



LEADERS' GUIDE

The goal of this guide is to lead people into being bold witnesses for Christ like Stephen was. Be careful not to let the discussion take a dogmatic or pressuring tone, but keep it inspirational. It's really geared for believers so be sensitive if there are unbelievers present.

WARM-UP

Do you prefer to 'rock the boat' or 'keep the peace'? Why?

Have you ever been falsely accused or treated badly for doing good? How did you respond?

Share a high and a low from the past week.

Another usable question could be: 'Have you ever been opposed in some endeavor? How did it feel? How did you respond?'

WORD

"Now Stephen, a man full of God's grace and power, performed great wonders and signs among the people. Opposition arose, however, from members of the Synagogue of the Freedmen (as it was called)—Jews of Cyrene and Alexandria as well as the provinces of Cilicia and Asia—who began to argue with Stephen. But they could not stand up against the wisdom the Spirit gave him as he spoke. Then they secretly persuaded some men to say, "We have heard Stephen speak blasphemous words against Moses and against God." So they stirred up the people and the elders and the teachers of the law. They seized Stephen and brought him before the Sanhedrin. They produced false witnesses, who testified, "This fellow never stops speaking against this holy place and against the law. For we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and change the customs Moses handed down to us." All who were sitting in the Sanhedrin looked intently at Stephen, and they saw that his face was like the face of an angel."

- Acts 6:8-15 (NIV)



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INTRODUCTION

Stephen, a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit (6:5), and one of the seven leaders chosen to help take care of the Greek widows (6:1-7), began doing many wonders and signs.

If you or someone in your group has a testimony of God's miracle power, you could pause right here and share that story to inspire faith that God continues to work miracles. And the fact that Stephen performed these miracles demonstrates that miracles weren't limited to the apostles.

Opposition arose against Stephen from members of the Synagogue of the Freedmen. The Synagogue of the Freedmen was a gathering of Jews who either had been Roman slaves or were the descendants of Roman slaves. Acts 6 adds that the members of this Synagogue were from Cyrene and Alexandria (both in North Africa) and Cilicia and Asia (both in Turkey).

As Stephen spoke to the Jews, he was filled with God's grace and power (6:8). Unable to resist the Spirit and the wisdom with which he spoke (as Jesus had promised in Luke 21:15), they resorted to false witnesses to stir up the people, elders, and scribes. Brought before the Sanhedrin (the council of Jewish religious rulers), Stephen was charged with blasphemy against the temple and the law of Moses.

See John 2:13-22, the Jewish leaders mistook Jesus' prophetic reference to his own death and resurrection as blasphemy against the temple because of his use of the word 'temple' in reference to his body.

The chapter ends with the council looking at Stephen and in his face the face of an angel (6:15).

DISCUSSION

1. What words are used to describe Stephen in Acts 6:8-15? What kind of man do you think he was? Using your imagination and the description given here, describe Stephen in your own words.



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DISCUSSION CONTINUED...

2. Why do you think the Jews were opposed to Stephen? How does their opposition differ or agree with the opposition of the Sanhedrin Acts 5:27-28?

3. What two adjectives would you use to describe yourself and your spiritual walk? How would your life be different if you were a person whose life was described as 'full of grace and power'?

It might be good to define 'grace' – the unmerited favor of God, how different if we walked in the humility that invited grace (James 4:6), and defined 'power' – miraculous enablement, seeing miracles through our lives.

4. How bold are you in sharing your faith? What kind of opposition do you or would you face? Would it be similar to what Stephen faced?

No correct or incorrect answers here, just comparing the answers from #2 to the answers here in #4.

APPLICATION

1. Where might you have an opportunity to share Jesus this week?

2. What steps can you take to be a person of full of grace and power this week?

3. How can this group be a support for each other as we seek to share Christ with a community that can sometimes be unwelcoming, if not hostile to the Gospel?



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PRAYER

Ask God for opportunities to share Jesus with people whose hearts are ready to receive him, and for the boldness to step into those opportunities.

Ask God to fill you with grace and power.

Ask God to help us as a church to be full of grace and power and to preach the gospel boldly.