

Field Guide and Leader Guide 10.18.26

The Book of Acts

Synopsis

How does someone pray for the people who are killing him? Stephen was falsely accused, dragged outside the city, and stoned. Yet his final words were prayers of trust and forgiveness. How does that happen? Acts keeps pointing us to the answer: Stephen was filled with the Holy Spirit. The Spirit empowered him to speak courageously, trust Jesus with his life, and love people who were showing him no love at all.

Now look at the religious leaders. These were devout people who believed they were honoring God. But they were furious while Stephen was peaceful. They rushed toward him in anger while he called upon Jesus. They threw stones while he prayed for their forgiveness. That should make us stop and take a look at ourselves. We can know Scripture, attend church, and serve faithfully while still resisting what God wants to change in us. When life squeezes us, what comes out? The Holy Spirit wants to shape our responses so people see Jesus in us, especially when responding like Jesus feels impossible.

Questions

1. ***When you're hurt, criticized, or treated unfairly, what tends to come out of you, and where do you need the Holy Spirit's help?***
 - **Follow-Up:** What makes it difficult to recognize or admit when your response doesn't reflect Jesus?
 - **Follow-Up:** The religious leaders believed they were honoring God. How can we recognize when we're defending ourselves rather than responding to His Spirit?
2. ***Think of a situation where you know how Jesus would want you to respond, but you feel pulled in the opposite direction. What might it look like to ask the Holy Spirit to fill you and take one step of obedience there?***
 - **Follow-Up:** What are you afraid might happen if you respond the way Jesus is calling you to?
 - **Follow-Up:** What specific step could you take this week, and how can this group support you in taking it?
3. ***Where are you relying on willpower to become more like Jesus? What might change if, instead of trying harder on your own, you asked the Holy Spirit to empower you?***
 - **Follow-Up:** Have you experienced God helping you respond in a way you couldn't have produced on your own? What happened?

- **Follow-Up:** What could help you make dependence on the Holy Spirit part of your everyday life, before a difficult moment arrives?

The religious leaders very sincerely want to know and follow God. They are not secular people. They are devoutly religious leaders.

But contrast:

They are furious when Stephen is peaceful.

They grind their teeth but Stephen has the face of an angel.

They rush toward him in anger. Stephen calls upon Jesus.

They throw stones. Stephen offers forgiveness.

Scripture References

Acts 6:3–5 | Acts 6:8–15 | Acts 7:51–60 | Ephesians 5:18 | Luke 23:34 | Luke 23:46

Conclusion

Most of us will never face a mob throwing stones. But we will face words that hurt, relationships that disappoint, and situations we cannot control. We know how we should respond. The struggle comes when we actually have to do it. Being filled with the Holy Spirit enables us to obey Jesus in those moments. We can ask for His help and trust Him to work in the places where our own strength keeps falling short.

Think about one situation you're facing right now. Before the conversation, before the frustration takes over, before you start building your defense, pause and pray, "Spirit of God, fill me. Help me respond like Jesus." Then take the next step of obedience. Tell the truth with love. Listen with humility. Begin forgiving. Let Him change what comes out of you so the people around you can see the One who lives within you.

