



S2.Lesson 8: God & Conflict – Stephen’s Stoning

Middle School Lesson Plans

Supplies Needed: Journals; Handout; tv or laptop to show movie clip (movie clip link is available at rfour.org/curriculum.html)

OPENING PRAYER

TELL

- (After the class has gathered their notebooks)
- We're going to start with a brief activity today.
- Let's stand up in a circle (move middle table ahead of time)
- The object of this activity is to follow the commands I give you.
- The two commands that I will give you are
- “Mingle” which means you walk around in this space saying “mingle mingle mingle,” separating yourself from others, changing your location, etc.
- The other command I'll give you is a number. When I say a number while you're mingling, then you get into a group with that many people in it. If there are some of us left over, but not enough to make another group, then we just wait until the next command.
- After I say a number and we're in groups of that number, then I might say mingle, or I might call out the same number again. If I call out the same number, then you have to regroup, because you can't be in the same group with the same people.
- This activity ends when I say, “Last number!” I will then call out a number. Whoever does not get into a group that matches that correct number loses the game.

DO ACTIVITY

NOTE: Make sure the adults, including you, play. Give the students about 3 to 5 seconds to get in a group, then call out the next command. Keep them moving. **To end the activity, MAKE SURE you call out the number of however many are in the class (including adults) MINUS ONE. Then “sacrifice” yourself.** Let everyone win but you – unless there is someone else willing to lose, then discuss with that person who should join the group and who should lose.

ASK

- Was there anything difficult about this activity? If yes, what was it?
- How did you feel when you were not able to join the group?
- How easy was it to keep finding a new group?
- When the last number was called, were you tempted to not join the group? Why or why not?
- What did you think of my (or whoever else volunteered) willingness to let the rest of the group win? (it was dumb; it was great because then everyone else got to win!)
- What might have happened if we ALL had been like me (or whoever else lost) and had decided to not join the group on the last round? (then we all would've lost, but together)

TELL

- So what I did at the end of the activity was make a sacrifice. I surrendered my desire to win so that the rest of you could win.
- During this session, we've been talking about God and Conflict.
- In the first week of this session, we saw in the story of Jericho how God does not remove conflicts, but instead leads us through the conflict – in sometimes rather unconventional ways.
- In the second week, we compared how Jesus handled conflict to how his disciples handled conflict. (Jesus prayed beforehand, he surrendered to his enemies and then healed one of his enemies. The disciples didn't pray and then they attacked the ear of the high priest's servant).
- This week, we'll look more closely at surrender and sacrifice and why God calls us to do so in the face of conflict.

TRANSITION to Scripture

- The story we're going to read happens after Jesus' ministry and just after Pentecost (which we talked about in Session II).
- In this story, Stephen is one of the new joiners of the Church. And he was chosen to help lead the church. Let's see what kind of conflict arises and how Stephen deals with it.

READ ACTS 6:7-15 & 7:1; 51-60

7 The word of God continued to spread; the number of the disciples increased greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith. 8 Stephen, full of grace and power, did great wonders and signs among the people. 9 Then some of those who belonged to the synagogue of the Freedmen (as it was called), Cyrenians, Alexandrians, and others of those from Cilicia and Asia, stood up and argued with Stephen. 10 But they could not withstand the wisdom and the Spirit with which he spoke. 11 Then they secretly instigated some men to say, "We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses and God." 12 They stirred up the people as well as the elders and the scribes; then they suddenly confronted him, seized him, and brought him before the council. 13 They set up false witnesses who said, "This man never stops saying things against this holy place and the law; 14 for we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and will change the customs that Moses handed on to us." 15 And all who sat in the council looked intently at him, and they saw that his face was like the face of an angel.

ACTS 7

1 Then the high priest asked Stephen, "Are these things so?" 2 And Stephen replied:

(note: first Stephen reminds them all of their shared history as Israelites. He starts by talking about Abraham and ends with Moses before saying...)

51 "You stiff-necked people, with hard-hearts and muffled ears, you are forever opposing the Holy Spirit, just as your ancestors used to do. 52 Which of the prophets did your ancestors not persecute? They killed those who foretold the coming of the Righteous One, and now you have become his betrayers and murderers. 53 You are the ones that received the law as ordained by angels, and yet you have not kept it." 54 When the council heard these things, they became enraged and gnashed their teeth at Stephen. 55 But filled with the Holy Spirit, Stephen gazed into heaven and saw the glory of

God and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. 56 "Look," he said, "I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!" 57 But they covered their ears, and with a loud shout all rushed together against him. 58 Then they dragged him out of the city and began to stone him; and the witnesses laid their coats at the feet of a young man named Saul. 59 While they were stoning Stephen, he prayed, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." 60 Then he knelt down and cried out in a loud voice, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them." When he had said this, he died.

ASK

- In Acts 6:8, what do we learn about Stephen?
- In 6:9 – 14, what happens?
- Have you ever been accused of and gotten in trouble for something that isn't true?
- When that happens to you, is your face like an angel's? Or are you angry and upset and saying things like "That's not fair!?"
- Does Stephen in chapter 7 answer the question in 7:1? (No.)
- What does Stephen do instead? (he tells the story of the Israelite people and how as a people, they keep saying no to God, and how the Council is living out their history all over again).
- So up to this point, Stephen has matched what has been done to him, right?
- They've traded accusations, right?
- But when Stephen was accused, what did his face look like?
And now that the Council has been accused, what do their faces look like? (verse 54 and 57)
- What is the Council's response? (violence)
- At this point, Stephen does not match the response of the Council. What does he do instead? (verse 59 and 60 – he prays; then dies).
- What other choices did Stephen have? (He couldn't run because he was under arrest. He could've begged for his life and renounced what he was saying – but that would've undermined what he was teaching and saying; he could've fought and still died. However, if he had fought, then its very likely that the rest of the Church (it was small at the time, new and fragile) would've been targeted even more quickly and strongly as an uprising and therefore wiped out. By not fighting, Stephen showed up the Council and saved the rest of the Church.
- But that was a costly move, wasn't it?
- During the game, I (or so-and-so) sacrificed winning so that everyone else could win.
- Stephen by God's instruction (or so we can assume since he's praying), gives up his life so that the Church can live.

If there's time (at least 10 minutes) go to next step; if less time, skip down to **TELL/Conclusion:**

TRANSITION to Movie Clip

- We're going to watch a movie clip that illustrates this point.
- Gandhi is talking with his fellow countrymen about India.
- They are trying to free India from British rule.
- They've had some success and some setbacks.
- The British massacred a large amount of protesters and in retaliation, some people of India attacked a British police station in India.
- In the conversation we're about to watch, the men are discussing the continued desire of the

- people of India strike out at the British.
- Let's see what Gandhi's response is....

WATCH Gandhi Clip

ASK

- What does Gandhi say he'll do if there is violence (He'll fast)
- This means as long as there is violence in India, he will not eat.
- For what reasons does he come to this conclusion (That an eye for an eye makes the whole world blind; that he wants no part of India being on the move if it results in murder and bloodshed)
- How are Gandhi's thoughts/actions comparable to Stephen's? (Gandhi is willing to give his life for the life of India, just as Stephen was willing to give his life for the life of the Church. What's different is that we're not very clear about how Gandhi comes to this conclusion. Stephen, we know at least from the story, was paying attention to God.

TELL/Conclusion

- That concludes Session III.
- A quick review of Session III is as follows...
 - God does not remove obstacles/conflicts from our lives
 - But God will lead us through those conflicts if we pay attention to God
 - God will most likely lead us through those conflicts in unconventional ways, including surrender and sacrifice.
 - In order to know how God will lead us through the conflict, we need to pray and then be obedient to what we hear.

CLOSING PRAYER