's life and about his descendants, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph.

Stephen spoke respectfully of Moses. He said that Moses was born an Israelite but was raised by Pharaoh's daughter. He told of how God heard the cries of His people in slavery and God chose Moses to lead His people. He told how God moved His mighty hand in Egypt to free them from slavery. And Stephen boldly stated that the Israelites refused to obey Moses, and instead chose to worship an idol.

Stephen talked about the tabernacle, built according to God's perfect plan. He spoke of how their forefathers carried the tabernacle with them through the wilderness, and that King Solomon built a temple after they had been in the Promised Land.

Throughout his speech, Stephen quoted Scripture. There was NO error in what he said. Every word was true and accurate. He did not speak evil against Moses or God. Every member of the high priest's council, known as the Sanhedrin, knew they could not deny a word of what Stephen said. Clearly, Stephen was speaking the words that the Holy Spirit gave him. His words were packed full of Scripture. He went back to the beginning to explain God's plan for the forgiveness of sins. This is the same way that Jesus had explained God's plan to some of His followers.

Jesus explained to them what was said about Himself in all the Scriptures. He began with Moses and all the Prophets. - Luke 24:27



Certainly, we rely on the Holy Spirit to know when to speak and what words to use. But, we are also responsible to know what we believe. Study your Bible and listen to good teaching. The Spirit will help you

Day #4 continued:

understand and remind you of the truth you have learned (John 14:26).

Always be ready to give an answer to anyone who asks you about the hope you have. Be ready to give the reason for it. But do it gently and with respect. - 1 Peter 3:15b

Day #5: Final Words

After Stephen spoke about the goodness of God and the fulfillment of the prophecies, he directed his comments toward the religious leaders in front of him.

"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! 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. You deliberately disobeyed God's law, even though you received it from the hands of angels." - Acts 7:51-53 NLT

All of this was also true. These men were stubborn and unwilling to hear the truth, though God laid the truth in front of them over and over. Their ancestors were also stubborn - testing God repeatedly (Psalm 78:17-20). Their ancestors had killed the prophets (Matthew 23:37). And the men seated in front of Stephen had killed Jesus. They had disobeyed God's law in many ways (Luke 16:14, Matthew 12:14, 23:23), and shortly, they would disobey the law again by killing another innocent man (Exodus 23:7). Predictably, the men of the Sanhedrin were furious at Stephen's accusations.

When the Sanhedrin heard this, they became very angry. They ground their teeth at Stephen. But he was full of the Holy Spirit. He looked up to heaven and saw God's glory. He saw Jesus standing at God's right hand. "Look!" he said. "I see heaven open. The Son of Man is standing at God's right hand."



When the Sanhedrin heard this, they covered their ears. They yelled at the top of their voices. They all rushed at him. They dragged him out of the city. They began to throw stones at him to kill him...While the members of the Sanhedrin were throwing stones at Stephen, he prayed. "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit," he said. Then he fell on his knees. He cried out, "Lord! Don't hold this sin against them!" When he had said this, he died. - Acts 7:54-60

Many times in Scripture we read that Jesus is seated next to the Father in heaven (Luke 22:69, Revelation 14:14). But how does Stephen see Him? Jesus was standing. Imagine seeing someone you love suffering. If you were not allowed to go to that person, you certainly could not keep your seat as you watched him in pain. Jesus rose to His feet and welcomed Stephen into heaven. Stephen's last words were so similar to those of his Savior, "Father forgive them..." (Luke 23:34) Stephen left the suffering and false accusations of this world and entered the peace and joy of heaven. His joy was finally complete, and his reward in heaven would be great.

Blessed are you when men hate you, when they exclude you and insult you and reject your name as evil, because of the Son of Man. Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, because great is your reward in heaven. - Luke 6:22-23a NIV



It is amazing to think that Stephen was **falsely accused**, yet remained at peace, while the religious leaders were **rightly accused** and became enraged. What was the difference? Stephen was filled with God's Holy Spirit of truth and peace (John 14:17, Romans 8:6). With the Holy Spirit in control of us, we can withstand anything, and know that all things will work together for good. Pray DAILY to give control of your life to the Holy Spirit.

And we know that God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to his purpose for them. - Romans 8:28 NLT