

Bible Story 5-24-2020

After Jesus died and came back to life, and before He ascended to heaven to be with God, He left His disciples with a mission: to spread the news about Him.

God had given His Holy Spirit to the believers to help them with this big job. The good news of Jesus was starting to spread, and the new church was growing quickly. There were some people among the believers who needed food and special care, so Peter and the other disciples made a plan to make sure these people were taken care of.

Listen to their plan.

Open the Bible to Acts 6:2-4 (NIRV) and read.

“So the 12 apostles gathered all the believers together. They said, “It wouldn’t be right for us to give up teaching God’s word. And we’d have to stop teaching to wait on tables. Brothers and sisters, choose seven of your men. They must be known as men who are wise and full of the Holy Spirit. We will turn this important work over to them. Then we can give our attention to prayer and to teaching God’s word.”

“Men who are wise and full of the Holy Spirit . . .’

When people thought of men like that, Stephen was top of the list.

Stephen? Stephen and six other men were chosen to help care for the new believers. God filled Stephen with special grace and power to do this work

Not everyone was a fan of Stephen, though. There were some people who chose to argue with him, but the Holy Spirit gave him wisdom to answer them.

Eventually, Stephen’s enemies resorted to telling lies about him. They said that he had spoken against Moses and God, which wasn’t true. But the religious leaders took advantage of this opportunity to arrest one

of Jesus' followers. They arrested Stephen and brought him before their gathering: the Sanhedrin.

The leaders found people who were willing to tell lies about Stephen. The false witnesses stood and told lies in front of the Sanhedrin about Stephen, saying he was speaking against the law and Moses and even God. But Stephen didn't look upset. In fact, they noticed that his face was like the face of an angel as he stood against his accusers.

The high priest stepped up and asked Stephen if what the accusers were saying was true.

Stephen knew that God was with him. So even as he looked up at the angry faces that surrounded him, he had peace. He knew these people could do anything they wanted—even kill him. But he knew that he could trust God no matter what might happen next.

Stephen wanted the leaders to understand who Jesus was—that He was the fulfillment of a plan God had set in motion with Abraham so long ago. So he began to speak of all that God had done since the beginning of humankind. Listen to what he said to them.

Open the Bible to Acts 7:2-3 (NIRV) and read.

“The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham. . . . “Leave your country and your people,” God said. “Go to the land I will show you.”

Stephen continued the story of God's people, through Jacob and Joseph and slavery in Egypt. The religious leaders listened as Stephen spoke of God's work through Moses to free the Israelites and bring them to the Promised Land. They continued to listen as he reminded them of David and Solomon and the building of God's temple. Then Stephen came to the heart of the story. He accused the religious leaders of killing Jesus.

He said: Open the Bible to Acts 7:51-52 (NIRV) and read.

“You stubborn people! You won’t obey! You won’t listen! You are just like your people of long ago! You always oppose the Holy Spirit! Was there ever a prophet your people didn’t try to hurt? They even killed those who told about the coming of the Blameless One. And now you have handed him over to his enemies. You have murdered him.”

This made the religious leaders very angry. They were so mad they could hardly stand it. But Stephen calmly looked up and saw a vision of heaven.

Open the Bible to Acts 7:55-56 (NirV) and read.

“[Stephen] was full of the Holy Spirit. He looked up to heaven and saw God’s glory. He saw Jesus standing at God’s right hand. “Look!” he said. “I see heaven open. The Son of Man is standing at God’s right hand.”

The religious leaders finally couldn’t take it any more. They covered their ears and yelled to keep from hearing another word. They rushed at Stephen and dragged him out of the city.

They began to throw stones at him to kill him. The people who had told lies about him left their coats with a young man named Saul.

Stephen had been falsely accused, and now he was facing death for believing in Jesus. But Stephen’s very last words were filled with love.

Open the Bible to Acts 7:59-60 (NirV) and read.

“While the members of the Sanhedrin were throwing stones at Stephen, he prayed. “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit,” he said. Then he fell on his knees. He cried out, “Lord! Don’t hold this sin against them!”

When he had said this, he died.

Jesus had told His followers to live out His love everywhere. And through God’s power, Stephen continued to share God’s love to his very

last breath. I know this is a very sad end to the story. But here's the thing: it wasn't REALLY the end of the story for Stephen, because we can read the Bible and know that he went to be with Jesus.

Stephen could be brave and keep going—even when his life was in danger—because he knew the end of his life wasn't the end of the story. He knew that God was in control and that no matter what happened, he would be able to be in heaven with God forever.

You and I don't always know how things are going to end either, . . . but we can keep going because God knows the end of the story.

Let's talk to God about that now.

Dear God,
this story about Stephen is kind of hard to hear, especially if we don't keep in mind the end of the story. But Stephen was able to keep going because he knew he would be able to be with You forever. Whatever we might face in life, we know that we can keep going because You know the end of the story. Please help us to trust You and remember that You are always in control.

We love You,
we pray these things in Jesus' name,
Amen

Stephen got to be with God forever because he trusted Jesus. He decided to stand strong in what he believed. He was determined that everyone should be able to know the love of Jesus for themselves.

Stephen knew what he was risking, but he also knew that he could trust God, because God knew the end of the story.

Even though we don't know how everything in our lives will turn out, we follow a God who DOES know the end of the story.

WE are a part of His Big Story.

You see, God has always had a big plan—all throughout history. It started when He created people and wanted a relationship with us. When that relationship was broken, He had a plan to make the end of the story a truly happy ending where we can be with Him forever. That's why He sent Jesus to be our Savior.

Many of the people we read about in the Bible—like Moses and Abraham—had to keep going even though they didn't know the end of the story. They had faith Jesus was coming, but they didn't get to see the end of the story on this side of heaven. But WE get to see a lot more of the story! We know that God kept His promise and sent Jesus. So we know that we can trust God, and since He knows the end of the story, we can trust His story, too! We can trust His plan for our lives.

We can keep going because God knows the end of the story.

Say that with me.

Keep going because God knows the end of the story.

When it feels like everything is awful and you're not sure what to do, talk to God. It could be something really big, like if your parents are fighting or if someone you know is really sick or even dies. Or maybe it's just a bad day because you got in trouble or got a bad grade on a pop quiz. You can talk to God about it all. You can also talk to an

And at the end of the day, remember . . . you can keep going because God knows the end of the story.