

Stephen's

Bad Day

The Point: Jesus saves us.

Scripture Connect: Acts 6:8–7:1; 7:51–60

Supplies for all Session 11 activities options: pencils, prepared poster, Bible, 1 fist-size stone, masking tape, newspaper, paper

The Basics for Leaders

This was Stephen's first sermon, and he had a tough audience. The very people who saw to it that Jesus was arrested and killed were in the crowd—and Stephen knew it.

This was the perfect time to try and avoid mentioning things that would arouse the anger of the men who wanted to harm Stephen. But that's not what Stephen did. He told the truth—the *whole* truth—and paid the price for it as a flurry of rocks hurt and killed him.

Bad day? A painful one, certainly, but not a bad one.

Stephen understood that the angry men gnashing their teeth and threatening him weren't his only audience. God was in the audience too, and God was pleased.

Did Jesus save Stephen? Not his body, but Jesus never promised to keep his followers from dying. Jesus saved Stephen's *soul*—something only Jesus could do.

It's true—Jesus saves us!

OPENING ACTIVITY—OPTION 1

HOWZITGOIN’

Time: about 5 minutes, depending on attendance

Supplies: pencils, prepared poster

Before kids arrive, draw a line on a poster. Write a 1 on the left end of the line, a 10 on the right, and a 5 in the middle. As kids arrive, ask them to pencil in their initials on the line.



Say: If this past week was so awful you wish you’d slept through it, place your initials by the 1. If it was a great week you wish you could repeat, put your initials by the 10. Place your initials anywhere on the line that shows how you feel about this past week—except exactly on the 5. Because there’s no such thing as a week that’s exactly half good and half bad!

After kids have signed in, give them 30 seconds each to explain why they placed their initials where they did. Be sure to include your own initials and explain your placement on the line. Kids will begin to express themselves more over time, and hearing their stories will help you adapt this lesson to make it relevant to your kids’ lives.

OPENING ACTIVITY—OPTION 2

TURN THE KEY

Time: about 10 minutes

Supplies: none

Explain that in a few moments you’ll ask one child to leave the room while the rest of the children circle up. (Have a small group? You can be the “circle” alone, if necessary!)

While the “outcast” child is out of earshot, you and the others will decide on one action that opens up your circle and lets the outcast in. It may be touching a nose, blinking twice—anything that the child can do. Don’t determine a secret password; it’s unlikely the outcast will ever guess that word.

Call the temporarily exiled child back into the room. Say: **You have been shut out of the circle, but there is a way to get back in—if you can guess what it is. You will have help. You can ask five yes and no questions to help you determine what action gets you in the circle.**

If a child guesses the way in, give him or her high fives. If the way in is not determined, choose a new “outcast” and play again. Play several rounds and then have your group discuss:

- **How was this activity like or unlike real life?**
- **What actions get you admitted to the groups you want to join at school?**

Say: **If you want to enter into a friendship with God, there's just one way: through Jesus. A man named Stephen said this, and it created a problem for him. Today we'll explore what happened to Stephen and that even in difficult times, Jesus saves us!**

Bad Days Game

SAVE ME!

Time: 10 minutes or more, as desired

Supplies: none

Say: **There are so many ways you can get in trouble and need help. Let's act some out. I'll call out a situation, and you act out how you'd look if you were in that situation. Ready?**

Here are a dozen situations ... feel free to add your own!

You jumped into the deep end of the pool, and you can't swim.

You walked into the opposite sex's restroom by mistake.

Your bike is about to crash into a wall.

You just found out there's a test, and you're not ready.

You just took a big drink of spoiled milk.

You're late coming home—you decide to sneak into the house.

Your left foot is on fire.

Someone dropped an ice cube down your back.

You fell asleep in class and woke up to find everyone looking at you.

You're walking and slip on ice.

You accidentally glued your thumbs together and have to pull them apart.

You have a heavy box to lift and wish you had some help.

Say: **Great job! You're all qualified to be movie stunt doubles! Get with a partner and find a place to sit as we discuss some important questions! Discuss:**

- **Would you rather be the person giving help ... or getting it? Why?**
- **How do you feel when you have to ask someone for help?**
- **In what ways do you need Jesus's help?**

Say: **We need more than Jesus's help. We need Jesus to save us—something a man named Stephen discovered. Let's dive into his story!**

Bad Days Bible Story

TO STONE OR NOT TO STONE

Time: about 15 minutes

Supplies: Bible, 1 fist-size stone

Hold up the stone. Say: **Let's think together, *What could we do with this stone?***

Take and affirm suggestions. When suggestions slow down, say: **Or we could throw it at someone and hurt him. That would get a reaction!**

Say: **In New Testament times, stones were used a lot of ways. Most of the time it was for building, but if someone blasphemed God or even spoke his name, it was considered**

AGE-ALERT TIPS

This is a long passage for **younger children** to process. If you have mostly **younger children**, modify the lesson in this way:

Alert #1: Paraphrase Acts 6:8–7:1 and 7:57–60.

This allows you to soften some of the more brutal parts of this story while still communicating that Jesus didn't spare Stephen's earthly life but brought him into heaven.

disrespectful to God. That person was sometimes punished by having heavy stones thrown at him.

People threatened to punish Jesus with stones because Jesus said he was God's Son. Today we'll explore a time when people punished a Christian named Stephen with stones.

I'll play the part of Stephen. You play the part of the crowd. Let's find out what happens and if Jesus protects and saves Stephen.

You decide if I say anything untrue or if I disrespect God. If so, vote to hit me with a stone. I'll place this stone over here (set it at least five feet from where you'll be as you're reading), and the first time I say something untrue or disrespectful of God, go stand next to it—but do not throw the stone. Ready?

Read aloud Acts 6:8–7:1; 7:51–56. Then say: **Okay, it's almost time to vote. But first let's discuss a few questions together.** Discuss the following as a whole group or have kids discuss each with a partner.

- **Has Stephen said anything untrue?**
- **Has Stephen disrespected God?**
- **Do you think it's fair to stone Stephen?**

Ask for a vote. If children want to let Stephen go, have them stand along the wall opposite the stone. If they want to punish and stone Stephen, have them go and stand beside the stone on the floor.

Say: **So we can expect Jesus to save Stephen, right? Let's see!** Read aloud Acts 7:57–60. Ask:

- **What happened in the story?**
- **Why didn't Jesus save Stephen, or did he?**

Listen to and affirm answers. Then say: **Jesus saved Stephen, but not in the way we might have wanted. We think that not being in pain and not dying are the best things possible. But really, being with God in heaven is the best thing. Loving and serving God is the best thing. Following Jesus is the best thing.**

Jesus took great care of Stephen. Jesus just didn't save his earthly life—Jesus saved Stephen's eternal soul. And Jesus can save us too!

CLOSING PRAYER

SAVE ME PRAYER

Time: about 5 minutes

Supplies: none

Ask children to sit in a circle, facing outward so they can't see one another. Say: **In old cartoons when someone is drowning, he raises one index finger when he slips under the water the first time, two fingers the second time, and three fingers the third and last time. We're going to do that too as a prayer.**

I'll mention three things many people need Jesus to save them from. If it's something you need Jesus's help with, raise one, then two, then three fingers. You won't see one another, but God will see you. Please close your eyes.

Pray: **Dear God, we need Jesus to save us. Some of us have done wrong things we need you to forgive through Jesus. If you've done something wrong and need to be forgiven, raise one finger. Silently tell God what you've done.** (pause)

Some of us find it hard to follow you, Jesus. We forget to listen to you. We don't pray, read the Bible, or grow in our friendship with you. If you ever forget to do what Jesus asks you to do, raise two fingers. Tell Jesus about how you need his help being faithful. (pause)

Some of us don't tell others about you, Jesus. If you find it hard to tell friends about Jesus, raise three fingers. Tell Jesus why you find it difficult. (pause)

Please help us, Jesus. Save us from what gets between you and us. Amen.

EXTRA-TIME ACTIVITY—OPTION 1

HORSESHOE SHOES

Time: about 10 minutes

Supplies: masking tape, newspaper

Tape a sheet of newspaper to the floor and position children to stand at least 15 feet away. Ask children to remove their shoes.

Explain that this is a game like horseshoes: a tossed shoe completely on the paper is worth three points, one partially on is worth one point. It's legal

to knock another player's shoe off the paper. Play several rounds. Then have children put their shoes back on.

Say: **In some things—like the game of horseshoes—“almost” is close enough to earn points. But in truth telling, being absolutely truthful and not just close to the truth is important. Stephen did that and paid a price. How truthful are you willing to be about Jesus when you have the chance to tell others?**

EXTRA-TIME ACTIVITY—OPTION 2

YOU TOO?

Time: about 5 minutes

Supplies: 1 sheet of paper and 1 pencil for every group

This activity works best with older kids.

Ask children to form groups of two or three. Give each group a sheet of paper and a pencil. If you're playing with young children, be sure to pair them with older kids who can write down answers!

Say: **You're about to play a game called You Too? In two minutes or less, I want you to discover 10 things you have in common. And not easy stuff like “We both have ears” or “We both think you're handsome/beautiful.” Find unusual things like “We both speak French” or “We both have 17 letters in our middle names.” Write down what you have in common as you go. Ready? Start now!**

At the end of two minutes, ask groups to share some of their You Too? discoveries. After they're finished, say: **Here's another thing you have in common: Jesus wants to save you both. That's something everyone can have in common!**

EXTRA-TIME ACTIVITY—OPTION 3

INQUIRING MINDS WANT TO KNOW

Time: 5 minutes

Supplies: none

Gather kids in a circle. Ask: **If being saved by Jesus is such a smart thing, why don't all people want to have that happen?**