

TAKEAWAY:

Faithfulness may cost you, but Jesus is worth whatever it costs.

INTRODUCTION QUESTIONS:

- Take a few minutes and ask your life group the following: "What's your role in the church, and how does it contribute to gospel mission?"

UNDERSTANDING:

Have a group member read Acts 7:44-60

- 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 similarities do you see between Stephen's death and Jesus' crucifixion?
- Stephen challenged the idea that God was confined to the temple. What "structures" or systems do we sometimes trust more than God Himself?
- Stephen's bold speech came from deep knowledge of God's story. How has Scripture given you courage in difficult moments? How can we grow in this area?
- Stephen saw Jesus standing for him at the moment of his death. What does it mean to "fix your eyes on Jesus" when suffering comes? How do we practically do this?

APPLICATION:

- Jesus promised that following Him would cost us something. How do we count that cost honestly while still believing He's worth it?
- What is something you need to give up in order to follow Jesus more closely?

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:

Improper Religious Zeal: By applying Psalm 110:1 and Daniel 7:13 to Jesus, Stephen was declaring that the crucified Jesus was divine and sitting in the seat of supreme authority. To the Sanhedrin, this was the ultimate blasphemy—an imposter claiming equality with God. In their passionate zeal to protect God's honor, keeping the Third of the Ten Commandments, etc. So they rushed to stone him. We must remember, they and their culture would have called them religious, God-fearing people and they **would have said that their actions against Stephen were motivated by intense religious zeal and a desire to**

uphold God's name and ways as supported by Scripture (see e.g., Mark 14:61-64; Acts 6:11, 13; 7:56; Exo 20:7; Lev 24:11-16).

- The Sanhedrin believed they were the ultimate gatekeepers of God's truth, while Stephen saw Jesus reigning in absolute authority (Acts 7:56). Where do we mistakenly put our ultimate trust in human leaders, political figures, or institutions to protect our faith, rather than trusting in the sovereign authority of Christ?
- When are we tempted to use specific Bible verses to attack, isolate, or "stone" someone relationally, rather than using scripture to restore them in love?
- How do we "cover our ears" (Acts 7:57) today when faced with uncomfortable truths, constructive criticism, or perspectives from Christians who do not look or think like us?
- How does modern social media or church politics encourage a "cancel culture" mentality, where we join a digital mob to tear someone down before fully hearing their heart or defense?
- Do we primarily discuss things in our own echo Chambers, that is, amongst those who agree with us? Stephen's accusers set up false witnesses who twisted his words to fit their narrative (Acts 6:13). When do we gossip, misrepresent, or assassinate the character or views of other believers just to make our own arguments or theological positions look superior and/or bolster our ideas by just talking with others who agree with us?

Radical Forgiveness: Stephen interceded for the very people who crushed him with stones. Meditate on Jesus' words in the Sermon on the Mount: ⁴³ *"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.'"* ⁴⁴ *But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you,* ⁴⁵ *so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.* ⁴⁶ *For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same?* ⁴⁷ *If you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same?* ⁴⁸ *Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.*

Consider what internal spiritual mechanics are required to genuinely pray for the forgiveness of active enemies.

- Why is the prayer "Lord, do not hold this sin against them" considered the ultimate proof of Stephen's Spirit-filled status?
- How does holding onto bitterness contradict the central thesis that "Jesus is worth whatever it costs"?
- What practical steps are required to transition from enduring an enemy to interceding for their salvation?
- How does Stephen's prayer challenge our modern cultural impulses toward vengeance and "cancel culture"?
- Is there a person or group in your life that you currently view as an enemy, and how can you begin to pray for them this week?

QUOTES:

- "There is a zeal which is a flame of the Holy Spirit, but there is also a zeal which is a spark from the fires of hell... Nothing is more fiercely destructive than religious passion divorced from the love of Christ." John Stott
- "Whenever custom and tradition are elevated to the level of divine mandate, the church becomes a museum guarding its relics rather than a movement following the Living God." A.W. Tozer
- "The digital mob has resurrected the ancient practice of stoning. We no longer use rocks; we use words, character assassination, and social exile—all while convinced we are doing God a favor." Alan Noble

- "We are always tempted to align our faith with political power and institutional security. But Christ is usually found outside the gate, suffering with the outcast, not inside the council chamber holding the stones." C.S. Lewis
- "If Stephen had not prayed, the church would not have had Paul." Augustine of Hippo
- "Jesus stood as a helpmate; he stood as if anxious to help Stephen, his athlete, in the struggle... Let him then stand for you that you may not fear him sitting, for he sits when he judges." Ambrose of Milan
- "God fill us with the Holy Ghost and with faith, so that we may, like Stephen, be the means of transforming Saul, the persecutor, into Paul, the apostle." Charles Spurgeon

GROUP ACCOUNTABILITY:

- Memorize Acts 7:55–56 this week. When you face difficulty, recall Stephen's vision of Jesus standing for him and ask God to help you see Jesus in your circumstances.

GROUP PRAYER:

- Pray for courage to remain faithful even when it's costly, and for eyes to see Jesus standing with us in our trials.