

WE LAY DOWN OUR LIVES TO PROCLAIM GOSPEL TRUTH

YEAR: KNEEL / FOCUS: LIVING ON MISSION / SERIES: ACTS

BIG TRUTH: WE LAY DOWN OUR LIVES TO PROCLAIM GOSPEL TRUTH

Mark 8:34-36; 1 John 3:16; Philippians 1:21; 2 Corinthians 4:5; Colossians 1:24; Mark 16:15; Luke 9:60

BIBLE VERSE: ACTS 7:56-58

“And he said, ‘Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.’ But they cried out with a loud voice and stopped their ears and rushed together at him. Then they cast him out of the city and stoned him. And the witnesses laid down their garments at the feet of a young man named Saul.”

BIG IDEAS

- We pursue grace and power to speak with the wisdom of the Holy Spirit.
- We proclaim who God is and what God has done.
- We faithfully follow Jesus until the end no matter the cost.

BIBLE PASSAGE: ACTS 6:8-7:60

KNEEL: LIVING ON MISSION

The Kneel Year is an exploration of what it means to worship God with our all (Luke 10:26-28) and to use our influence to lead others to do the same. We know that as we pursue a life of worship, we will pursue a life of both wisdom and mission. Throughout this year we will study and pursue the wisdom of God through the book of Proverbs and the mission of God through the book of Acts, and we will learn how both of these things must inform and shape our influence as Jesus followers!

SERIES AIMS



Every student should know...

- The gospel has the power to turn the world upside down.
- They are empowered and chosen to be a gospel witness in the world.
- Our salvation has come by grace alone.



Every student should feel...

- Comfort that the Lord is with them wherever they go.
- Hope in the God of salvation.
- Responsible to use their influence to live for Jesus alone.



Every student should strive to...

- Read, study, and meditate on the entire book of Acts.
- Memorize the Bible verse each week.
- Pray consistently for boldness to make Jesus known.



Every student should want...

- To pursue faithfulness in living on mission.
- To share the gospel with people in their lives who do not know Jesus.
- To sacrifice their personal freedoms for the sake of the gospel

GUIDES AND WORKOUTS

The Guide provides a commentary page on each week’s Bible verse and on each Big Idea that unpacks the Big Truth. Each week also includes a Student Workout as a resource to help the student pursue spiritual disciplines on their own. Additionally, each week has a Family Workout that helps equip parents and guardians to have spiritual conversations with their student.



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Believers boldly tell others what Jesus did for them.

Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.

- Stephen boldly told others of the salvation he had received through his own faith in Jesus. He did this by proclaiming Jesus as the Son of Man and declaring to others that Jesus was the Christ. By acknowledging Jesus’ identity to others, Stephen boldly told others who he knew Jesus to be and who they should believe Him to be.
- Believers know Jesus as their Savior. They know that they are redeemed because of Him, and they boldly tell others about the salvation they have received because of Him. They tell others even when it brings persecution upon them. They share with others even when it means they lose their physical lives.

Believers risk their lives to share the Gospel.

“And he said, ‘Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God. But they cried out with a loud voice and stopped their ears and rushed together at him. Then they cast him out of the city and stoned him.”

- Proclaiming the Gospel means that believers will place themselves in situations that could bring trouble to them. Telling others about Jesus means believers must be willing to risk their reputations and their lives to point people to the saving grace of Jesus.
- Stephen was willing to give up his life to tell others about Jesus. His life was not worth keeping if it meant remaining silent about Jesus. Instead, he willingly lost his life to tell others who Jesus was and how to receive forgiveness for their sins.

Believers willingly die for the Gospel.

“Then they cast him out of the city and stoned him. And the witnesses laid down their garments at the feet of a young man named Saul.”

- Stephen lost his life because he boldly told others about Jesus. He was stoned to death because he refused to remain silent about Jesus. Instead, he willingly laid down his life so that he could proclaim to any who could hear that Jesus is Savior.
- Believers boldly tell others about Jesus and do so knowing they could lose their lives. They go to places that are risky and they count their earthly lives worth losing for the sake of the world hearing that Jesus is Savior. They willingly die to spread the Gospel.

WE LAY DOWN OUR LIVES TO PROCLAIM GOSPEL TRUTH

BIG IDEA #1: WE PURSUE GRACE AND POWER TO SPEAK WITH THE WISDOM OF THE HOLY SPIRIT.¹

[THIS]

As the work of the early church was growing, the needs of the people were also growing. Acts 6 shows us that the disciples chose Godly men to meet some of these needs. Stephen was chosen as one of these men to help minister to those in need in Jerusalem. Stephen was a Godly man who exhibited great faith and was full of the Spirit of God. He was bold in his faith because he was full of the Spirit. Acts 6:8-10 shows us that Stephen was full of grace, power, and the Spirit. These three things empowered him to successfully proclaim Christ to those around him. When Stephen spoke, he spoke not from his own wisdom or knowledge, but from the wisdom of the Spirit who was leading Him. He pursued these things and from that pursuit was able to share Jesus with those around him. Having the grace and power to speak with the wisdom of the Holy Spirit didn't keep Stephen from facing persecution. He faced great persecution because he proclaimed Christ boldly, but he faced with the grace and power of the Holy Spirit.

[THEREFORE]

Practically, what does it look like to pursue grace and power from the Holy Spirit in your daily life?

The disciples are examples of what it means to pursue grace and power. Paul is also an example of pursuing grace and power. In 1 Corinthians 2:4, he speaks of preaching in the power of the Holy Spirit. The author of Hebrews speaks of the grace and power of the Holy Spirit in Hebrews 4:16. Our pursuit of Christ is our pursuit of the Spirit's grace and power through daily spiritual disciplines, like a study of the Word and prayer.

[THIS]

Stephen spoke with the wisdom of the Holy Spirit and because of this, his oppressors could not stand against him. This didn't mean that they couldn't take his physical life, but they couldn't overpower the truth he was speaking. Believers understand that their earthly bodies may be overcome, but the truth they speak in the wisdom of the Holy Spirit cannot be overcome. When we pursue grace and power to speak this truth in the wisdom of the Holy Spirit, it has power that is beyond anything in this world. As followers of Christ, our pursuit of Him must be a pursuit of this grace and power. To follow Christ is to pursue the grace and power that involves gaining the wisdom of His Spirit. We do this to make His name famous in all the world.

[THEREFORE]

How does our pursuit of earthly wisdom interfere with our pursuit of Godly grace and power?

Earthly wisdom is folly compared to Godly wisdom as Proverbs 21:30 reminds us. Colossians 2:8, 1 Corinthians 3:19, and Ephesians 4:14-15 help us understand the significance of pursuing Godly wisdom. To use the Godly wisdom available to us, we need the grace and power of the Holy Spirit.

Read Acts 6:10. How have you proclaimed Christ using the wisdom of the Holy Spirit?

When Stephen spoke, he spoke in the wisdom of the Spirit and the truth he spoke could not be withstood. When we proclaim Christ walking in the power and grace of the Spirit, the truth we speak is the truth that comes from the Spirit. It is powerful and mighty. We do not have to worry about what we speak but can rely upon the Spirit to guide us. Luke 12:12, Matthew 10:20, and Mark 13:11 assure us that the Spirit will guide us.

1. Acts 6:10: Stephen proclaimed Christ in the power and grace of the Holy Spirit. He spoke with the wisdom of the Spirit.

WE LAY DOWN OUR LIVES TO PROCLAIM GOSPEL TRUTH

BIG IDEA #2: WE PROCLAIM WHO GOD IS AND WHAT GOD HAS DONE.²

[THIS]

Acts 7:1-53 records Stephen's interaction with the high priest of the synagogue. Stephen's speech in these verses proclaimed truth about who God is and what He had done. Stephen began with God's call of Abraham and followed the history of God's people through to Moses. Stephen proclaimed what God had done and in doing so, he angered the religious people. The truth he proclaimed was a mirror, reflecting the sin in their hearts and their rejection of the true Messiah. Stephen did not hesitate to continue speaking truth though it cost him his life. After they heard his words, they were so angry they wanted to kill him. Proclaiming truth about God is foolishness to those who reject Him. To those who believe, it is good news.

[THEREFORE]

How does Stephen's boldness to tell others who God is and what He has done encourage you to do the same?

In Acts 7:1-53, Stephen did not let the reactions and responses of the religious people deter him from telling them who God is and what He had done. Instead, he continued sharing the truth about God. When we see Stephen's boldness, we should be encouraged to speak boldly in all situations.

[THIS]

To proclaim who God is, we must first know Him personally. To know Him personally, we must know Jesus. The early church is a picture of believers who had a knowledge of God through their saving knowledge of Jesus. Their encounter with the Christ led them to a deeper and more personal understanding of who God is. In Acts 7, Stephen spoke of God as a person who knew Him personally and intimately. He spoke of God with authority and in the power of the Holy Spirit because Stephen was full of the Spirit. When we proclaim who God is because we know God, we will do so in the same way. Stephen also spoke of what God has done. For those whose lives have been changed by God, they cannot help but tell others. Stephen's life was different because he was changed by the work of Jesus. He told others, not even considering what it would cost him. When we proclaim the truth, we tell others what God has done so they, too, can know Him like we do.

[THEREFORE]

Do you desire to tell others what Jesus has done for you? Why or why not?

Romans 10:13-14 shows us the connection between someone telling and someone hearing the good news of the Gospel. One must tell it for another to hear it. When we are changed by Jesus, we will tell what He has done for us to others. This desire comes from our own personal relationship with Him.

How does fear keep us from boldly proclaiming what God has done sometimes?

Often, we let our fleshly fear keep us from proclaiming boldly. We place our eyes on fleshly things instead of eternal things. 2 Timothy 1:7 reminds us that we are not given a Spirit of fear. Matthew 10:28 teaches us that we should not fear those who hurt our physical bodies, but we should fear what will take our souls. Stephen exemplifies not fearing those who take our earthly bodies by proclaiming truth at all costs.

2. Acts 7:1-53: Stephen boldly proclaimed all that God had done and told others who God was. He was unashamed.

WE LAY DOWN OUR LIVES TO PROCLAIM GOSPEL TRUTH

BIG IDEA #3: WE WILL FAITHFULLY FOLLOW JESUS UNTIL THE END NO MATTER THE COST.³

[THIS]

Acts 7:54-60 finishes the story of Stephen. As we read the rest of his story, it seems that his bold actions led to his oppressors' victory over him. They silenced his proclamation of the Gospel by stoning him to death, yet Stephen's story lived on. The oppressors took his earthly life, but they could not rob his soul. They could not take the joy he found in obedience to God. As Stephen's life faded, he did not cry out for justice for himself but mercy for those who were sinning against him and rejecting God. The last words they heard from him were words pointing them to God's mercy and grace. These words painted a picture of the Spirit at work inside of one of Jesus' followers. Stephen faithfully followed Jesus to the end of his life, laying down his life for the sake of telling others who Jesus is and what He had done.

[THEREFORE]

Read Acts 7:54-60. What does Stephen's faithfulness to the end and his prayer for his persecutors teach you about faithfully following Jesus?

Stephen did not let the response of his persecutors silence him. He did not cry out for rescue or justice. Instead, he faithfully asked God to have mercy on the people oppressing him, revealing that his proclamation of the truth was in hopes of their redemption.

[THIS]

Following Jesus means faithfully doing so no matter the cost to us. Jesus even tells His disciples to count the cost before setting out to follow Him. If we are to be faithful to the end, then we will lose valuable things. We may even lose our lives. Persecution is part of the Christian life and those who seek to avoid it will avoid living faithfully for Jesus. Instead, those who follow Jesus will faithfully follow Him even when it costs them everything. They will persevere through the most difficult of times and continue to walk in obedience just as Stephen did. They will tell others who God is and what great things He has done because their own lives have been transformed and there really is no other way.

[THEREFORE]

What perspectives keep us from believing that proclaiming the Gospel is worth the cost of our lives?

In Matthew 10:39, Jesus teaches that if a person wants to find his life, he must lose it. He is not speaking out of both sides of his mouth. Instead, He is teaching that we must be willing to give up this life on earth to gain an eternal life. We must always live with this perspective if we are to live in a way that considers proclaiming the Gospel worth any cost.

How does the Holy Spirit help us follow Jesus faithfully when the cost is high to us?

The Holy Spirit is our Helper and works in us in our times of greatest need. John 14:26 and Romans 8:26 help us see that He is always with us, especially when we need Him the most. When the cost to follow Jesus is the greatest, we can trust that the Holy Spirit will be with us, just as He was with Stephen in Acts 7:59-60.

3. Acts 7:60: Stephen lost his earthly life because he boldly proclaimed the Gospel. He proclaimed no matter the cost to himself.