

Unleashed

WEEK ONE

Before we begin with the scripture passage, let's start by answering the following questions:

- 1** Have you ever been in a hard situation and acted with courage - even courage that surprised you and others?
- 2** Who was the first person that shared the good news about Jesus with you? How and why did they do so? What was your initial response?
- 3** Why do you think it's so natural to drift toward complacency (away from commitment) in our lives? Think of exercise, eating healthy, learning new skills, and our spiritual lives. Why does the natural drift always seem to be backward?

**I HAVE JESUS POTENTIAL!
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READ ACTS 7:1-60

Each week we'll focus on a portion of Acts, the history book of the New Testament. Acts is the story of the early church's formation and growth. After Jesus' resurrection and ascension back into Heaven, the early followers were filled with the power of the Holy Spirit and sent to make disciples wherever they went. Over the next 30 years, this small group of believers was unleashed to share the good news about Jesus, make disciples, and plant churches in hundreds of towns and villages around the world.

READ ACTS 7:1-16

READ ACTS 7:17-34

READ ACTS 7:35-47

READ ACTS 7:48-60

Praying Together: Lord Jesus, help us as we look at this chapter that tells us about Your early followers. Help us to see what they did, the people they encountered, the change in their lives that You made in them and through them. Help us to catch that same excitement as we see Your Holy Spirit at work. Amen!

QUESTIONS ABOUT ACTS 7

- 1) Jesus' earliest followers were considered "ordinary people with no special training" but they had been empowered by the very presence of Jesus (Acts 4:13). Why is this significant for how the Good News spreads and the church growing through the rest of the book?
- 2) Why do you think Stephen takes time – about 50 years in our Scriptures – to remind the Israelite leaders of God's faithfulness throughout their history? How does this set up his "application" to them in verses 51-53?
- 3) Why was Stephen's claim about Jesus (verses 51-53) so infuriating to the Israelites? Why did they believe it to be grounds for Stephen's stoning?
- 4) As the crowd began to throw stones at Stephen, he looked up and saw the glorified Lord standing at the right hand of the Father, and he prayed, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit" (verses 55-60). How do the presence and an accurate view of Jesus directly relate to Stephen's boldness in life and death? How do you think this vision empowered the other disciples to follow Stephen's example in proclaiming Jesus?

APPLICATION QUESTIONS

- 1) Sometimes it can feel like there is a significant void between our lives and the lives of the early believers in Acts. Why do you think that is? How do you feel it personally?
- 2) Consider that Stephen was “a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 6:5) and clearly knew the Old Testament stories well. How does his depth of faith and knowledge inspire you to study the Scriptures, grow in your faith, and be filled with the Holy Spirit? What is your next step in becoming more like Stephen?
- 3) Stephen was perfectly positioned to stand before the Israelite leaders – though he didn’t have formal training, he understood history and had been chosen to represent the church in the previous chapter. Where do you recognize that God has positioned you to have an impact for His kingdom? Think about your workplace, your neighborhood, your family, your social groups, and your friendships. Who are some of the people in your life for whom you are the closest believer?
- 4) What fears and doubts rise to the surface as you think about being unleashed – moving from complacent to committed? What is in the way?

WEEKLY CHALLENGE

Take time to think further about the passions God has placed on your heart.

- What do you believe He is calling you to?
- What in the world breaks your heart
- If time and money were not issues, what would you love to see changed in your community?
- How can you step into making a difference within your context?

Dream big and write down whatever God places on your heart this week. This week begin actively praying over those passions and what God may be calling you to.

Take time to encourage or bless in a simply way three people this week – at least one of whom is not part of our church.

CONTEMPLATION QUESTIONS

Consider your specific fears and doubts about sharing your faith or living fully for Jesus. What are you afraid of? Where do you think that fear comes from? Have you experienced embarrassment, shame, or rejection in the past?

What would it look like to give that fear over to Jesus and find healing and fresh power? How do you think God might want to overcome your fears and doubts and unleash you – not just for the sake of others but for your own freedom and joy?

DIGGING DEEPER

READ LUKE 10:1-20

How do you see Jesus empower His followers to complete a great mission – though they may have been initially skeptical or fearful to do so?

Why do you think Jesus told His disciples to quickly move on from those who reject their message? What does that mean for your evangelistic efforts today? How do you balance that with patience with those outside the faith?

Why does Jesus say, “Do not rejoice that the (evil) spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven (Luke 10:20)? How does Jesus want you to cling to Him in both success and failure?