

WEEK 3 - Acts 7-9

Canopy Guide // Fall Focus 2025: The Spirit Acts

CONVERSATION STARTERS

Use the questions below to kickstart a community building, all-play conversation that connects to our weekly topic. If your group meets for dinner, these might be great questions to share around a table.

- What was a time when someone had to speak a hard truth into your life? How did you respond?
- How do you respond to a person who has a dramatic story of conversion or reconciliation? What emotions does that bubble up for you?

VIDEO INTRO: WEEK 3

STUDY GUIDE

In Acts chapter 6, we meet Stephen, one of seven men chosen to give attention to the needs of the widows in the daily distribution of food (6:1). From the beginning to the end, the Holy Spirit is at the center of Stephen's story. The very first thing we learn about Stephen is that he was "full of faith and of the Holy Spirit" (6:5). We are not introduced to Stephen through his nationality, status, family of origin, or any of the other identifiers we might expect. Instead, the best way to understand who Stephen is, is to know that he was filled with faith and with God. Only three verses later, Stephen is further described as "a man full of God's grace and power," (6:8) who was performing wonders and signs among the people.

This introduction sets the stage for his incredible story. When disagreements and arguments arose with Stephen and the "Freedmen", Acts tells us that "they could not stand up against the wisdom the Spirit gave [Stephen] as he spoke" (6:10). Rather than walk away or accept the Word that Stephen spoke, the Freedmen instead chose to call false witnesses and fabricate stories around Stephen's ministry. They testified that Stephen spoke against the holy place and the law. They testified that they had heard him say that Jesus would destroy the temple and the customs handed down by Moses.

Stephen gives a sermon outlining the whole of the Law and the Prophets - the very things

that his accusers say he has been speaking against (7:2-53).

While he would have known the law and the prophets from birth, his speech is the work of the Holy Spirit acting through him to proclaim the gospel in the face of opposition. The sermon culminates with the Spirit revealing to Stephen “the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God” (7:55). Filled with the Spirit, Stephen proclaims with confidence the good news that has come with Jesus. Upon hearing this, the Sanhedrin dragged him out of the city and stoned him. In final words that sound very similar to Jesus’ own words on the cross, Stephen gives up his spirit and asks for forgiveness of those who are stoning him to death (7:58-60).

Stephen’s story reveals that to be filled with the Holy Spirit means living like Jesus. The key things that Jesus did are done again by Stephen. He performs signs and wonders, preaches, faces persecution, sees a vision of God’s glory, and asks God to forgive his persecutors. Because of God’s presence with Stephen through the Spirit, Stephen lives and dies as Jesus lived and died.

In addition to Stephen we get to know Philip, another of the “deacons” named in chapter 6. But more than “waiting tables” he also was a spokesman for Jesus. He went to the usually despised and avoided area of Samaria where he had a dynamic response. Peter and John came there to support and endorse his efforts (encountering a partially converted magician who tried to profit materially from the Holy Spirit), but then Philip was instrumental in the conversion and baptism of a “neutered” African official.

Stephen and Philip’s story bumps right into the story of Acts’ most famous figure, Saul (later referred to as Paul). Saul, a Pharisee, stands by and approves of Stephen’s killing by the Sanhedrin (8:1). Saul was a staunch opponent of Jesus’s followers until he set out for Damascus on a mission to arrest “any who belonged to the Way” (9:2). God intervenes as Jesus speaks directly to Saul and he loses his sight (9:4). Then, the Spirit guides Ananias to Saul’s side, despite his initial misgivings, and allows him to restore Saul’s vision and baptize him (9:10-19). While Saul begins to preach and teach throughout the region, many members of the Church are skeptical of his conversion, as would make sense to most of us. However, the Spirit moves forward the work of Saul to expand the Church even further and bring a time of peace and strengthening to the Church (9:31).

Saul’s story demonstrates the power of the Holy Spirit to bring repentance. God intervenes in Saul’s life and reroutes his trajectory. Jesus confronts Saul for the harm he has brought about and gives Saul a chance to be initiated into the body of Christ. Immediately, once Saul is filled with the Spirit, he is ready to proclaim Jesus as Lord to his fellow Jews (9:20). Just as Jesus called his disciples to follow him and they immediately follow, Saul is invited by Jesus to follow him in proclaiming the good news. Because of the Holy Spirit, the same power that was with Jesus is with his followers - strength for boldness, repentance, forgiveness, and faith.

Scripture to Read: Acts 7-9

This semester we're challenging our canopies to read the book of Acts in total. This study will be the most meaningful if you read the chapters you'll discuss ahead of time individually AND if you read the week's chapters during your group meeting time aloud together. You can read individually all in one setting or parse it out through your week. The Bible app has a great audio version of the Bible you can use as well.

General Discussion Questions:

What's something in this week's reading you have questions about?

What is something in this week's reading that makes you think about your own life of faith?

Deeper Discussion Questions

1. What parallels do you see between Stephen's and Jesus' ministries?
2. Paul is the writer of many of the Epistles. Where do you see him talking about his life before the Road to Damascus? How does he speak of it?
3. Saul's life before meeting Jesus looked drastically different. This is true for many of us as well. How do you talk about your story before meeting Jesus and after meeting Jesus?
4. In light of Paul's conversion story, we all have our own encounter with the Holy Spirit. Was your conversion dramatic or a natural progression? What differences can you see between your life before Christ and after Christ? [Your story is not less if your conversion was not dramatic. All stories are valid and important in Christ.]

PRAYER

Invite the Spirit to use your story in a way that expands God's kingdom and helps you see how your story is oriented in the Big Story of God.

EXTRA RESOURCES/ARTICLES/RESEARCH

1. <https://hermeneutics.stackexchange.com/questions/1867/why-did-stephen-give-such-a-long-speech>
 - a. A helpful forum discussion of Stephen's speech.

An additional document full of resources that will benefit deeper study through the book of Acts and the Holy Spirit can be found here:

<https://grandviewchristian.org/fallfocus2025/>