



## SENT, PART 1: IT'S GETTING UNCOMFORTABLE

As the first century believers grew in numbers, so did the Jews' determination to stomp out the church, but God used their vain attempts to strengthen and spread His message. The enemies of the early church designed to scatter and lose them, yet God designed to scatter and use them. Are you experiencing problems and difficulties today? Maybe God wants to use them so that you can be used by Him.

**BIG IDEA: Sometimes God uses difficulties to jolt us out of our comfort zones to be used.**

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Are you more likely to “rock-the-boat” or “keep quiet for peace-at-any-price”?
2. What is one very traumatic, upsetting experience that happened in your formative years? Can you see now how God has used it for good?
3. *With your Bible or BibleApp, read and discuss [Acts 6:8-15](#).*

*Stephen, a man full of God's grace and power, performed amazing miracles and signs among the people. 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. None of them could stand against the wisdom and the Spirit with which Stephen spoke. So they persuaded some men to lie about Stephen, saying, “We heard him blaspheme Moses, and even God.” This roused the people, the elders, and the teachers of religious law. So they arrested Stephen and brought him before the high council. The lying witnesses said, “This man is always speaking against the holy Temple and against the law of Moses. We have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy the Temple and change the customs Moses handed down to us.” At this point everyone in the high council stared at Stephen, because his face became as bright as an angel.* [Acts 6:8-15 \(NLT\)](#)

4. What do you think Stephen was like?
5. Immigrant Jews often formed their own synagogues in Jerusalem. How is their opposition to Stephen like and unlike the opposition the apostles faced from the Sanhedrin ([5:27-28](#))?
6. What might lie behind these accusations against Stephen (see [5:21-24](#); [John 2:13-21](#))?
7. The adjectives used to describe Stephen's spiritual life are that he was full of *grace* and *power*. What two adjectives best describe your spiritual life?
8. *With your Bible or BibleApp, read and discuss [Acts 7:54-60](#).*

*The Jewish leaders were infuriated by Stephen's accusation, and they shook their fists in rage. But Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, gazed steadily upward into heaven and saw the glory of God, and he saw Jesus standing in the place of honor at God's right hand. And he told them, “Look, I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing in the place of honor at God's right hand!” Then they put their hands over their ears, and drowning out his voice with their shouts, they rushed at him. They dragged him out of the city and began to stone him. The official witnesses took off their coats and laid them at the feet of a young man named Saul. And as they stoned him, Stephen prayed, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.” And he fell to his knees, shouting, “Lord, don't charge them with this sin!” And with that, he died.* [Acts 7:54-60 \(NLT\)](#)



9. On an emotional level, have you ever hated someone that you resorted to “sticks and stones”? What did you do instead?
10. Why are Stephen’s listeners so enraged (see [Daniel 7:13-14](#))?
11. What is your reaction to Stephen’s story?
12. What does this story teach you about God? About what it means to be a follower of Jesus?
13. Stephen’s death was illegal (see [John 18:31](#)). What does that reveal about the desperation of the Sanhedrin?
14. What words does Stephen speak in [7:59-60](#)? Compare these words to those Jesus spoke in [Luke 23:34, 46](#). What is the significance of Stephen’s words? Can you identify some specific parallels between Jesus and Stephen as to their rejection and deaths?
15. *With your Bible or BibleApp, read [Acts 8:1-4](#).*

*Saul was one of the official witnesses at the killing of Stephen. A great wave of persecution began that day, sweeping over the church in Jerusalem, and all the believers except the apostles fled into Judea and Samaria. (Some godly men came and buried Stephen with loud weeping.) But Saul was going everywhere to destroy the church. He went from house to house, dragging out both men and women to throw them into prison. But the believers who were scattered preached the Good News about Jesus wherever they went.* [Acts 8:1-4 \(NLT\)](#)

16. What effect does the stoning of Stephen have on the church? What do the scattered believers do?
17. How is Stephen’s death and Saul’s mission an example of God using evil to fulfill God’s plan? ([Acts 1:8](#))
18. Would you say that you trust God enough to be faithful when your comfort level is threatened? Why or why not?
19. This begins phase 2 (Judea and Samaria) of God’s plan (see [Acts 1:8](#)). How would you sum up the Jerusalem phase ([Acts 2-7](#))?
20. Peter’s speech led to mass conversion (Acts 2), while Stephen’s speech led to his death. What does that teach you about ‘success’ in how we serve God?
21. Do you view death the same way that Stephen did? How does this play out in your life?

## THINK ABOUT IT

Jesus had commanded His disciples in Acts 1:8 to be “His witnesses everywhere, first in Jerusalem, then to Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the Earth.” But the church had gotten comfortable. So God used persecution and problems to jolt the sleeping giant called the church out of her comfort zone. We see over and over again, God never calls anyone to a comfort zone but out of it, for that is where we learn to rely and trust in God, and where He stretches and grows our faith.



**The Lion’s Gate in Jerusalem, where Stephen was stoned and killed.**

## MOVING FORWARD

What can you do this week to learn to have peace in all circumstances? What can you do this week to be ready to do difficult things for the sake of the gospel?

## CHANGING YOUR MIND

*But the believers who were scattered preached the Good News about Jesus wherever they went.* [Acts 8:4 \(NLT\)](#)

