

7:9 – \_\_\_\_\_  
7:27-29 – \_\_\_\_\_  
7:39 – \_\_\_\_\_

## **“Whose Life Are You Living In?”**

### **Book of Acts – Week #8**

*Acts 7:52-53 NLT - 52 Name one prophet your ancestors didn't persecute! They even killed the ones who predicted the coming of the Righteous One--the Messiah whom you betrayed and murdered. 53 You deliberately disobeyed God's law, even though you received it from the hands of angels."*

In response to this accusation the crowd covered their ears and stoned him to death. But even in the last moments of life Stephen was a reflection of God's Spirit living in him. His eyes were fixed on Heaven where he saw Jesus by the throne of God, and as he committed his spirit into Jesus care, he plead for forgiveness for his persecutors.

### **WRAP-UP**

The story of Stephen records the first martyr for the faith. Stephen accepted God's call to serve in a ordinary roll but because he was willing to set aside his own ambitions and live out God's story for him, God filled him, and used him to perform miracles and powerfully preach the good news of Jesus to those who had refused to hear the truth that could set them free.

### **Memory Verse**

*Don't you realize that you become the slave of whatever you choose to obey? You can be a slave to sin, which leads to death, or you can choose to obey God, which leads to righteous living.*

*- Romans 6:16 NLT*

### **PRAYER (20 MIN)**

Ask your group to pray for you regarding one area where you can apply this study in your life: \_\_\_\_\_

Pray for your group members' needs: \_\_\_\_\_

### **Challenge-**

*Ask yourself if you are allowing God to direct the story of your life or is there something you need to allow Him to take charge of?*

### **INTRODUCTION**

Our study in Acts this week takes us to the life and death of Stephen. Stephen is most often remembered as the first martyr of the Christian faith. As we read about the circumstances surrounding Stephen's death, we see the collision of a life determined to follow God's story with those whose only interest was themselves. How different would our lives look if we were dedicated to following Jesus without thought of ourselves?

### **Key Passage**

**ACTS 6:9 – ACT 7:60**

### **STUDY QUESTIONS (45 MIN)**

#### **1. Serve Where You are Called**

The community of believers in Jerusalem were serving not only spiritual needs but the physical needs as well. One way they did this was distributing food to the widows. But even in this gesture of charity there was controversy. A favoritism was demonstrated toward one group of widows over another. This complaint was brought to the Apostles to solve and their solution is found in Acts 6:2-3.

*2 So the Twelve called a meeting of all the believers. They said, "We apostles should spend our time teaching the word of God, not running a food program. 3 And so, brothers, select seven men who are well respected and are full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will give them this responsibility."*

*The Twelve Apostles recognized that God had called them to minister in some things but not to personally execute all things that needed to be done in the church. The same is true today. It is easy for us to complain about things "The Church" needs to do and many times we bring this to*

*our Pastor's attention. What did the Apostles recognize about what they were and weren't responsible for? Rather than abandon the food distribution, how did they handle it? What are the church's responsibilities that you think could or should be done by church members rather than by pastoral staff? What area's do you feel God has called you to be a part of?*

Stephen's qualifications were that he was well respected, and full of wisdom and the Holy Spirit. It was not his experience or profession that qualified him to serve, but he was being called by God to this duty and he followed God's leading.

*In performing his everyday tasks of waiting tables what was he able to do?(v.8)*

*Acts 6:8 NLT - 8 Stephen, a man full of God's grace and power, performed amazing miracles and signs among the people.*

Stephen was filled with God's Holy Spirit, His grace and His power. As a result, God used Him to perform miracles and signs, even in the mundane work of food distribution.

*Which do you find more difficult; saying no to all the things that need doing but you are not called to do, or saying yes to the unglamorous tasks that God has called you to?*

## **2. Set Free from what?**

Stephen had willingly set aside his own ambitions to follow God's call to wait tables and feed the widows. He was, in effect, a bondservant to God, having laid down his life to follow Jesus. There were also men in Jerusalem who were previously slaves but were now free men. They gathered at a Synagogue known as the Synagogue of Freed Slaves. It was these men who challenged Stephen about his faith in Jesus. At this time the believers had not been called Christians and were still worshiping in the synagogues but believed Jesus was the prophesied Messiah.

*Romans 6:16 NLT - 16 Don't you realize that you become the slave of whatever you choose to obey? You can be a slave to sin, which leads to death, or you can choose to obey God, which leads to righteous living.*

*Paul told the Romans that we become the slave of whatever we choose to obey. There are many things that compete for our devotion. Name some "idols" that we often recognize as fighting for our attention.*

*Perhaps our greatest battle arises when we become the object of our own worship. What freedom do we forfeit when self-importance and pride displace God's control of our lives?*

## **3. Defending Ourselves or Defending God**

*Acts 6:11, 13-14 NLT - 11 So they persuaded some men to lie about Stephen, saying, "We heard him blaspheme Moses, and even God." ... 13 The lying witnesses said, "This man is always speaking against the holy Temple and against the law of Moses. 14 We have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy the Temple and change the customs Moses handed down to us."*

*What was Stephen accused of? If you were accused in this way what kind of a defense would you present?*

It is clear in verse 11 that the charges against Stephen were lies. But rather than bring witnesses to defend his own character, Stephen presents his accusers with the history of how God's people had rejected those He sent to save them. Stephen was accusing his accusers of doing the same.

*Acts 7:51 NLT - 51 "You stubborn people! You are heathen at heart and deaf to the truth. Must you forever resist the Holy Spirit? That's what your ancestors did, and so do you!"*

*One thing that stands out in Stephen's narrative is how often God's people rejected God and those He sent to save them.*

*In the following verses note the how God's people rejected the ones sent to save them.*