**1. Motivate**

Whom do you believe are the true heroes in our world today?

* pastors

A video introduction to the lesson is available. Watch it at <https://tinyurl.com/4jctf535> . If you don’t have wi-fi where you teach, it is best to download the video file to your computer from <https://tinyurl.com/2th6emcd>

* missionaries
* public school teachers
* fist responders – firemen, police
* people who perform acts of unsolicited kindness
* people who rise above great hardship to succeed
* evangelists
* single parents who hold their family together
* people who speak out against the ungodly culture of our day
* unwed mothers who do not abort their baby
* ministries that support unwed mothers

**2. Transition**

Only by faith do these people ultimately succeed.

* Bold faith helps advance the Kingdom of God

**3. Bible Study**

3.1 Church and Community

Listen for exponential growth.

Acts 6:3-7 (NIV) Brothers, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them 4 and will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word." 5 This proposal pleased the whole group. They chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit; also Philip, Procorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas from Antioch, a convert to Judaism. 6 They presented these men to the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them. 7 So the word of God spread. The number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly, and a large number of priests became obedient to the faith.

The early church needed men who would oversee some of the social ministries within the groups. What were the qualifications they established for this ministry?

* known to be full of (controlled by) the Spirit
* men with wisdom (more than just knowledge)
* men of faith (one of the qualities mentioned of Stephen)

Why do you think those qualities are essential for advancing God's Kingdom?

* it was more than just administration
* it was a spiritual ministry
* they needed to make good judgements, to be fair, to be just
* it was part of the spiritual outreach of the church, they had to be believers

What additional qualities do you think would be important which might not have been mentioned here?

* honesty
* good head for organization
* attitudes of kindness and generosity
* willing to offer encouragement along with the distribution of material needs
* able to help the widows/widowers and their families in other practical ways (dealing with government officials, fix-it tasks around their homes, act as mentors for their children)

Scripture is specific about ministry to widows … what other kinds of needs might be overlooked in the overall ministry of a congregation in our society today?

* elderly who need transport or help around their homes
* young couples who live away from their families and are dealing with a new baby
* children who attend a church but their parents do not – need for Christian role model
* people who have recently lost a spouse due to a death who need help dealing with legal issues
* single parents who need babysitting now and then
* unmarried singles who need fellowship, guidance, encouragement, even health support

How did they prepare these men for their ministry?

* they came before the apostles
* the apostles prayed for them
* they “laid hands” on them – a sort of formal ceremony dedicating them to the activity for which they had been chosen.

What does this special service say to us about the importance of this “administrative” ministry?

* it is just as important a ministry as preaching
* administrative tasks might be less visible but are significant in the overall ministry of the church
* *all* believers need to realize that God values and equips them for important tasks within the circle of fellow Christians where God has placed them

3.2 Invite God to Work Through Us

Listen for eloquence of speech.

Acts 6:8 - 10 (NIV) Now Stephen, a man full of God's grace and power, did great wonders and miraculous signs among the people. 9 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. These men began to argue with Stephen, 10 but they could not stand up against his wisdom or the Spirit by whom he spoke.

What does it mean to be "full of God’s grace and power"?

* Stephen’s actions and attitudes display God’s presence in his life
* God’s Holy Spirit was present in his life
* Paul hadn’t written it yet, but Stephen’s life was showing the Fruit of the Spirit … love, joy, peace, …
* the miracles that were being demonstrated gave validity to what he was preaching

If Stephen were alive today, how might other religious groups oppose him?

* start a smear campaign in social media
* get him arrested for all manner of fake charges
* stage demonstrations where he was preaching
* maybe even try to get him assassinated
* bring legal suits against him

What kind of opposition might the evangelical church face today?

* IRS might harrass a church organization’s tax free status
* neighbors complain about noise, traffic, a big church sign, a big flag
* city pass an ordinance about door to door ministries
* a parent accuse a children’s Sunday School teacher of trying to brainwash their child
* a pastor’s public statement or letter to the editor bring threats
* the disgruntled spouse a new convert may carry out physical threats against the church or pastor

Verse 10 says that the opponents "could not withstand the wisdom and the Spirit with which he was speaking." How does Stephen's wisdom come from God, and how can we apply this to our own spiritual lives?

* Stephen had known the teachings and ministry of Jesus
* he was able to communicate what he knew and experienced
* for us, we have the whole of Scripture
* knowing and applying what God has given us in the Bible
* living our lives according to God’s Truth in Scripture
* submitting to the direction and empowering of God’s Holy Spirit, same as Stephen

What can we do to prepare ourselves to stand firm and speak with grace and boldness, like Stephen, when we are opposed?

* be asking God to display through us the Fruit of the Spirit … love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness, and self-control
* be studying and thinking on God’s Word daily
* pray for wisdom, grace and boldness
* memorize scripture
* study and practice giving a salvation witness – check out the “15 Second Testimony”

3.3 Faith that Meets Opposition

Listen for deceitful actions.

Acts 6:11-15 (NIV) Then they secretly persuaded some men to say, "We have heard Stephen speak words of blasphemy against Moses and against God." 12 So they stirred up the people and the elders and the teachers of the law. They seized Stephen and brought him before the Sanhedrin. 13 They produced false witnesses, who testified, "This fellow never stops speaking against this holy place and against the law. 14 For we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and change the customs Moses handed down to us." 15 All who were sitting in the Sanhedrin looked intently at Stephen, and they saw that his face was like the face of an angel.

Stephen faced false accusations and manipulation of his words. How should believers respond when their faith work is misrepresented or attacked?

* do NOT lash out in anger, don’t try to get even
* pray for those who oppose and abuse
* like the disciples, thank God that we are worthy to suffer with Jesus
* know that your ministry is being effective because you see Satan trying to hinder it
* work all the harder
* may need to respond in rebuttal in a calm and gracious manner

Both Jesus and Stephen faced false accusations and were put on trial before religious leaders. What do these parallels suggest about the cost of following Christ?

* God’s Truth will be opposed
* many in today’s world do suffer severely for their professed faith
* in our society it is possible to occasionally suffer derision and be made fun of
* in some situations, in recent times, a Christian stance has suffered legal repercussions
* even standing outside an abortion clinic, silently praying has resulted in someone’s arrest
* we can encounter peer pressure against living a life of purity

What character qualities help a person face conflict or opposition?

* faith in God’s power and authority
* tenacity, perseverance, single-mindedness
* assurance that God is with them
* Fruit of the Spirit … love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness, self-control

In what specific ways can you advance God's Kingdom in your current circumstances, even if you anticipate pushback?

* “water” the planting of the “seed” of the word with prayer
* be aware of in what ways or ministries God is blessing and proceed with those efforts
* make sure your ministry is of the very best quality – God’s kingdom deserves the best
* keep all activities above board … no sneaky or deceptive tactics
* minister with kindness and love, pray some more
* praise God for His presence and power at work in your ministry

Use the last page as a handout so your learners can take home the application points of this week’s lesson.

Application

Compassion.

* Search out someone with physical or spiritual needs.
* Strive to meet those needs with God’s grace and guidance.
* Seek no recognition but to serve God and people with humility.

Companionship.

* Never forget that the Holy Spirit resides in every believer, including you.
* Know that He will be with you and guide you to carry out your mission to tell others about Jesus, regardless of the consequences.
* Trust Him by reaching out to someone far from God this week.

Continuation.

* Continue to obey God’s Word and share the story of His love for the world.
* Help others to do the same.
* Challenge family, friends, or coworkers to share God’s amazing grace.
* Gather together afterward to give praise for what God has done.

Cryptogram Puzzle



This is a scrap of a manuscript found in the area of the Waitthern Meengand peoples of ancient Mesopotamia. From other similar manuscripts, we have the key to the symbols shown below. The “Hello World” example shows how the alphabet works. Help us decrypt this message from what appears to be from the early church there. Technical assistance can be found at <https://tinyurl.com/2th6emcd> Other Fun Family Activities are also available.