

TAKEAWAY:

A Spirit-filled life shines brightly, even when the world pushes back.

INTRODUCTION QUESTIONS:

- When have you experienced pushback or resistance for doing the right thing? How did you respond?

UNDERSTANDING:

Have a group member read Acts 6:8-15

- How did this sermon help you better understand this passage of scripture? Is there anything that was mentioned during the sermon that stuck out to you?
- What stands out to you about Stephen's character and the opposition he faced?
- Stephen was "full of grace and power." What does it look like practically to let God's power shape your character rather than seeking public approval?
- Stephen's opponents couldn't win the argument, so they resorted to false accusations. When have you seen truth provoke an irrational response? Why does truth sometimes make people so uncomfortable?
- Stephen's face shone like an angel even as he faced false charges. What does this tell us about where to find peace when circumstances feel unfair?

APPLICATION:

- In what area of your life do you most need to trust God to defend what you cannot defend yourself?
- This week, identify one situation where you're tempted to defend yourself or seek approval. Instead, ask God to shape your character and trust Him with the outcome.

GO DEEPER:

The Go Deeper section has two potential functions. It can supplement your small group discussion by providing extra discussion material.

You can also use these sections as short devotionals to carry you through the week until your next group meeting and to deepen your study of our text from this week. Here are two "Going Deeper" discussion prompts that build upon the above provided questions without repeating them:

- **What's Your Focus?** Many Christians live with the assurance they'll spend eternity with God but functionally live as if this life on earth is all there is to life. This typically leads to disappointment with God (questioning God's goodness), using the world's measurements to define success, as well as that of expecting too much from ourselves, our circumstances, and others. We attempt to create our version of Paradise but our fallen world cannot act like Paradise—as God defines it.

Typically, our loss of peace, joy, right living, etc. is a result of not abiding in God, defining success by the world's standards, etc.

- How does Acts 6:8-15 exemplify God's heart toward those who are Christians, the world we currently live in, and what a Christian's character should be in the midst of the worst this world can throw at her or him?
- How does keeping our eyes on eternity and eternal values protect us from being emotionally crushed when people inevitably fail, oppose, or sin against us or when we would want our circumstances to be different?
- What do you want most for your kids in terms of a life focus and life on this earth?
- C.S. Lewis noted that "our whole education tends to fix our minds on this world," making it hard to truly want heaven. Stephen's composure before the Sanhedrin suggests his mind was grounded in and fixed upon God and eternity. What practical habits can we/you adopt this week to "train" our/your mind(s) to dwell on God and eternal values, so we are better prepared when this fallen world, including religious people, breaks its promises?
- **Obscurity and Divine Power:** Read Acts 6:3-5. Stephen's character was forged in the obscurity of serving marginalized widows before it was ever displayed before the Sanhedrin. How does the faithful execution of mundane, hidden tasks build the spiritual resilience necessary for public crises?
 - What is the precise theological distinction between natural human charisma and the "grace and power" bestowed by the Holy Spirit as seen in Stephen?
 - How does a contemporary culture obsessed with public platforming undermine the quiet, hidden development of spiritual depth?
 - In what specific ways does serving those who cannot repay us strip away our innate need for public approval and social validation?
 - How can a local church discern if a leader's power is rooted deeply in the Holy Spirit or merely in administrative competence and eloquence?

QUOTES:

- N.T. Wright: "A kind of light, illuminating Stephen from the inside. A kind of serenity, humble and unostentatious, but a fearful omen for his captors."
- John Calvin: "God has so ordered the church from the very beginning that death is the way to life, and the cross the way to victory."
- John Calvin: "Holy Stephen, the first martyr, took up somewhat of glory by anticipation before he died. For when he was brought to his trial... He had his transfiguration, according unto his measure..."
- John Chrysostom: "A person's wisdom brightens his face... When we imitate Jesus and glory in his work (not our own) we become the wisdom of God to the world and our face shines bright!"
- F.F. Bruce: "[Noting the Greek translation of grace in this context] Stephen had "charm... he was winsome; in the sense that... it would be hard to fall out with Stephen."
- Matthew Henry: "Wisdom and holiness make a man's face to shine, and yet these will not secure men from the greatest indignities... What shall we say of man... attempting to uphold a religious system by false witness and murder!"

PRAYER: Have a member of your group pray for strength to stand for truth and to lead with integrity, "full of grace and power".