

# Lesson 5







## Where We're Going

We will learn that loving God and loving our neighbor is at the core of our faith, understand that love is an action and not necessarily an emotion, and examine how our definition of love may have been tainted by society and the norms of our culture.



## Get Them Going

Ask your class if they believe it is possible to love someone without liking them. Follow up by asking the class what they think love is. Give them a minute or two to think about it and to answer with their honest opinions.



## Arguing about Love

**J**eanie and Donald were arguing again. Even though they were only three years into their marriage, the same issues arose. He felt alone, and she felt taken for granted.

"I think you love some idea of me," Jeanie said. She could hear the groan in Donald's throat when she spoke, but she wouldn't back down. "It's true. You won't agree. In fact, you'll deny it, but you don't really love the real me." Donald shook his head and sighed.

"Well?" she asked.

"Well what?" Donald continued.

"You know what I'm going to say, and I know what you're going to say. We keep saying the same things over and over."

"Then what do you suggest we do about it?" Jeanie whispered sarcastically, matching her tone with his.

"I have no idea," he replied.

Jeanie glared at him. He pulled his chair up to the table and folded his hands as if to pray. She knew that he was trying not to be like his father, a man with four ex-wives. Jeanie hated that they couldn't just have a healthy, loving relationship.

"I don't know either," she said.

"I'm sorry, Jeanie. I wish I could be something else to you, that I could love you in a way that would be pleasing to you," Donald said sadly.

"I'm not looking for you to be something else," she snappily replied.

"It sure feels that way. We should get some help. I hate to admit it, but we're messed up." Donald looked at Jeanie for the first time since the argument began. "Maybe I'm messed up," he continued.

"I probably should say we're both messed up," Jeanie responded.

"But you don't think that, do you?" he asked, smiling.

She smiled and said, "I think our pastor can help us find a good counselor."

"Okay," Donald said, "I'll email him right away."

Thus, the fighting ended for the day. Together, they would seek help.

"Let's watch a movie," Donald said, and a truce prevailed for the evening.



## Real Talk

1. Do you know of couples who have struggled to love each other with a godly love, as described in the story?
2. What could Jeanie or Donald do differently to respond to one another in love?
3. When it comes to loving others according to 1 Corinthians 13, what are your personal strengths and weaknesses?



## The Big Picture

First Corinthians 13 is known by most as the "love chapter." Paul is addressing the church at Corinth because there was much debate over spiritual gifts and which of the spiritual gifts were considered to be the best. Paul teaches in the previous chapter about the diversity of spiritual gifts, but he then goes right into chapter 13, explaining to the believers at Corinth that without love, the exercising of their spiritual gifts is meaningless.



## The Players

**Corinth.** Located in southern Greece, about 50 miles from Athens, the Corinth of the ancient world was actually a city that had been destroyed by Rome in 146 B.C., and then rebuilt by the emperor, Julius Caesar in



## Make It Stick

“Three things will last forever—faith, hope, and love—and the greatest of these is love.” (1 Corinthians 13:13, NLT)



## The Word (NLT)

**Hebrews 13:1** Keep on loving each other as brothers and sisters.

**2** Don't forget to show hospitality to strangers, for some who have done this have entertained angels without realizing it!

**3** Remember those in prison, as if you were there yourself. Remember also those being mistreated, as if you felt their pain in your own bodies.

**1 Corinthians 13:1** If I could speak all the languages of earth and of angels, but didn't love others, I would only be a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal.

**2** If I had the gift of prophecy, and if I understood all of God's secret plans and possessed all knowledge, and if I had such faith that I could move mountains, but didn't love others, I would be nothing.

**3** If I gave everything I have to the poor and even sacrificed my body, I could boast about it; but if I didn't love others, I would have gained nothing.

**4** Love is patient and kind. Love is not jealous or boastful or proud

**5** or rude. It does not demand its own way. It is not irritable, and it keeps no record of being wronged.

**6** It does not rejoice about injustice but rejoices whenever the truth wins out.

**7** Love never gives up, never loses faith, is always hopeful, and endures through every circumstance.

**8** Prophecy and speaking in unknown languages and special knowledge will become useless. But love will last forever!

**9** Now our knowledge is partial and incomplete, and even the gift of prophecy reveals only part of the whole picture!

**10** But when the time of perfection comes, these partial things will become useless.

**11** When I was a child, I spoke and thought and reasoned as a child. But when I grew up, I put away childish things.

**12** Now we see things imperfectly like puzzling reflections in a mirror, but then we will see everything with perfect clarity. All that I know now is partial and incomplete, but then I will know everything completely, just as God now knows me completely.

**13** Three things will last forever—faith, hope, and love—and the greatest of these is love.

46-45 B.C. A Roman colony, Corinth was the capital of the province of Achaia.

Corinth was socially, culturally, and religiously diverse. In fact, in 49 A.D. a good number of Jews who were expelled from Rome resettled in Corinth. The Christians of Corinth reflected the diversity of the city. Congregations included the wealthy, merchants, enslaved individuals, and those who were formerly enslaved.

Corinth was home to numerous temples dedicated to pagan gods and goddesses including Apollo, Hermes, Isis, Poseidon, and the Pantheon, which is a temple dedicated to all of the gods. When Paul arrived in Corinth (about 50 A.D.) the city's reputation for immorality was widely recognized. The infamous temple of Aphrodite had fallen into ruins but was home to hundreds of “temple prostitutes,” making it popular with the numerous sailors visiting the city. The Greek word *korinthiazesthai*, which means to live like a Corinthian, meant that one lived immorally.



## Backstage

In Paul's letter to the believers in Corinth, we see the challenges that faced the early church. Corinth was a large metropolis with a diverse population. The house churches that the Corinthian Christians worshiped in reflected the city's diversity. One issue Paul addressed to the Corinthians was unity among themselves, emphasizing the importance of their relationships with one another.



## Combing Through

### 1. A Plea for Brotherly Love (Hebrews 13:1-3)

The Scripture opens with “Let brotherly love continue.” Our world is full of hurting people, who in turn only know how to hurt other people. As a result, our newspapers and online and TV news reports are full of stories detailing terrible murders and horrific assaults committed by and on people in every age group. Thank God that believers who have found forgiveness through the blood of Jesus Christ have a new and divine nature. Because of Christ's forgiveness, we are capable of loving others in a deeper and more spiritual way. We are now capable of loving the way that God loves us. However, this capacity to love one another must be exercised. Each day, we have to plead as Jesus did, “nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt” (see Matthew 26:39). It is our love for God that must be the source of our love for others.

We want to remember that verse 1 is not a request nor a mere suggestion. This reminds us that there is a possibility for our love for one another to stop. Two possible reasons are failure to ask for forgiveness when we sin and refusing to forgive someone who hurts us. In His Sermon on the Mount, Jesus taught us to ask God to “forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors” (Matthew 6:12).

Hebrews 13:3 hearkens to customs of the Ancient Near East. In that time, people traveled great distances on foot. It was a common practice for a family to provide a meal and night's lodging to traveling strangers. Our world is very different today, and the expectation to open one's doors to a stranger hardly seems reasonable. We can, however, ask God to provide us with opportunities to assist strangers and share with them. Hospitality is a hallmark of Christianity. We want to show the same grace and kindness toward strangers that God has shown toward us. Jesus taught that, “Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me” (Matthew 25:40).

Hebrews 13:3 offers yet another motivation for our Christian hospitality. The Scripture says that in doing this, we might be visited by an angel. The Old Testament has many accounts of people who were visited by angels of God. However, the word “angel” translated here means a “messenger” and not necessarily a divine creature. While a present-day angel may never actually visit most saints, God's human messengers will most certainly visit us when we express Christian hospitality.

### 2. Love is the Basis of Our Faith (1 Corinthians 13:1-3)

We want to remember that when Paul wrote this letter, he was keenly aware of the Corinthians' fascination with the gifts of the Spirit. They were attracted to knowledge, prophecy, and speaking in tongues. Paul is teaching that these gifts were meaningless without love. When Paul speaks of “charity” we should read that word as “love.” More importantly, we should know that Paul is speaking of a specific form of love. He is not talking about eros, or the sensuous or erotic form of love. Nor is Paul describing *philia*, which means “a brotherly affection or friendship.” Rather, Paul is describing *agape*, “a commitment of the will to cherish and uphold another person.” In the Bible, this is the form of love that is always used when we describe God's love. *Agape* describes our willful and deliberate decision to treat others with the utmost care and concern and allows us to esteem the best interests of our brother or sister above our own.

We must remember that this form of love is only possible when we love God first. Without this, the love toward one another is a sham, a mere imitation. This prerequisite is demonstrated in the Scripture when we read that there are two great commandments. The first is, “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength.” The second is, “Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself” (Matthew 22:37, 39; Mark 12:30–31; Luke 10:27).

When Paul speaks of “tongues of men and angels,” he is not primarily describing *glossolalia*, or speaking in tongues. Rather, he is saying that it is more important to act lovingly than to be able to speak all the languages of heaven or earth. That definitely includes the conduct of those who practiced *glossolalia*. Without love, Paul is saying, the ability to communicate is useless. Similarly, Paul tells us that if he was able to explain all the mysteries of the Scriptures, but he wasn’t a loving person, it would be meaningless.

### 3. Love is the Proof of Our Gifts (vv. 4–7)

Contrary to what many of us believe, love is not an ethereal (heavenly) notion. Love is practical and must be put into practice on a daily basis. Christians must constantly measure their love and ask themselves, “Did I show love in that situation or toward that person?” And,

more importantly, “Am I growing?” Paul shows that love can indeed be measured and that love results in characteristics that can be seen and heard.

### 4. Love is Permanent (vv. 8–13)

True love will produce patience, kindness, and honesty. As Christians, we have to identify and remove things from our lives that prohibit us from being able to manifest these qualities of love. Paul identifies these hindrances as jealousy, boastfulness, resentment, and ill temperament. He understood that when Jesus returned, sin and death would end. He knew that the gifts of the Spirit would no longer be needed. Paul uses two analogies to support this. First, it would be unimaginable to think that a mature adult would resort to childlike behavior. Secondly, an actual portrayal of a person could never be obtained by looking at a reflection of poor quality. Paul was teaching the Corinthians and us that when Christ returns, Christians would have direct access to Him. Our relationship with Him will be personal and intimate. Paul was trying to dispel the Corinthians’ pride in temporary supernatural gifts. Much of Paul’s ministry had been spent teaching about the importance of faith and hope. Now, he places love right alongside them, and in fact, elevates love above the others.



## Diving Deeper Quiz

Have participants read Hebrews 13:1–3, 1 Corinthians 13:1–13, BACKGROUND, and IN DEPTH from the BIBLE STUDY GUIDE. Then, have them answer the following:

1. Think about the five people you love the most in the world. As you think about your relationship with each of them, compare your love for them with the definition of love in the scripture verses. Is your love patient? Kind? Humble? Do you keep no record of wrongs? Does your love endure all things?
2. What does a relationship that exemplifies 1 Corinthians 13 look like? What is a biblical definition of love drawn from the scripture?
3. According to Hebrews 13:1–3, who should we remember? Why do you think it is important we remember them?



## Next Steps

1. Reflect on what love means to you. Does it mean something different in light of Christ’s love?

2. The love in today’s scripture is not simply romantic, it’s for all believers to show one another. How does that help us understand love?



## Put It Out There

### A. Group Application

Have the group write a song, poem, or story about God’s love according to 1 Corinthians 13. Talk to them about the possibility of posting their creation on social media to spread the word about what love really is as the Bible defines it.

### B. Personal Application

Have your students make a T-chart. On one side have them list all the things that love is according to 1 Corinthians 13. On the other side, have them list all the things love is according to society. Challenge each student to pray for God’s help where they need to be intentional about showing love according to God’s standard and definition.



## Wrap It Up

### A. Daily Bible Readings

Present the DAILY BIBLE READINGS listed in the BIBLE STUDY GUIDE.

### B. Prayer

Father God, help me to grow in my love for the people closest to me and those who are in my community.

In Jesus Name, Amen



## Say Word?

Corinth. KOR-inth.

Pantheon. PAN-thee-ahn

**SWAG**  
(Spiritual Wisdom and Guidance)

A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another.—John 13:34



# A LIVING

# FAITH

By Mwikali HH Munyao

In the last year or so, the world has experienced a drastic change of events due to the current pandemic. Regardless of how strong you are in your walk with the Lord, there have been moments where you may have expressed a sigh of frustration, shaken your head in a state of shock and uncertainty, or found your mind wandering off while trying to remember how life used to be.

Hebrews 11:1 KJV (*Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen*) provides a definition of what is faith from the eyes of God. It is the substance of things hoped for. What things one may ask? In our current world, it may be:

1. A cure for COVID-19
2. Stability in our government
3. Justice in various industries in society
4. Equal opportunities for all regardless of race or gender
5. World Peace

What we have been reminded of by this pandemic is how feeble we are and how we need God. There has been a deep realization of the power of community, touch, and connection in the



constricted spaces we found ourselves in because of the travel restrictions placed across the world. It was a rude awakening of how quickly life can change.

No one can claim they were prepared for this drastic change. Looking over the last five years, there has been a push to find purpose and understand the reason why we have been gifted with life. A great example is the awareness of mental health in the world today, and the importance of having great health mentally, to push for balance in life. We have been reminded that a lot of the things we thought we needed to feel happy were not necessary. The best things like pure love, friendships, family are not replaceable and matter more than we desire to admit.

In the moments of silence and isolation, we have had to confront our inner fears, excuses, and issues that were pushed aside because we were caught up in a race of schedules, appointments and distractions that made us miss, for a moment, what is really important.

Were we asking for superficial things because that is what we thought was best, or, was it the pressure of social media that made us think that was what we needed?

If faith is the substance of things hoped for, is there an expectation by God, that our faith should aim for that which should last or outlive us? Living faith should be tangible, a faith that moves one to action. A faith that would provoke one to ask for the unimaginable.



## How can I activate living faith?

- Remember, you already have faith, but to make it alive, you have to activate it
- Write down what is important to you (not what you think is important to those around you)
- Check your measure of faith – faith comes by hearing the Word of God
- Engage with God through heartfelt prayers to express your need of using faith wisely to activate answers
- Strategize and think of solutions to bring to pass what you are believing God for
- Step out in faith and do it

Here is an example: You graduate from college, and you are wondering what to do and how do you achieve the career goal that you had in mind. Using the strategies above:

1. You write down the career that you desire including how much you want to make
2. Look at the Word of God and find scriptures that assure you about the provision and the direction of God
3. Pray and ask God to lead you to the right career path as you begin your job search
4. Send out your resume and begin to network with a keen intention of securing a great opportunity
5. Keep asking and believing. When you receive an offer that may not be what you wanted, but will give you the experience you need, to grow to better opportunities, be open to take it

Living faith is an act of your will. Agree to grow with God through the circumstances that life offers and use His Word to get your destiny. It is a journey, and the journey begins with a day.

## What do I do if I do not feel like I have faith?

Remember, faith and feelings are like oil and water. They do not mix. Your faith will always be stirred and strengthened by the level of the Word of God you hear and choose to believe. Your ears are the highway through which faith drives into your soul.

Gauging and assessing what you are exposing to your ears and what you listen to daily, will reveal to you what is adding to your faith or robbing it. Spend time learning the Word of God and understanding it.

Understanding the Word of God involves communicating with God through questions, as you study the scriptures and ask yourself provoking questions on the revelation locked in each scripture. Think of it as treasure waiting to be discovered.





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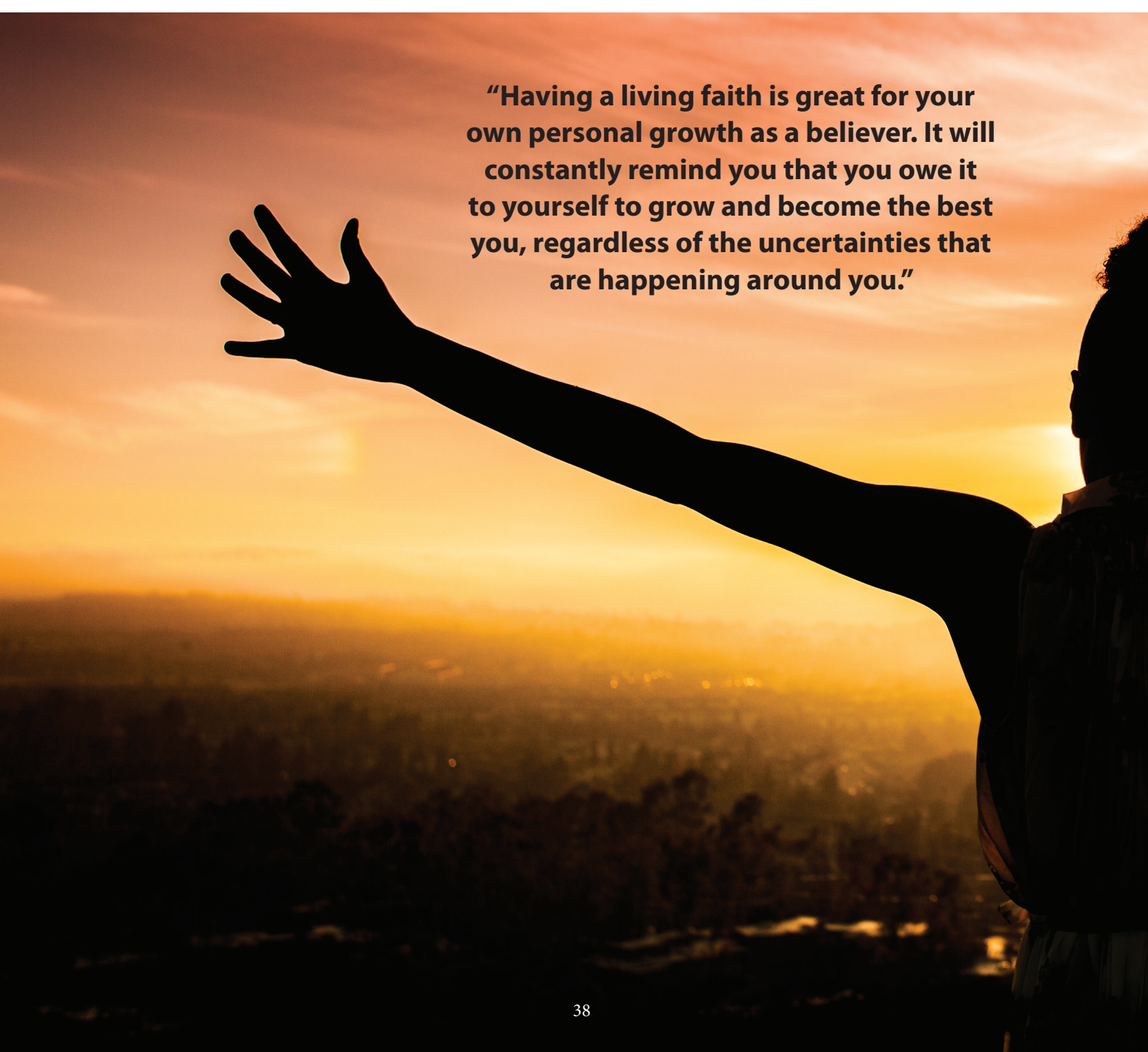
You have the faith that you need, to provoke the next season of your life, but you have to activate it.

### **What decays or robs living faith?**

- **Inconsistency** – you have to believe that God wants you to be blessed more than you do. He loves you. That is a constant factor that should provide you with security and confidence
- **Unrealistic expectations** – Everything will not flow as you expected. It is important to receive grace and extend it to yourself in the moments that you are not seeing the desired or expected results. Sometimes faith is a step, other

times it is a pause in the process. Do not be overly critical of the journey you are on

- **Ignorance** – Not understanding God's will, which is found in His scriptures, will move you to make decisions based on assumptions and not the truth of the Word of God
- **Lack of communion with God** – Every relationship grows by the level of communication it is exposed to. This applies to your relationship with God. Prayer and time spent in devotion reveals to you the journey and process of your growth as you pursue your destiny.
- **A lack of forgiveness** – offense or unprocessed trauma will

A silhouette of a person's arm and hand reaching out towards a bright, hazy sunset or sunrise sky. The person is on the right side of the frame, and their arm extends across the middle of the image. The background is a warm, golden-orange glow from the sun, with some darker, silhouetted trees or hills visible at the bottom.

**“Having a living faith is great for your own personal growth as a believer. It will constantly remind you that you owe it to yourself to grow and become the best you, regardless of the uncertainties that are happening around you.”**



hinder your ability to hear clearly due to the distraction of what you are holding on to. Forgive and do it quickly.

- **Fear** – Thinking of the worst that could happen will cause you to create non-existent realities that become access points for torment in your mind. Step out and do it, do not be afraid. You can gain a lesson out of each decision.

Having a living faith is great for your own personal growth as a believer. It will constantly remind you that you owe it to yourself to grow and become the best you, regardless of the uncertainties that are happening around you. You have what it takes. You have enough faith, get up and use it to provoke the great future that God has in store for you.

### **A prayer for you:**

Dear God,

Help me to move in faith and do what you have called me to do. I am a solution; there is a problem that I am graced and equipped to solve. I am someone's answered prayer. I reject every form of indecisiveness and hold myself accountable to make this day count. I activate my faith and believe that I will win in this life. I am blessed, and will see your goodness in the land of the living. I believe that you will bless me to make it and fulfill my destiny. That is the expectation I have from this day forward.

Amen.





# Lesson 6







## Where We're Going

We will examine what led to Stephen's arrest, learn that God's power is available to all who will take a bold stand for Him, and reflect on our own lives as to whether or not we are willing to speak up for Christ.



## Get Them Going

Read Proverbs 25:18 to the class. Take a minute to talk to your class about what their response would be if they found out that someone was spreading vicious lies and rumors about them. Ask the class to keep this in mind as they read Stephen's story.



## Basketball Blues

**“**quit!” Derrick murmured under his breath as he walked through the front door. He hadn't decided whether or not to tell his parents what was bothering him, because he was more than angry—he was humiliated.

Derrick was the only freshman starter on the basketball team at the local university. One day, he was late for practice because he needed to stay after his English class to ask some questions about a research paper. As he approached the locker room, he paused. The guys were laughing and he overheard one of them say, “You better watch your back. I bet Derrick-the-Church-Boy is gay.” The locker room erupted with laughter.

Before the laughter fully subsided, someone else chimed in, “Yeah, I ain't ever seen him with a girl, but he sure loves hanging out with us, if you know what I mean!”

Derrick slowly backed away from the locker room door in total disbelief and horror.

Feeling like someone had just punched him in the stomach, he had difficulty walking to the bus stop. When the bus finally came, he slumped into his seat and sat in a trance for the entire ride.

“What did you say?” his father replied after the front door slammed. Derrick looked up, no longer trying to hide the tears that were streaming down his face. He tried to speak but for the first few minutes, it was pointless. His sobs made him impossible to understand.

When Derrick could finally speak, he told his father everything. His father sighed heavily and replied, “You can't quit. God is counting on you to represent Him. You may be His only representative on this team. I know it hurts and we can pray about it together, but God will give you the strength to go back and be a part of the team, even in the face of vicious lies. In Christ, we don't need to prove or explain our actions. Your love and dedication to Christ will shine through. We have to trust God for His way and His divine timing. God has gifted you with the ability to play basketball extremely well, and He expects you to use this venue to bring glory and honor to His name. Let's pray now, not just for you, but also for your teammates. And son, ask God to help you find a way to forgive them because the truth is, they really have no idea how hurtful, harmful, and damaging their words really are.”



## Real Talk

1. Why was Derrick so embarrassed?
2. What are some of the personal challenges you face in trying to be a bold witness for Christ?



## The Big Picture

Stephen was one of the first seven deacons of the early church. He was the first believer recorded in Scripture to be martyred for the name of Jesus Christ. In this passage, we see Stephen arrested after being falsely accused, and we get to hear his final, divinely inspired speech given to the high priest and his other accusers.



## The Players

**Synagogue of the Libertines (Freedmen).** Jews who were born in the Holy Land and spent most of their lives there spoke Aramaic, which was a form of the ancient Hebrew in which our Old Testament is written. But there were other Jews born in other places who had returned to Palestine, and they did not know Aramaic or Hebrew. They only spoke Greek, which was the language of the educated people of the day. Perhaps they had been slaves in other countries, but now they were all proud to be free people. Some of them came from





## Make It Stick

“Stephen, a man full of God’s grace and power, performed amazing miracles and signs among the people.” (Acts 6:8, NLT)



## The Word (NLT)

**Acts 6:8** Stephen, a man full of God’s grace and power, performed amazing miracles and signs among the people.

**9** But one day some men from the Synagogue of Freed Slaves, as it was called, started to debate with him. They were Jews from Cyrene, Alexandria, Cilicia, and the province of Asia.

**10** None of them could stand against the wisdom and the Spirit with which Stephen spoke.

**11** So they persuaded some men to lie about Stephen, saying, “We heard him blaspheme Moses, and even God.”

**12** This roused the people, the elders, and the teachers of religious law. So they arrested Stephen and brought him before the high council.

**13** The lying witnesses said, “This man is always speaking against the holy Temple and against the law of Moses.

**14** We have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy the Temple and change the customs Moses handed down to us.”

**15** At this point everyone in the high council stared at Stephen, because his face became as bright as an angel’s.

**7:1** Then the high priest asked Stephen, “Are these accusations true?”

**2a** This was Stephen’s reply: “Brothers and fathers, listen to me.”

Cyrene, an important city located in what is modern-day Libya in northern Africa. Others came from Alexandria, the chief city of Egypt, and others came from Cilicia and Asia. Ephesus was a grand city located in Asia Minor. Tarsus, where Paul was born, was located in the northern part of Asia Minor in what is now known as Syria.

Pious Greek-speaking Jews attended the Synagogue of Libertines or Freedmen. Paul would have attended this synagogue, and Barnabas probably did also. Among all these Greek-speaking Jews were a few Christians, but the most outspoken was Stephen. The Holy Spirit spoke through him as he reasoned, discussed, and argued for Jesus Christ.



## Backstage

At the beginning of Acts 6, the early Christians were having problems. The Aramaic-speaking Jews were probably attending the big Temple in Jerusalem. But the early Jewish Christians, who spoke Greek, were attending the Synagogue of the Freedmen. The Jews had the wonderful custom of collecting donations for the poor among them; thus, the early Christians followed this custom and gave to needy widows. (Widows in those days had few ways to raise money to feed themselves, much less their children if they had any.)

The apostles were among the Aramaic Jews and were the early Christian leaders. They were in charge of the distribution of gifts to the widows, yet they were forgetting the Greek-speaking Christian widows. This could have been because of snobbery, because of language differences or because they just overlooked the Greek-speaking poor.

The godly solution of the apostles was to appoint Greek-speaking Jewish Christians to take charge of distributing food and money to the widows and other poor among them. The Greek-speaking Christians would know who was in need. The seven men chosen for this task were also chosen for their outstanding spirituality. Among them were Philip and Stephen, who is the focus of today’s lesson.



## Combing Through

### 1. Introduction of Stephen (Acts 6:8–10)

Stephen did much more than hand out gifts to the needy. Until this time, Scripture had only mentioned the apostles performing miracles, but now we see Stephen doing great wonders. (We’ll read later of the miracles that Philip performed). Scripture tells us the reason for Stephen’s ability to perform miracles is that he is full of grace and power. We would expect to hear about the power in conjunction with miracles, but maybe we are surprised by the accompaniment of grace. Grace is always an unmerited gift of God. Therefore, we see that God working through Stephen, not because Stephen is so wonderful, but because God is wonderful and empowered him to do these amazing things.

At this time, all Christians were converted Jews and all attended synagogues. The Christian Jews were a tiny minority among the other Jews. The Jews whose primary language was Greek attended the Synagogue of the Freedmen. As Stephen, who attended this synagogue, performed miracles in the name of Jesus, other Jewish members who did not follow Christ opposed. They debated with Stephen, but their arguments did not stand up against him for two reasons. First of all, the Holy Spirit was enabling him to use great wisdom. Secondly, the things that Stephen said concerning Jesus Christ were true.

### 2. Opposition to Stephen (vv. 11–14)

Those who opposed Stephen thought they were defending things that good Jews believed, but they were probably jealous of him as well. Obviously, Stephen garnered a lot of attention from the miracles he performed and his brilliant exposition of the true meaning of Old Testament Scriptures.

Opposition spread from the Synagogue of the Freeman to the great temple in Jerusalem and to the influential Jews who had also opposed Jesus. As a result, they seized Stephen and brought him before the great Jewish religious council, the Sanhedrin. This was the same religious council that put Jesus on trial. As they had with Jesus, they also brought false witnesses against Stephen and used some of the same arguments.

They accused Stephen of speaking against the Temple in Jerusalem. They said the Jesus he preached about had threatened to destroy the Temple. In John 2:19, Jesus said that if they destroyed “this temple,” meaning His body, He would raise it again in three days. We know that they were twisting the words of both Jesus and Stephen without really trying to understand the message.



In addition, they accused both Stephen and Jesus of trying to destroy the Old Testament Law, again twisting their words. Jesus said He came not to abolish the Law but to fulfill it (Matthew 5:17). And because they were accusing Stephen of speaking about the Temple and the Law, they were in essence accusing him of speaking against God.

### 3. Stephen's Effect on the Sanhedrin (vv. 15-7:2a)

When Stephen's accusers finished what they had to say, they noticed his face looked like that of an angel. We are sure this does not mean he resembled the childlike pictures of angels we often see por-

trayed nor is it likely that he looked like some type of avenging angel. But because we have never looked into the face of an angel, we can only imagine a face that reflected the holiness of God Himself.

At that point, the high priest asked Stephen whether the charges of his accusers were true. This was probably Caiaphas, the very same man who had presided over the trial of Jesus. But that did not scare Stephen, who then launched into a history of the Jewish people, including their rejection of the prophets that God sent and finally the crucifixion of their Savior. The result of Stephen's sermon was that he was stoned and received by Jesus into heaven.



## Diving Deeper Quiz

Have participants read Acts 6:8-7:2a, BACKGROUND, and IN DEPTH from the BIBLE STUDY GUIDE. After doing so, have them answer the following questions:

1. Why do you think the Jewish people from Cyrene and Alexandria lied about Stephen?
2. How can the reason Stephen was lied about help us, as believers, when we face false accusations?
3. If you found yourself in Stephen's situation, do you honestly think you would have been as bold of a witness for Christ?
4. Where did Stephen get the courage and strength to bravely face his accusers? Why do you think this is so?



## Next Steps

1. Reflect why trust and honesty matter in our relationships on teams, organizations, and church groups. How can you encourage that in your group?

2. How can you respond to people lying about your or someone you know?



## Put It Out There

### A. Group Application

Have students discuss some of the serious issues confronting them in today's world. Have them brainstorm and list ways they can empower themselves to speak as leaders and witnesses for Christ to impact their community and even the world.

### B. Personal Application

Have your students read Psalm 119:29 from the NLT. Encourage them to closely examine their own relationship with Christ. Ask students to reflect on whether they believe their own lives are filled with God's grace and power. If not, why not? Encourage each of them to pray and ask God for boldness and courage to be a witness for Him, even in the face of opposition and persecution.



## Wrap It Up

### A. Daily Bible Readings

Present the DAILY BIBLE READINGS listed in the BIBLE STUDY GUIDE.

### B. Prayer

Lord, help me to stand for truth and pursue honesty in my relationships. I know you are faithful, help me to be faithful to you as well.  
In Jesus Name,  
Amen



## Say Word?

Corinth. KOR-inth.  
Pantheon. PAN-thee-ahn

# SWAG

(Spiritual Wisdom and Guidance)

A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another.—John 13:34