

Stephen Forgives His Accusers as They Stone Him

Acts 6:8–7:60



Worship Theme:



God is honored when we stand up for him.

Weaving Faith Into Life:



Kids will stand up for God in their worship.

| Session Sequence | What Children Will Do | Supplies |
|---|---|--|
| 1 Let's Praise God! <i>(up to 25 minutes)</i> | Sing <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "You Gave" (John 14:19b) • "Love and Pray" (Matthew 5:44) • "I Have Decided to Follow Jesus" • "No Matter What I'm Facing" • "Are You Going to Praise the Lord?" • "Living Inside Out" | KidsOwn Worship Kit: <i>KidsOwn Worship DVD</i> Classroom Supplies: 2 Bibles, video equipment, 2 large paper bags, marker, tennis balls |

Preschool

| Session Sequence | What Children Will Do | Supplies |
|--|--|---|
| 2 Let's Learn the Point! <i>(up to 25 minutes)</i> | Stand Like Stephen Hear the story of how Stephen stood up for Jesus. | Classroom Supplies: Bible, 2 stickers for each child |
| | * Stir Praising Make and use stick figures to praise God. | Classroom Supplies: 1 paint stir stick and 3 ounces modeling dough per child, markers, yarn, glue gun or glue, scissors |
| | Day and Night Sing a song to each other about standing up for Jesus. | |

Elementary

| Session Sequence | What Children Will Do | Supplies |
|--|--|--|
| 2 Let's Learn the Point! <i>(up to 25 minutes)</i> | * "Do Right" Watch a video, and talk about how and when to stand up for Jesus. | KidsOwn Worship Kit: <i>KidsOwn Worship</i> DVD Classroom Supplies: Video equipment |
| | * The First Martyr Hear the story of Stephen, the first martyr, and ask God to help them stand up for him. | KidsOwn Worship Kit: Balancing Birds |
| | Stand-Up Stickers Design window stickers that make statements of faith. | Classroom Supplies: 1 sheet of cling vinyl for every 4 kids, scissors, permanent markers |



| Session Sequence | What Children Will Do | Supplies |
|---|--|--|
| 3 Let's Pray! <i>(up to 10 minutes)</i> | The Offering Offer their gifts to God. | Classroom Supplies: Offering bowls, stickers from "Stand-Up Stickers" |
| | Stand Up and Praise Call out praise phrases. | |
| | Standing Strong Stand strong as they sing. | KidsOwn Worship Kit: <i>KidsOwn Worship</i> DVD Classroom Supplies: Video equipment |

* Starred activities can be used successfully with preschool and elementary children together. Customize your session to fit your needs. You can separate preschoolers and elementary children for Let's Learn the Point! Or, if you keep the children all together for the entire worship session, we suggest you choose from the starred activities.

Stephen Forgives His Accusers as They Stone Him

Acts 6:8–7:60

A lot happened in the early church between last week's lesson and this week's. The church continued to grow as God blessed it. Peter healed a crippled beggar at the temple gate, and the preaching of the apostles became so prominent that the Jewish leaders grew concerned. They didn't want the news about Jesus being spread. Finally they put Peter and John in jail, but the Jewish leaders were astonished at the two apostles' courage in standing up for Jesus, since Peter and John were not highly educated people. When confronted and told to stop teaching about Jesus, Peter and John responded by telling the Jewish leaders that they chose to obey God rather than people. As the church prospered, more healings and miracles took place, and the persecution of the apostles increased.

With the growth in the church came problems. Stephen was chosen as one of seven who would help administer the distribution of food so that no one would be left out. Notice that Stephen and the others were chosen not because of their administrative skills, but because they were "full of the Spirit and wisdom."

As we begin looking at today's passage, we see that Stephen did far more than administer food distribution! He is the first person who wasn't an apostle to be mentioned in Acts as performing a miracle. And he was definitely bold in speaking about Jesus! We see in Acts 6:9-14 that his opponents were so frustrated by the power and wisdom of his speaking that they decided to drum up false accusations against him to get rid of him.

Stephen's eloquent speech before the Sanhedrin in Acts 7 was no doubt intended to bring repentance on the part of the Jewish leaders. Though Stephen could have been more subtle, he likely felt what he had to say was so critical that he didn't dare water it down. He boldly proclaimed his faith in Jesus, while accusing the Jewish leaders of murdering the Messiah. Yet we know that the Jewish leaders responded in resentment and anger rather than repentance.

Notice that, as stones were picked up to execute Stephen, those preparing to cast the stones lay their clothing at Saul's feet. This is the same Saul who later became known as the Apostle Paul. We don't know exactly what Saul's role was at this point, but some feel this verse indicates that he was the authority presiding over Stephen's death. Whatever his role, he must have heard Stephen's speech, and after Jesus confronted him and he became a Christian, Paul took up where Stephen left off in boldly proclaiming the news about Jesus!

As Stephen was being slowly and painfully executed by stoning, he twice echoed similar words to what Jesus had said when dying on the cross. First Stephen offered his spirit to Jesus, as Jesus had offered his spirit to the Father (Acts 7:59; Luke 23:46). Then in his last words, he sought forgiveness for his accusers and killers, again following Jesus' example (Acts 7:60; Luke 23:34). Stephen had learned from Jesus how to face death with faith and forgiveness.

Devotion for Leaders

A growing relationship with Jesus produces faith and courage in the heart and life of a Christian. This courage allows us to speak the truth in the face of danger.

Weaving Faith Into Your Life: You may never be called upon to die for telling the truth about Jesus, but Christians have died—and continue to suffer and die—because of their outspoken faith and commitment to truth. Take a moment to thank God for men and women who, like Stephen, have given their lives for the sake of the gospel. How can you honor them in your life? You share in their work each time you tell the truth about the life and work of Jesus Christ.

Why We Worship for Leaders

Our God is a God of infinite love and power. God deserves our love, obedience, and unswerving loyalty. When we stand up for God, we show others that we don't care what anyone thinks—we only care what God thinks. When we stand up for God, we demonstrate to the world our love and devotion to him. God's name is glorified, and we bring him honor. Most of us will never have to die for our faith, but every day we face decisions about whether we'll live for our faith. Use this worship session to help children explore what it means to honor God by standing up for him. Lead them in joyfully worshipping a God who is worthy of our allegiance and faithfulness just because He Is and because he loves us so much.

Easy Prep for Leaders

Let's Praise God

- Make sure your video equipment is ready.
- Label a paper grocery bag "Christian 1." Label a second paper grocery bag "Christian 2," and place a heavy Bible in the bottom of it. Put several tennis balls and the labeled bags under a table in the worship area.

"Do Right"—Watch "Do Right" at least once before the worship session so you'll be familiar with it.

Stand-Up Stickers—Cut sheets of cling vinyl, available at craft stores, into fourths (approximately 4x6-inch pieces). You'll need one piece of vinyl and one or two permanent markers for each child. Make a sample sticker to show the children.

Preschool Activities—Refer to the preschool pages for preparations.

1 Let's Praise God!

Play KidsOwn Worship music videos as children arrive. Ask some children to stand at the door and welcome everyone who comes into the room. Ask the greeters to smile, shake hands, and say "Welcome!"

When all children have arrived, invite them to worship with you.

Say **We've come together today to worship God. Today we're going to talk about how we bring honor and glory to God when we stand up for him. People all over the world serve God with their loyalty and love. Let's start honoring God by standing to sing our first song.**

 Sing "You Gave" (John 14:19b).

Say **We just honored God by standing and singing a worship song. But standing up for God means a whole lot more than standing on our feet.**

- Ask** • **What does it mean to stand up for someone?** (Be willing to help the person; say good things about them.)
- **What does it mean to stand up for God?** (Talk about how great God is; do what God asks us to do.)
- **How does standing up for God honor him?** (We praise him when we talk about him; we show people that God is important.)

Say **Standing up for God means that we will do what's right even if others disagree with us. It means speaking the truth about God when others say things about him that aren't true. It means telling others about Jesus even if they think he's not real. Jesus was the perfect example of someone who stood up for God.**

- Ask** • **How did Jesus stand up for God?** (Jesus taught about God; Jesus died because God told him to.)
- **How did his actions honor God?** (Jesus showed that God is most important; people believed in God because of Jesus.)

Say **Jesus stood up for God. He spoke the truth about God even when people hated him for it. He obeyed God in everything, even though it meant being put to death on the cross. When he died on the cross, Jesus was standing up for us, too. He didn't stand up for us because of the great things we do; he died on the cross because he loves us and has mercy on us. Let's think about honoring Jesus by loving others as Jesus loves them.**

 Sing "Love and Pray" (Matthew 5:44).

Say **We stand up for God when we follow Jesus. Let's sing about that.**

 Sing "I Have Decided to Follow Jesus."

Say **Jesus showed us how to honor God by standing up for him. Because we have his example, we can stand up for God, too.**

Open your Bible to 1 Corinthians 16:13, and read it aloud.

- Ask** • **What does this verse tell us to do?** (Stand up for Jesus; be brave.)
- **How can we "stand firm" in our faith?** (Be truthful; tell about it.)

Put the "Christian 1" and "Christian 2" bags on the table where everyone can see them.

Say **Let's pretend these paper bags are kids just like you. We'll call them Christian 1 and Christian 2. They're trying to love God and know him better. Then one day someone teases them about being Christians.**

- Ask** • **Have you ever been teased about being a Christian or for going to church? What was said to you?**

Have a few volunteers share examples. Then give a tennis ball to each child who shared, and have the kids throw the balls at “Christian 1” and “Christian 2.” Make sure both bags are targeted.

Say ➤ **Teasing can hurt us. It’s like getting hit with these balls. But it’s important that we stand up for what’s right anyway.** Straighten out the bags if needed.

One day a friend told Christian 1 and Christian 2 that God isn’t real and said they couldn’t prove he is real.

Ask for volunteers to share about being told something untrue about God. Give each volunteer a tennis ball to throw at one of the bags, making sure both are targeted.

Say ➤ **One time Christian 1 and Christian 2 tried to tell a kid on their soccer team about Jesus. He laughed at them and said to forget it.**

Ask ➤ • **Have you ever tried to tell people about Jesus and felt bad because they wouldn’t listen? Explain.**

Give the tennis balls to volunteers who shared, and have them toss the balls at the bags.

Ask ➤ • **What difference did you notice between Christian 1 and Christian 2 when the balls hit them?**

Say ➤ **Christian 1 fell over a lot more easily than Christian 2 did. Here’s why.** Reach inside the “Christian 2” bag, take out the Bible, and show it to the children.

Christian 2 had the Word of God to help him stand! If we know God’s Word and keep the truth about God deep inside us, it’ll help us to stand strong for Jesus. Then we’ll bring honor to God. Let’s be like Christian 2. Let’s read God’s Word and talk to Jesus so we can be strong. Let’s honor God this week by telling others about the joy he brings no matter what we’re facing.

▶ Sing “No Matter What I’m Facing.”


Say ➤ **Are you going to praise the Lord? Are you going to take a stand for him when people say he’s not real? when they don’t believe in him? when they say it’s not important to do what’s right? God is honored when we stand up for him.**

▶ Sing “Are You Going to Praise the Lord?”

Say ➤ **God also gives us the Holy Spirit to help make us strong. The Holy Spirit will be with you and give you words to say. The Holy Spirit will fill you with God’s love for other people. Honor God by doing good to others. If you want God to strengthen you today, join me now in singing our last song. Let’s stand and tell God we want to honor him by standing up for him and living inside out.**

Worship Leader Tip

Use your judgment during this conversation, and adjust the discussion to your group and to what happens to the bags as kids toss the balls at them.

 Sing "Living Inside Out."

Pray ▶ **God, we worship you today because you are a good and holy God. You deserve our love and our praise. Help us, God, to honor you by standing up for you this week. Help us do what's right and good and to honor your name at home, at school, on the playground, and in church. In Jesus' name, amen.**


2 **Let's Learn the Point!**

Preschool Activities, pages 145-146

At this time, have the preschool leader invite the preschoolers to go to their own room for this section of activities. Tear out the Preschool Activities page, and give it to the preschool leader. Have the preschool leader bring the preschoolers back to participate in Let's Pray! with the older children. If you prefer to keep all the children together, do the starred (*) activities. They will work well with both elementary and preschool children.

Elementary Activities

*** "Do Right"**

 Show the video "Do Right." It shows a boy who must decide whether or not to be honest. When kids have watched the clip, have them form discussion groups of two or three. Make sure older children work with younger children. If you have adults who can help lead the discussions, you can have children form groups of up to five. Have groups discuss these questions:

- Ask** ▶
- **If you've ever faced a decision like this, what happened?**
 - **What did you learn from this video about how to stand up for God?**
 - **Why is God honored when we stand up for him?**

Give kids a few moments to tell specific ways they've stood up for God and what happened to them. Encourage kids to think of a time they were afraid to stand up for what's right but did it anyway. Ask what happened.


Say ▶ **Standing up for God means doing the right thing even when we don't have to or want to. God is honored when we stand up for him and do the right thing. He'll help us be strong, and he'll always be with us. Our God is an awesome God!**

(continued on page 147)

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Acts 6:8–7:60

Worship Theme:

 God is honored when we stand up for him.

Easy Prep for Leaders

Stir Praising—If you choose to use a hot-glue gun, put it where the children cannot reach it. Be sure to protect the surface under the glue gun, and be sure to unplug it as soon as this activity is over. It's a good idea to use a glue gun only if there's another adult in the room with you. Or you could glue the yarn onto the sticks before the session.

Using Theo

Consider using Theophilus the FaithRetriever puppet today in these ways:

- Have Theo lead the preschoolers from the main worship area to the preschool room.
- Have Theo select the children in the "Day and Night" activity.
- See the KidsOwn Worship Kit for a puppet skit written for today's worship session.



Stand Like Stephen

You'll need one or two stickers, such as stars or hearts, for each child.

Say Hello, preschoolers! We're learning today that God is honored when we stand up for him. Can you stand up? (Pause.) Can you lie down? (Pause.) Can you sit up nice and straight with your legs crossed? (Pause.) Good job, everyone!

Open your Bible to Acts 6:8–7:60, and show it to the children.

Say The Bible tells us about a brave man named Stephen who stood up for God. That doesn't mean he stood on his feet the way we just did. It means he spoke the truth about God even though he got in trouble for it. Stephen loved Jesus, and he loved people. He performed miracles and told people about Jesus. Some people didn't like hearing about Jesus because they didn't believe that Jesus is God. One day these people got so mad at Stephen that they threw stones at him to kill him. But he loved them anyway and forgave them. Stephen honored God when he stood up for him. We can be like Stephen and stand up for God, too.

Ask • What are some ways we can tell others about Jesus, just as Stephen did?

• What are other ways we can stand up for God?

Say We can be like Stephen and tell people, "Jesus loves you!" We can be like Stephen and learn Bible stories. We can be like Stephen and love God with all our hearts. Every time we do things like that, we honor God.

I have some pretty stickers here to put on our shoes to remind us to honor God by standing up for him. Think of a way you want to honor God. When I call your name, stand up and tell us what it is. Then I'll put a sticker on your shoe.

Continue the activity until everyone is standing. If children need help, prompt them with statements from the discussion. Then put stickers on their shoes.

Say Look at all of us standing up for Jesus! Our stickers can remind us to be faithful and stand up for God the way Stephen did.

Preschool Activities

* Stir Praising

Give each child a paint stir stick, and show the children how to make the sticks resemble themselves by using the markers to draw facial features and clothes. Working away from the children, use the glue gun to glue bits of yarn to the top and back of the stick for hair. Don't let the children touch the paint sticks until the glue has cooled (about 30 seconds each). When everyone has finished, have children sit on the floor with their stick people.

Say God is honored when we stand up for him. That means it makes God happy when we do what's right or tell others about him. Do you love Jesus? If you do, stand your stick person on the floor to show that you want to stand up for God.

Will you tell someone that Jesus loves him or her? If you will, hold your stick up in the air. When you obey your parents, you're doing what's right, so hold your stick up higher.

Do you like learning Bible stories? If you do, hold your stick even higher! If you want to honor God today, stand up and hold your stick as high in the air as you can reach!

Great job, everyone! Look at everyone who loves God! Let's honor God even more by jumping up and down and making our stick people go as high as we can!

End the activity by having children walk the figures to the table. Give each child a small piece of modeling dough and show him or her how to push the stick person into the dough to make it stand up on its own.

Say God is honored when we stand up for him. Now our stick people are standing up for God, too! We'll leave them here until it's time to go home. They can remind us to stand up for God by doing what's right.

Preschool Leader Tip

Paint supply stores are usually willing to donate stir sticks to schools and churches.

If you do this activity with elementary kids, have them name ways they can stand up for God. Then have them form pairs or trios and use their figures like puppets to act out scenarios in which one of them stands up for God. Have them perform their skits for the preschoolers.

Day and Night

Say We all want to honor God by standing up for him. That means we will tell others about him and do things that are right and good.

Let's sing a song to God to tell him we want to honor him by standing up for him. When I come to you, stand up and we'll sing the song about you.

Go to each child in turn. Have the child stand up, and place your hands on the child's shoulders as you sing the following song to the tune of "This Old Man."

This little boy [girl],

He'll [she'll] do what's right;

He'll [she'll] stand up for Jesus day and night.

With a knickknack, paddywhack,

Give this boy [girl] a hand.

He'll [she'll] honor God by taking a stand!

At the end of each verse, say, "And that means..." The children should respond, "He'll [she'll] do what's right."

(continued from page 144)

* *The First Martyr*

Help kids form five groups.

Say After Jesus' death and resurrection, his followers preached about him with all their heart everywhere they went. One of the believers was a man named Stephen. He was full of faith and the Holy Spirit. He did great wonders and miraculous signs among the people.

Many people didn't believe Jesus was God's Son. They hated the things Stephen said. They told lies about him, which caused everyone to hate him. They dragged Stephen to court. One last time Stephen challenged them to believe in Jesus. This made them furious, and they all rushed at him, dragged him out of the city, and began to stone him.

While they were stoning him, Stephen prayed, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." Then he fell on his knees and cried out, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them." Then he died.

Stephen was the first Christian martyr. A martyr is a person who is put to death because of his or her beliefs. Stephen was stoned because he preached about Jesus. When he stood up for God, Stephen brought great honor to God. Many people believed in Jesus because of Stephen's actions.

- Ask**
- Have you ever been afraid to tell someone about Jesus but you did it anyway? What happened? (My friend listened to me and didn't laugh; the person asked me to talk about something else.)
 - Has anyone ever gotten mad at you for believing in God or for doing what's right? How did you feel? (Yes, my friend didn't want to hear that God doesn't want us to steal, and I thought I might lose my friend, but I didn't; yes, my friend said I'm stupid.)

Say Have you felt afraid to speak the truth about God to someone? We all have. But God is honored when we stand up for him. He has given us the Holy Spirit to help us do and say what's right.

Set the beak of one of the Balancing Birds on your fingertip, and show kids how it works.

Say Notice that, even when I tip the bird, it doesn't lose its balance.

- Ask**
- What can we learn from this bird about taking a stand for God? (If we know God's Word, we'll be balanced; God can help us stay balanced so we don't fall.)

Say We might wobble a bit when someone pushes us, but we won't fall over because God is with us! The Holy Spirit and Jesus were with Stephen as he stood up for God, even to the point of death. Most of us will never have to face death when we talk about Jesus, but God promises to be with us no matter what the situation. Whether it's telling people that Jesus loves them or telling a friend not to steal, taking a stand brings honor to God.



Say ▶ Let's decide today that we'll honor God by standing up for him. I'm going to give each group a Balancing Bird. Each of you take a turn balancing the bird on your fingertip. As you do, say a one-sentence prayer asking God to help you take a stand for him. You might say something like, "Jesus, please help me invite someone to church," or "Holy Spirit, help me say no when someone tempts me to do what's wrong." Then the rest of the group should pray, "God is honored when you stand up for him."

Pass out the Balancing Birds, and circulate among the groups as they pray. Offer assistance as needed.

Worship Leader Tip

For extra fun, use paint pens (available at craft stores) to decorate the vinyl. Show kids how to put their stickers on a window so that they can't see the design and message, but people looking in can.

Stand-Up Stickers

Say ▶ We've been learning today that God is honored when we stand up for him. Let's make something fun to help us make a statement of our faith that tells others about Jesus.

Show kids the window sticker you made before worship.

Say ▶ Think of something you want others to know about God or your relationship with him. For example, you might write, "Jesus and Me—Best Friends Forever," or "Jesus loves you." Then decorate your stand-up sticker with the markers.

Brainstorm with kids about different designs or sayings they could write on their stickers. Kids may also want to cut their vinyl pieces into an appropriate shape, such as a cross or a heart. If they do cut a shape, encourage them to cut the shape as large as possible. Have extra vinyl on hand in case of mistakes, and have kids make extras for the preschoolers.

Say ▶ Our stickers are a fun way to stand up for Jesus. Put them on a car or bedroom window or a mirror at home or in your locker at school. Always be proud to let others know that you're a Christian. God is honored when you do.

3 *Let's Pray!*

The Offering

Put the offering bowls near a window or mirror, and give each preschooler a stand-up sticker.

Say ▶ Today we talked about how God is honored when we stand up for him. God loves us so much and promises to help us do that. As you bring your offering today, bring your stand-up sticker with you, and put it on the window. As you do, tell God you want to honor him by standing up for him. Then, if you brought an offering, place it in the bowl. When you go home today, you can take your sticker with you.

Take the offering.

Stand Up and Praise

Clear an area of the room by moving chairs and tables against a wall.

Say ▶ **Since God is honored when we stand up for him, let's do just that! Crouch down on the floor. Then we'll take turns calling out reasons to stand up for God—for example, "You are mighty!" or "You are Lord!" or "You are awesome!" When someone calls out a praise phrase, we'll all jump up to a standing position and clap and praise him with loud cheering. Then we'll crouch to do it again.**

Lead the children in praising God this way for several minutes.

Standing Strong

Say ▶ **Spread out around the room, and make yourself look strong. That's the way to stand up for God! We want everyone to know God. Let's honor him now by singing "This Little Light of Mine." Remember that the reason we stand up for him is because we love him and want everyone else to love him, too. Standing up for God honors him. Let's give God our strongest praise ever!**

 Sing "This Little Light of Mine."

Pray ▶ **Lord, thank you for being God. You are worthy of our praise. You are worthy of our standing up for you. Help us when we're weak, Jesus, to do and say what's right. Help us to tell others about you and your great love. Help us to make a real difference in our world. We want our lives to count! In Jesus' name, amen.**