



# LIFE GROUP STUDY GUIDE

JANUARY–MARCH 2016

## WEEK 3

HEALING HEARTS

*This study guide should be used the week following the sermon it supplements.*

**MAIN TEXT:** Acts 7:1-2, 9-10, 23-51

And the high priest said, “Are these things so?” <sup>2</sup>And Stephen said: “Brothers and fathers, hear me. The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham...

<sup>9</sup>“And the patriarchs, jealous of Joseph, sold him into Egypt; but God was with him <sup>10</sup>and rescued him out of all his afflictions and gave him favour and wisdom before Pharaoh, king of Egypt, who made him ruler over Egypt and over all his household.

<sup>23</sup>“When he [Moses] was forty years old, it came into his heart to visit his brothers, the children of Israel. <sup>24</sup>And seeing one of them being wronged, he defended the oppressed man and avenged him by striking down the Egyptian. <sup>25</sup>He supposed that his brothers would understand that God was giving them salvation by his hand, but they did not understand. <sup>26</sup>And on the following day he appeared to them as they were quarrelling and tried to reconcile them, saying, ‘Men, you are brothers. Why do you wrong each other?’ <sup>27</sup>But the man who was wronging his neighbour thrust him aside, saying, ‘Who made you a ruler and a judge over us?’ <sup>28</sup>Do you want to kill me as you killed the Egyptian yesterday?’ <sup>29</sup>At this retort Moses fled and became an exile in the land of Midian, where he became the father of two sons.

<sup>30</sup>“Now when forty years had passed, an angel appeared to him in the wilderness of Mount Sinai, in a flame of fire in a bush. <sup>31</sup>When Moses saw it, he was amazed at the sight, and as he drew near to look, there came the voice of the Lord: <sup>32</sup>‘I am the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham and of Isaac and of Jacob.’ And Moses trembled and did not dare to look. <sup>33</sup>Then the Lord said to him, ‘Take off the sandals from your feet, for the place where you are standing is holy ground. <sup>34</sup>I have surely seen the affliction of my people who are in Egypt, and have heard their groaning, and I have come down to deliver them. And now come, I will send you to Egypt.’

<sup>35</sup>“This Moses, whom they rejected, saying, ‘Who made you a ruler and a judge?’—this man God sent as both ruler and redeemer by the hand of

### GETTING STARTED

Stephen, like Christ, was being accused of blasphemy and persecuted. Invite people to share how they react when they’re treated unfairly or face the *possibility* of ‘persecution’ for following Jesus?

### DIGGING DEEPER

1. How does (and doesn’t) Stephen respond to the accusations made against him (in Acts 6:14)?
2. Verses 51-53 are the summary of Stephen’s speech. How do verses 51 and 53 expose the problem of sin?
3. Israel still had the law and the tabernacle/temple (see verses 44-50) but they didn’t stop them rejecting God. What things today can we think keep us close to God but actually don’t? What traps should we be vigilant against falling in to?
4. What do you think the phrases ‘stiff-necked’ and ‘uncircumcised in heart and ears’ mean (see Deuteronomy 10:12-22)? *Hint:* hardness of heart. In what ways can you be resistant to the Holy Spirit?
5. What pattern runs throughout the Old Testament stories Stephen highlights? What do we learn about the character of God and man from them? *Hint:* man’s proud *unfaithfulness* makes him blind to God’s extraordinary faithfulness (sending deliverers).
6. How is Jesus the climax of these stories? *Hint:* Jesus doesn’t deliver in spite of suffering but through suffering.
7. How does verse 52 speak about the solution to sin? What is the significance of Jesus being called the “Righteous One” (a rare occurrence in the New Testament) (see 1 John 2:1-2)? How has Jesus fulfilled the temple and the law? How, therefore, can hard hearts be healed?

### NEXT STEPS

1. Take some time (either during this session or individually during the week) to reflect on where your heart is. Is there any blindness or hardness? What things get in the way and take the place of God? How does this need to change to make sure God is the centre of your life?

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the angel who appeared to him in the bush. <sup>36</sup> This man led them out, performing wonders and signs in Egypt and at the Red Sea and in the wilderness for forty years. <sup>37</sup> This is the Moses who said to the Israelites, 'God will raise up for you a prophet like me from your brothers.' <sup>38</sup> This is the one who was in the congregation in the wilderness with the angel who spoke to him at Mount Sinai, and with our fathers. He received living oracles to give to us. <sup>39</sup> Our fathers refused to obey him, but thrust him aside, and in their hearts they turned to Egypt, <sup>40</sup> saying to Aaron, 'Make for us gods who will go before us. As for this Moses who led us out from the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him.' <sup>41</sup> And they made a calf in those days, and offered a sacrifice to the idol and were rejoicing in the works of their hands. <sup>42</sup> But God turned away and gave them over to worship the host of heaven, as it is written in the book of the prophets:

"Did you bring to me slain beasts and sacrifices, during the forty years in the wilderness, O house of Israel?

<sup>43</sup> You took up the tent of Moloch and the star of your god Rephan, the images that you made to worship; and I will send you into exile beyond Babylon.'

<sup>44</sup> "Our fathers had the tent of witness in the wilderness, just as he who spoke to Moses directed him to make it, according to the pattern that he had seen. <sup>45</sup> Our fathers in turn brought it in with Joshua when they dispossessed the nations that God drove out before our fathers. So it was until the days of David, <sup>46</sup> who found favour in the sight of God and asked to find a dwelling place for the God of Jacob. <sup>47</sup> But it was Solomon who built a house for him. <sup>48</sup> Yet the Most High does not dwell in houses made by hands, as the prophet says, <sup>49</sup> "Heaven is my throne,

and the earth is my footstool. What kind of house will you build for me, says the Lord,

or what is the place of my rest?

<sup>50</sup> Did not my hand make all these things?' <sup>51</sup> "You stiff-necked people, uncircumcised in heart and ears, you always resist the Holy Spirit. As your fathers did, so do you. <sup>52</sup> Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? And they killed those who announced beforehand the coming of the Righteous One, whom you have now betrayed and murdered, <sup>53</sup> you who received the law as delivered by angels and did not keep it."

## COMING UP

Alpha Course | 11 Jan-14 Mar  
Beta Course | 11 Jan-22 Feb  
Prayer Meeting | 17 Feb

2. Stephen's life (and death) are an encouragement to every believer to boldly preach the gospel, and be willing to be used by God for his plan and purpose, even to the point of death. In what ways can you overcome fear and be faithful to God with the people he's placed in your life? Are you in danger of playing it safe, not being 'persecuted' or facing unfair treatment for following Jesus because you're not blowing your cover or making the most of every opportunity?

3. Discuss how you can encourage/walk alongside each other in the community of your Life Group to cultivate soft and sensitive hearts that are less resistant to the Holy Spirit. What practical things can you do when you meet and throughout the week to keep each other accountable?

4. Consider persuading your Life Group to attend a Pilot Lights meeting together, on a Saturday, to encourage and equip them to overcome fears *Sharing the Gospel* with strangers that will hopefully make them bolder sharing the gospel with friends.

5. Commit to memorising the following verse this week:

*"Blessed are you when people hate you and when they exclude you and revile you and spurn your name as evil, on account of the Son of Man! Rejoice in that day, and leap for joy, for behold, your reward is great in heaven; for so their fathers did to the prophets."* (Luke 6:22-23)

## PRAYER

- Thank God for his faithfulness and patience, even when we reject him and his ways.
- Ask God for boldness to stand up for Christ in the face of persecution and unfair treatment.
- Pray for help to remember the hand of God at work in his people throughout the Bible, and for help to remember that God is still working in his people today.
- Pray for God to reveal the areas of your heart that need changing and realigning to God's direction.