Preschool–Grade 6

Stephen

Sunday School Lesson for Preteens (Ages 11–12), 45–60 minutes

Main point: Stand strong for Jesus, full of faith and the Holy Ghost, and forgive the people who hurt you, because God can save anyone.
Bible passage: Acts 6:1–15 and 7:54–8:2. Students read them out loud themselves.
Memory verse: "And Stephen, full of faith and power, did great wonders and miracles among the people." *Acts 6:8 (KJV)* and "And he kneeled down, and cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge. And when he had said this, he fell asleep." *Acts 7:60 (KJV)*
You need: a Bible for each student, paper or a notebook and a pen for each student, a whiteboard and a marker, and one take-home sheet for each student.
Before class: read Acts 6–8:3. Write both memory verses on the board. Decide who reads which verses, or go around the room a few verses each.

1. Opening game: Easy or Hard to Forgive? (5–10 minutes)

Name one side of the room "easy to forgive" and the other side "hard to forgive." Read each situation, and students walk to the side that fits. 1) A friend forgets to save you a seat. 2) Someone tells a lie about you to the whole class. 3) A classmate laughs at you for praying. 4) Someone breaks something you love and won't say sorry. Ask: *What makes some things so hard to forgive?* Say: "Stephen faced the hardest kind, and he forgave."

2. Bible story: Students Read It (15 minutes)

Read out loud: Acts 6:1–15. Students take turns, a few verses each. Old words in this passage:

- **murmuring** (6:1): grumbling; **daily ministration**: the daily care given out
- **of honest report** (6:3): known to be honest; **proselyte** (6:5): someone not born a Jew who joined the Jews' faith
- **resist** (6:10): stand against, win against; **suborned** (6:11): secretly got men to lie
- **blasphemous** (6:11): speaking against God; **council** (6:12): the leaders who judged the people
- **false witnesses** (6:13): people who lied about him; **stedfastly** (6:15): steadily, without looking away

Tell the middle part in your own words: Stephen answered the council with the history of Israel: God's call to Abraham (Acts 7:2), Joseph sold by his brothers, "but God was with him" (7:9), Moses (7:20–44), the tabernacle and Solomon's house for God (7:44–47). He ended by telling them they always resisted the Holy Ghost, as their fathers did (7:51).

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Read out loud: Acts 7:54–8:2. Old words in this passage:

- **cut to the heart** (7:54): here, stung and furious; **gnashed on him with their teeth**: ground their teeth in anger
- **the Son of man** (7:56): a name Jesus used for Himself; **the right hand of God**: the place of power and honor (Exodus 15:6)
- **stopped their ears** (7:57): covered their ears so they wouldn't hear; **with one accord**: all together
- **lay not this sin to their charge** (7:60): don't hold this sin against them
- **fell asleep** (7:60): a gentle Bible way of saying he died (God's people who die are "present with the Lord," 2 Corinthians 5:8)
- **consenting** (8:1): agreeing with it; **devout** (8:2): faithful to God; **lamentation**: loud sorrow and crying

3. Questions to ask (15 minutes)

1. Stephen started by serving widows (6:1–5). What does it tell you that a man chosen to serve tables was "full of faith and power" (6:8)?
2. The men could not answer Stephen, so they told lies (6:10–13). Why do people sometimes attack the person when they can't answer the truth?
3. Stephen's face was "as it had been the face of an angel" (6:15). Where do you think his peace came from?
4. Stephen prayed, "Lord, lay not this sin to their charge" (7:60). Compare it with Jesus' prayer in Luke 23:34. What does forgiving someone mean, and what doesn't it mean?
5. Saul held the witnesses' clothes and agreed with Stephen's death (7:58; 8:1). Later, as Paul, he said he was "standing by, and consenting" (Acts 22:20). How do you think Stephen's prayer and Saul's later life fit together?
6. Where in your life is it hardest to stand strong for Jesus? Who could stand with you?

4. Memory verse (5 minutes)

Read both verses together. Then students cover one phrase at a time and quiz a partner. Say Acts 6:8 this week; keep working on Acts 7:60 next week too.

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5. What this means for us (5–10 minutes)

Say: "Stephen was 'full of the Holy Ghost' (Acts 7:55). That same gift is for you. God loves you, and 'all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God' (Romans 3:23, KJV). Jesus is God manifest in the flesh, God who came as a man (1 Timothy 3:16). 'Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures' (1 Corinthians 15:3–4, KJV). We obey the gospel the way Peter preached it: 'Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.' (Acts 2:38, KJV) We **repent**, turning from sin, and our old self dies (Romans 6:6). We are buried with Jesus by baptism in His name, all the way under the water. **Remission** means our sins are washed away, and we rise to walk in newness of life, a brand-new life (Romans 6:4; Acts 22:16). And God fills us with the Holy Ghost, and we speak with other tongues as the Spirit gives utterance, which means as He gives the words (Acts 2:4). Jesus called this being born of water and of the Spirit (John 3:5)."
Pray with the students, and encourage them to talk with their parents and pastor about being baptized in Jesus' name and filled with the Holy Ghost. Never pressure a child.

6. Activity: Journal (10 minutes)

Each student writes privately. No one has to share. Write these three prompts on the board:

1. Where do I need courage to stand strong for Jesus this week?
2. Who do I need to forgive? (You can write only their first letter.)
3. Write a short prayer for that person, like Stephen prayed in Acts 7:60.
   If there is time, invite a few volunteers to share one sentence.

This week: stand strong for Jesus in one hard moment, and pray by name for someone who has hurt you.

7. Prayer

"Dear God, fill us with faith and with Your Spirit, like Stephen. Give us courage to stand strong for Jesus, peace when people are against us, and hearts that forgive. Thank You for loving us and making a way to save us through Jesus. In Jesus' name, amen."

Telling the hard part honestly: preteens can hear that Stephen was stoned (7:58) and that Saul agreed with it (8:1). Keep the details short. If a student is grieving, point to Stephen's prayer, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit" (7:59), and to 2 Corinthians 5:8. **Forgiving** someone does not mean what they did was all right, or that a child must stay where they are being hurt; if a student tells you someone is hurting them, tell your pastor or children's director right away.

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