



Keep Holding On

Bible Story: Keep Holding On (Stephen) • Acts 6:1–7:60

Bottom Line: Keep going because God knows the end of the story.

Key Question: When were you scared but kept going?

Memory Verse: *Let us not become tired of doing good. At the right time we will gather a crop if we don't give up.* Galatians 6:9 (NirV)

Life App: Determination—Deciding it's worth it to finish what you started

Basic Truth: I can trust God no matter what.

Story: Communicating God's Truth in Engaging Ways (Large Group, 35 minutes)

Engage kids' hearts through a dynamic and interactive Bible story, worship, and prayer experience in a Large Group setting.

Host enters.

Welcome

Host has lots of energy as he or she welcomes everyone to [Name of Environment]. Host is relatable and inviting. Host can talk about something that happened culturally throughout the week like a big sports game,

movie opening (Scoob, Artemis Fowl, etc.), a viral video on YouTube, etc. Host tells them how excited he or she is that they're there and briefly runs through what they can expect. This is especially helpful for first-time guests to make them feel like they know what's happening.

Opener

HOST: “Hey, everyone! What a great month so far, right?! I don’t know about you, but getting Unstuck has been a ton of fun! And that fun continues RIGHT NOW with another sticky game. Now, we’ve had bubble gum, and we’ve been up to our knees in slime! BUT, when I think of sticky, I think of the ultimate home improvement tool. Do you know what I’m talking about? *(Pause for responses.)* That’s right, duct tape!”

“If you want something stuck . . . and you want that stuck something to not get unstuck . . . than turn to the duct . . . duct tape that is. I call this one: Stuck to the Duct!”

CG: “Stuck to the Duct” Title Slide

“Before you ask, no, we won’t be sticking any of you to the wall—though that did sound like fun. Instead, we have a pretty unique challenge for two volunteers! Who is in?”

Choose two volunteers. Consider that they will be rolling around on the ground when choosing them. Call them up to the stage and introduce them to the rest of the kids. Have preselected Small Group Leaders come up as well to help get the duct tape around the kids.

“Alright, as our small group leaders are wrapping you up in duct tape—don’t worry! The sticky side will be facing out—here’s how this works. When I say go, you will roll on the ground where I will have placed a large amount of items. Some of these items are good *(Give an example.)* and you should try and get these to stick to the tape, while some of these items are not so good *(Give an example.)*, and you should do your best to avoid these. At the end of 60 seconds, I will stop you and we’ll inspect what stuck to the duct. Whoever has more good items stuck to their tape wins! Any Questions? Awesome!

“On your mark, get set, go!”

Provide commentary during the game. Have the two small group leaders watch to make sure that the kids aren't bumping into each other. After a while, call time and count up the good items and subtract the bad items. Declare a winner and throw out the good items to the crowd. Give a prize to the winner.

HOST: "That was a lot of fun! Now let's all stand and worship God together!"

Worship

COMMUNICATOR SCRIPT

Communicator enters Worship Leaders exit, carrying a box labeled "Amazing Prizes."

INTRODUCTION

COMMUNICATOR: "Hey, everybody! So good to see you here today. Hey I have a question for you: how many of you like sports? What sports do you like? Shout it out!"

Pause for response and comment on some of the answers.

"That's a lot of variety! Now, in my opinion—and maybe some of yours, too—one of the greatest things in sports is a good comeback story. You know, those moments where it looks like a team is down and out with no chance of getting the win. Yet somehow and in some way, against all odds, they somehow rally together and win!"

CG: 2004 Boston Red Sox pile up on the pitcher's mound

“Take this group for example. You may have heard of the New York Yankees? Well, back in the 2004 American League Championship Series—the series that determines who goes on to the World Series—the Red Sox lost the first three games in a best-of-seven series! Pretty rough. People didn’t think they had a chance being down three games to none in the series, but that didn’t stop the Red Sox. They went out and won the next four games straight to defeat the Yankees and move on to the World Series where, guess what, they won!”

CG: 2016 Cavaliers

“Or maybe you’ve heard of a guy named LeBron James? Well, his Cleveland Cavaliers team in 2016 looked way overmatched as they faced a Golden State Warriors team that set an NBA record by winning 73 regular season games while only losing nine. That is insane! In the NBA finals, Cleveland found themselves down three games to one. It was looking pretty automatic for the Warriors. But the Cavs went on to win the next three games straight to win the first major championship for the city of Cleveland since 1964!”

CG: Super Bowl 51

“Some of you might remember this one. Just a few Super Bowls ago, the mighty New England Patriots were getting destroyed—I mean absolutely destroyed—by the Atlanta Falcons. Nobody saw this coming. The score at halftime was Falcons 28, New England 3! It was pretty bad. If it weren’t for the commercials, even more TVs across America would have been turning off. But then something crazy happened. The Patriots started scoring . . . a lot. And the Falcons . . . well they never scored again. What was 28-3 at the half was 34-28 at the end of the game. The Patriots actually won!”

“In all three of these stories, when it seemed like the ending was obvious, all of the sudden something changed that blew us all away. We didn’t see it coming!”

TENSION

COMMUNICATOR: “Could you imagine if the Red Sox, after losing game three, just huddled up as a team and decided, ‘Well, we know how this is going to go. Nobody has done this before. There is no reason to even play game four. Let’s just go home and call it a season.’ Or if the Cavaliers decided not to finish their series

because no other team had come back from a three-to-one deficit? Or if the Patriots just decided to stay in the locker room at half time because 28 to three was pretty embarrassing?”

“Is it possible to do this in life, too? Do we ever make an assumption about how something will go, think we know how something will turn out, or believe we know the ending before it actually happens and just give up thinking there’s no way we’ll come back from this? From time to time, we’ll face moments like this. When we do, we’ll have a choice to make. Give up or keep going.”

TRUTH

COMMUNICATOR: “As we’ve seen this month, the writers of the Bible have a lot to say about not giving up. Today we jump back into the book of Acts, the fifth book of the New Testament. Acts is short for the ‘The Acts of the Apostles,’ and the author, a man named Luke, shares the stories of what happened with Jesus’ disciples as they became leaders in the early church. In other words, Acts gives us the inside look at how the message of Jesus spread from a small group of disciples in Israel to the ends of the earth!”

“You might remember how two weeks ago, we saw how the church was formed and many people started to become followers of Jesus and join in. The numbers continued to grow like crazy, so much so that the leaders realized that they needed even MORE leaders just to help care for the needs of the people. The leaders came together with an idea.”

“(Read directly from Acts 6:3, NIV) ‘Brothers and sisters, choose seven of your men. They must be known as men who are wise and full of the Holy Spirit. We will turn this important work over to them.’ So, seven men were chosen . . .”

Communicator Opens Jar One

SFX: Sound Jar 1: Kid counting to seven

“Yes, seven! One of these was a man named Stephen. He was described as ‘full of faith and the Holy Spirit.’ In another place, it says this *(Read directly from Acts 6:8, NIV) ‘Stephen was full of God’s grace and power. He did great wonders and signs among the people.’*”

"They are off to a great start, and with these new leaders in place to help with the needs of the people, it really looks as if there is nothing that can stop the growth of the church!"

Communicator Opens Jar Two

SFX: Sound Jar 2: Unstoppable!

"Until a group of Jewish people from outside of the church began to oppose Stephen. They tried to argue with him. *(Read directly from Acts 6:10, NIV) 'But he was too wise for them. That's because the Holy Spirit gave Stephen wisdom whenever he spoke.'*"

"This did not go over so well, and so . . . *(Read directly from Acts 6:11, NIV) 'Then in secret they talked some men into lying about Stephen . . .'*"

Communicator Opens Jar Three

SFX: Sound Jar 3: Liar Liar Pants on Fire!

"(Continue reading) 'They said, "We heard Stephen speak evil things against Moses and against God.'"

Communicator Opens Jar Four

SFX: Sound Jar 4: He did what now?

"Did you catch that? They are making up lies about him, saying that he is going against their people, the Jews and against God! This is a pretty big deal. How big of a deal? Well, look what happens next.

"(Read directly from Acts 6:12, NIV) 'So the people were stirred up. The elders and the teachers of the law were stirred up too. They arrested Stephen and brought him to the Sanhedrin.' The Sanhedrin was the Jewish ruling council. In other words, it was the way that the Jewish people settled their legal matters without having to

involve the Romans in everything. If you are familiar with the name, it may be because Jesus appeared before this same group, and they decided He was worthy of death. That's why this was such a big deal."

"Now, Jesus didn't get a fair trial. Let's see if Stephen does."

"(Read directly from Acts 6:13, NIV) 'They found witnesses who were willing to tell lies. These liars said, "This fellow never stops speaking against this holy place. He also speaks against the law."

Communicator Opens Jar Three

SFX: Sound Jar 3: Liar Liar Pants on Fire!

"Can you believe it! They found people who would lie about Stephen, saying he is completely against their people and traditions. He must be really worried right now, huh?"

"(Read directly from Acts 6:15, NIV) 'All who were sitting in the Sanhedrin looked right at Stephen. They saw that his face was like the face of an angel."

Communicator Opens Jar Five

SFX: Sounds Jar 5: Heavenly angel "Aaaaaa"

"The high priest, who is in charge of the Sanhedrin, turned to Stephen with a question. He asked him if what the people are saying is true. He may have regretted asking, because Stephen's answer is one of the longest speeches in the book of Acts! Let's summarize it since nobody brought their sleeping bag to spend the night reading it straight through. It is an incredible speech, though. He begins by reminding them of God's story all the way back to Abraham, the father of the nation of Israel . . ."

Communicator Opens Jar Six

SFX: Sound Jar 6: "Leave your country, your people . . . God to the land I will show you"

"And talks about Abraham leaving even though he didn't know how God would fulfill his promise. Abraham had Isaac, who had Jacob, who had 12 sons. Stephen told the story of one of those 12 sons, Joseph . . ."

Communicator Opens Jar Seven

SFX: Sound Jar 7: "Look at that silly colored coat . . . get him!"

"And how he was sold into slavery in Egypt. He told them about the growth of the Israelites in Egypt that led to their oppression. And then the rise of Moses, their deliverer."

Communicator Opens Jar Eight

SFX: Sound Jar 8: Let my people go!

"Stephen then recalled the Israelites in the desert building a tabernacle for God and David's desire to build a real temple for God. It was in this moment that Stephen made the purpose of his long history clear. He wasn't just giving a review or reminding them in case they forgot. He was making a powerful point: all throughout this great history of Israel, they have had moments of obedience, but sadly, they also had moments of disobedience. God had sent messengers and prophets many times in the past, but they didn't always listen. Look at what Stephen says . . ."

"(Read directly from Acts 7:51-52, NIV) 'You stubborn people! You won't obey! You won't listen! You are just like your people of long ago! You always oppose the Holy Spirit! Was there ever a prophet your people didn't try to hurt? They even killed those who told about the coming of the Blameless One. And now you have handed him over to his enemies. You have murdered him.'"

"Woah. Stephen summed it all up by saying, your work is against God's work, and there is no greater example of this then in the fact that this same group had been responsible for sentencing Jesus to death."

Communicator Opens Jar Nine

SFX: Sound Jar 9: Mic drop!

"As you might guess, people listening did not respond well to Stephen's speech. In fact, it all escalated very quickly."

"(Read directly from Acts 7:54-55, NIV) 'When the members of the Sanhedrin heard this, they became very angry. They were so angry they ground their teeth at Stephen. But he was full of the Holy Spirit. He looked up to heaven and saw God's glory. He saw Jesus standing at God's right hand.'"

"Stephen told them what he saw: Jesus standing in Heaven at God's right hand. And at that, the place goes nuts. In their minds, this was outrageous and worthy of death."

"(Read directly from Acts 7:57, NIV) 'When the Sanhedrin heard this, they covered their ears. They yelled at the top of their voices. They all rushed at him.'"

Communicator Opens Jar 10

SFX: Sound Jar 10: Sound of men yelling

"And this is where it gets really sad. *(Read directly from Acts 7:58, NIV) 'They dragged him out of the city. They began to throw stones at him to kill him. The people who had brought false charges against Stephen took off their coats. They placed them at the feet of a young man named Saul.'"*

"This group takes Stephen's life from him outside of the city of Jerusalem, much in the same way that Jesus also gave up his life outside of the city. And in a final act of love that resembles the words of Jesus almost

word for word . . . (Read directly from Acts 7:60, NIV) *‘Then he fell on his knees. He cried out, “Lord! Don’t hold this sin against them!” When he had said this, he died.’*

“And that was it for Stephen. This man full of God’s grace and power, chosen to serve the church was set up, lied about, and killed. This was devastating.”

“Could you imagine what it must have been like for those other followers of Jesus in the church? Up to this point, it has really been mostly smooth sailing. Sure there had been some opposition, but nothing like this. Stephen died, and now I’m guessing many were wondering if could happen to them, too. Are we next? Could this be the end of what God has been doing in the church?”

“I bet they were confused. I bet they were even scared. Maybe some thought about calling it quits.”

“You want to know the crazy part? Stephen’s death wasn’t the ending of the story. It was actually a powerful beginning to the next big part of what God was doing in and through the first followers of Jesus. You see, Jesus had told his disciples that they would spread the message of Jesus in Jerusalem and then to the surrounding areas of Judea and Samaria.

CG: Map

“Check out the very next verse after Stephen dies . . .”

(Read directly from Acts 8:1, NIV) ‘On that day the church in Jerusalem began to be attacked and treated badly. All except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria.’

“Two things. The day Stephen dies, it gets much worse for the church. And because of this, the people start to scatter. But what do you notice about WHERE they scatter to?”

Pause for responses.

“Exactly! Where they go is exactly where Jesus said they would go in the first place. And as they go, they continue to share the message of Jesus! In other words, Stephen’s death is not the END of the story, but it is what drives the story forward!”

APPLICATION

COMMUNICATOR: “Like we said earlier, there are times where we believe that we know the outcome and we might as well just give up.”

“Think about Stephen. He didn’t run away or hide from those that opposed him. Instead, he boldly stood up and faced his fears, sharing the message of Jesus even though it cost him his life!”

“And then there is the church. Could you imagine if the church had just assumed this was the end and stopped the mission right then and there? But because they didn’t assume the ending, the message of Jesus continued to spread in powerful ways.”

“And then there’s you. Do you ever find yourself here? You know the right thing you should do . . . maybe standing up for a friend who is being picked on or telling the truth when you know it could cost you, but you’re feeling scared to keep going. Remember, just because we think we know how it might end doesn’t mean that we do. You never know how God might use your part of the story to write an incredible ending!”

LANDING

COMMUNICATOR: “Today as you go to groups, think about this question:”

CG: Key Question Slide

“**When were you scared but kept going?** Think about times both big and small when you were scared or anxious or unsure of what was happening. You didn’t know the right decision or didn’t know if you’d be able to keep going. If you’re having trouble thinking about a moment, that’s OK, too. You’ll get a chance to chat about

this in Small Group, too. Before you head there, let's pray and thank God for always being with us. I'm so thankful we can trust God no matter what! Let's pray."