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**OPEN THE CONVERSATION**Take some time to build relationships with the students:

* Ask for each student’s high and low from the week.
* Today’s RBQ (Relationship Building Question): If you had to give a speech to a crowd of thousands, what would your topic be? (Serious or silly!)

**INTRODUCTION**

Have you ever felt left out, misunderstood, or even mocked because of what you believe? Maybe you’ve tried to do the right thing, but it still cost you something—like a friendship, your reputation, or your comfort. The truth is, following Jesus isn’t always easy. In today’s lesson, we’re going to look at the story of Stephen, the first Christian to be killed for his faith. Even though his story happened nearly 2,000 years ago, it has a lot to say to us today—especially when it comes to standing strong in our faith. Through Stephen’s courage and the early church’s response to persecution, we’ll see how God can use even the hardest moments in our lives to bring hope, spread truth, and help others see who Jesus really is.

**What does it mean to be persecuted for your faith? Have you ever faced opposition or felt pressure because of your faith in Jesus? What was that like?**

***READ ACTS 6:8-12***

1. Stephen was described as full of grace and power. How do you think that helped him in this moment? Is there someone in your own life that you would describe that way? What stands out about them?

***READ ACTS 7:51-60***

1. In this passage, the religious leaders respond with anger to the truth that Stephen shares. How do people today sometimes respond similarly when they hear truth that challenges them and why do you think that is? Share an experience you’ve had or example that comes to mind.
2. Stephen lived and spoke the truth of Jesus boldly. What fears do you personally wrestle with when it comes to sharing your faith and how does the story of Stephen offer encouragement?
3. How is Stephen’s ability to stand firm in this moment and his focus on Jesus connected?Where is your focus currently? What would it look like to shift your focus to Jesus and be better prepared for a Gospel conversation this week?

***READ ACTS 8:1-4***

1. Acts 8:4 shows how God ultimately used the death of Stephen to spread the Gospel and grow the Church. How does that encourage you in your own efforts to share your faith—even when it’s hard?

**WRAP UP**

**Put today's lesson into action: *Where is God asking you to be “full of grace and power” in your everyday life and keep showing up with his love and truth even though it might be hard?***

Keep leaning into those gospel conversations. Keep showing hospitality for the sake of the gospel. Pray for specific lost people this week, that they may come to life in Jesus Christ.

**EXTENDED CUT**

**Context**: Acts 6:8–8:4 tells the powerful story of Stephen, one of the early church's Spirit-filled leaders, who boldly preached the gospel among Greek-speaking Jews in Jerusalem. Unable to refute his message, his opponents falsely accused him of blasphemy and brought him before the Sanhedrin. In response, Stephen delivered a lengthy speech recounting Israel’s history, emphasizing how God's work often occurred outside the Promised Land and how Israel repeatedly rejected God’s chosen leaders—including Jesus, the Messiah. His speech challenged Jewish nationalism and temple-centered worship, laying the theological foundation for the Gospel’s global mission. Enraged, the religious leaders dragged Stephen out and stoned him—making him the first Christian martyr. His final words echoed Jesus, as he entrusted his spirit to Christ and asked for his killers to be forgiven. Stephen’s death sparked widespread persecution, especially against Greek-speaking believers, leading to their dispersion and the further spread of the Gospel. This event also marked the emergence of Saul (later Paul) as a fierce persecutor of the church.

1. **Stephen was described as full of grace and power. How do you think that helped him in this moment? Is there someone in your own life that you would describe that way? What stands out about them?**

Stephen being described as full of grace and power tells us that he was deeply connected to God and led by the Holy Spirit. That kind of strength and character doesn’t just show up in a crisis—but rather is something that’s built over time through faith, prayer, and trust in God! Because he had that foundation, Stephen was able to stay calm when opposition rose up against him. He was able to speak truth boldly in a way that verse 10 tells us his enemies, “could not stand up against.” Is there someone in your own life who reflects this kind of strength of character in their relationship with God? A parent, mentor, group leader, or friend maybe? How do you see it lived out in their life?

1. **In this passage, the religious leaders respond with anger to the truth that Stephen shares. How do people today sometimes respond similarly when they hear truth that challenges them and why do you think that is? Share an experience you’ve had or example that comes to mind.**

When people hear truth that challenges them—especially truth from God's Word—they often respond with anger, just like the religious leaders did with Stephen. That’s because truth has a way of revealing things we don’t always want to see in ourselves. It can expose sin, pride, or areas where we’re living in a way that doesn’t line up with God’s design. Instead of humbling themselves, people may get defensive because it’s easier to reject the message than to admit they might need to change. But that doesn’t mean we should dim the truth to avoid conflict. Like Stephen, we are called to stand firm. In Matthew 5:13-16, Jesus tells his followers they are to be salt and light in the world. Salt preserves and brings out flavor—just like we’re meant to preserve what is good and stand out by living differently. Light shines into darkness and reveals what’s really there. So when we live and speak the truth of Jesus, it may cause a strong reaction, not because we’re doing something wrong, but because light exposes what’s been hidden! As Christians, we should seek to speak the truth with love, relying on the Holy Spirit for courage and compassion—just like Stephen did.

1. **Stephen lived and spoke the truth of Jesus boldly. What fears do you personally wrestle with when it comes to sharing your faith and how does the story of Stephen offer encouragement?**

Stephen’s boldness in speaking the truth about Jesus is inspiring. Though most of us would like to boldly stand for Jesus, we often wrestle with fears that hold us back from doing so. You might wrestle with the fear of being judged, rejected, or misunderstood. Or maybe you worry most about not having the right words to say or fear being labeled as pushy in a culture that preaches tolerance as a virtue. These fears can make it difficult to share the gospel, even when there’s a clear opportunity. But the example of Stephen reminds us that boldness in sharing Jesus is not something that comes as a result of our own strength! Rather, it comes from being filled with the Holy Spirit (Acts 6:10). Jesus prepared His followers for this kind of opposition, saying in Matthew 10:19-20, “Do not worry about how or what you are to speak… because the Holy Spirit will speak through you.” Knowing that God is present and working through those who speak in faith can help us overcome our fears and trust that God can use even simple words to make an eternal difference. We don’t have to be perfect, just willing.

1. **How are Stephen’s ability to stand firm and his focus on Jesus in this moment connected? Where is your focus currently? What would it look like to shift your focus to Jesus and be better prepared for a Gospel conversation this week?**

Acts 7:55 again emphases that Stephen was “full of the Holy Spirit” and tells us that he “gazed into heaven” where he saw Jesus standing at the right hand of God. It’s another reminder that Stephen’s strength didn’t come from trying harder or having any particular kind of gifting —it came from where his attention and focus was. Similar to Peter when he took those few steps of faith and walked toward Jesus on the water. With his focus on Jesus, Peter was able to do the miraculous. But when he put his gaze on the storm around him, he began to sink. (Matthew 14: 22-33). Hebrews 12:2 encourages us to “fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith.” The Enemy constantly throws distractions at us, designed to pull our focus off Jesus and onto other things, most often ourselves! Things like social media, pressure to fit in, or just the busyness of life can easily crowd out our best intentions to keep our eyes on Jesus. Before we know it, we’ve drifted away from time with God. But if we want to stand strong when our faith is tested, like Stephen did, we have to be intentional with keeping our focus on Jesus. That means making time for prayer, reading the Bible, worship, and being part of a community that helps us grow! A *consistent* relationship with Jesus is what gives us the courage and clarity to share our faith—no matter what comes our way.

1. **Acts 8:4 shows how God ultimately used the death of Stephen to spread the Gospel and grow the Church. How does that encourage you in your own efforts to share your faith—even when it’s hard?**

Acts 8:4 says, “So those who were scattered went on their way preaching the word.” Even though Stephen’s death was tragic, and the church was facing intense persecution, God uses it to spread the Gospel farther than ever before. It’s a reminder for us that even when things seem painful, unfair, or out of our control, God is still at work! Our efforts to share Jesus—no matter how small or difficult—are never wasted. Romans 8:28 says that “God works all things together for the good of those who love Him,” and we see that clearly in how the early church grew through hardship. Even when it feels scary to speak up about our faith or seems like no one is listening, we can trust that God is doing more behind the scenes than we can imagine or see. Our job is to be faithful, and trust God with all the rest.