 **Community Group Discussion Guide**

Go Therefore: Acts 6:8 – 7:53, February 28th, 2021

**The 5 Ws of Journalism: Who, what, when, where, why?**

**Who** are the main characters in today’s scripture

Steven, Opposition, Church, False Accusers, People, elders, teachers of the law, Sanhedrin, Saul

**What** happened?

**When** did this happen?

**Where** did this happen?

**Why** did this happen?

**I. Getting Started:**

What are some of the reasons that give hesitancy to follow Jesus well?

What are some of the hinderances we experience as we follow Jesus today?

Is fear one of them?

**II. Discussion of Scripture:**

**More about Stephen:**

*Acts 6:8-10 - 8And Stephen, full of grace and power, was doing great wonders and signs among the people. 9 Then some of those who belonged to the synagogue of the Freedmen (as it was called), and of the Cyrenians, and of the Alexandrians, and of those from Cilicia and Asia, rose up and disputed with Stephen. 10 But they could not withstand the wisdom and the Spirit with which he was speaking.*

Last week, we learned that Stephen was a man of good character, filled with the Holy Spirit and wise. He was asked by the early church to serve as one of the first deacons, where caring for the needs of the church was entrusted to him and to others. In Acts 6:8-10, Stephen is described as someone full of grace and power, and when he was opposed by those who were enemies of the church, they could not withstand, or hold out, against the wisdom God had gifted to Stephen. Stephen was clearly a “vessel” for God’s work as he gave himself to the needs of the church.

**Discussion Questions**:

* Looking to Stephen as an example of ministry to the church, what strikes you about his discipleship to Christ?
* What does Scripture mean in speaking of Stephen as being “full of grace and power?”
* What are some of the hinderances that keep us from being a “Stephen” to the church and our communities?
* What can we do better as the church to prepare for the type of sacrifice and ministry demonstrated by Stephen?

**Stephen is “Framed”**:

 *11 “Then they secretly instigated men who said, “We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses and God.” 12 And they stirred up the people and the elders and the scribes, and they came upon him and seized him and brought him before the council, 13 and they set up false witnesses who said, “This man never ceases to speak words against this holy place and the law, 14 for we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and will change the customs that Moses delivered to us.” 15 And gazing at him, all who sat in the council saw that his face was like the face of an angel.”*

**Discussion Questions**:

* In their darkened minds, those “who belonged to the synagogue” did not understand Jesus’ teaching regarding the purpose of His death and resurrection. We also see that they were unable to overcome the wisdom that Stephen spoke by the power of the Holy Spirit. Frustrated in their attempt to destroy Stephen’s witness, what did the elders and scribes do in response—what evil did they turn to in their desire to close Stephen’s mouth?
* What did the false accusers mean about Stephen speaking blasphemous words against Moses and God. Or against this holy place and the law. Or that Jesus will destroy this place and change the customs from Moses? Is there any similar things that could be said about today’s culture or our lives?
* We are told that the council, sitting in his judgement “saw that his face was like the face of an angel.”
	+ What do you think that meant? What did they see? Can you describe or contrast the power demonstrated in Stephen’s life with what is defined as power in the world today? How are they different? How has sin perverted power and its use?

**Stephen’s History Lesson**: (Acts 7:1-53)

In verses 1-50 of Acts 7, Stephen responds in the grace and power described in 6:8. Stephen affectionately speaks to his “Brothers and fathers” (vs. 2) with grace, but also with power. His speech gives a brief history of Israel’s long rebellion against a patient and longsuffering God whose desire is to see a humble and repentant people. In verse 51, Stephen speaks unbridled truth, calling the people “stiff-necked” and spiritually dead (uncircumcised) in heart and ears. In Scripture, the one who is “stiff-necked” is one who is unwilling to recognize, submit to, or “bow” to God’s authority. It is active resistance and rebellion against God. Clearly, Stephen is speaking to people who are actively rejecting God and His rightful place in their lives.

* What was the purpose for Stephen to give this lesson of Jewish history?
* Where do we, in our culture, see similar resistance to God’s leadership?
* Stephen gave his defense to his audience in his way. Do we have a similar opportunity, or is our setting very different? What does our setting, or culture say about how we might speak truth to those God brings into our lives?

**Stephen will become a martyr.**

As a result of Stephen’s submission to God’s call on his life, he became the church’s first martyr. The witness of Stephen’s life as a follower of Christ marks an important and instructive moment in the life of the church. We learn that being a follower of Christ can sometimes lead to physical death and that our discipleship is not living “our best life now”—that life is yet to come. But it also teaches us, in a profound way, how the Holy Spirit enables our witness and is powerfully present in the most threatening moments.

* + The command most often given in Scripture is “fear not”, or “do not be afraid”. Stephen’s directness with the crowd brought rage and physical violence against him.
		- Do you think Stephen was afraid at this moment?
		- What do these verses tell us about the work of the Holy Spirit when we are inadequate to the task and fearful?
	+ Those who have written on courage as it’s portrayed in Scripture have rightly observed that sustainable courage only occurs when we’ve moved or pushed beyond the limits of our own self-sufficiency. Filled with the Holy Spirit and full of grace and power, Stephen found that courage is in our Father who loves and stands by His children.
		- Is it your tendency to only walk as far as your self-sufficiency in your call to go, to do the work of a disciple?
		- Do you see a promise to us in how God’s sufficiency sustained Stephen?
	+ Jesus said, “Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear Him who can destroy both soul and body in hell” (Matt 10:28).
		- Notice that Jesus’ distinction is not between those who fear and those who do not. I can’t imagine that Stephen was fearless in this circumstance. The distinction is in what is feared. What distinction did Jesus outline in the verse above?
		- Is the difference in where the fear leads? Filled with the Holy Spirit, prepared to speak with grace and power, did Stephen speak toward self-protection, or faith?
		- God created us wholly dependent on him, and as He did for Stephen, His Spirit provides the strength we need as a follower of Jesus. Fear is often a barrier to our obedience, but Scripture encourages us and reminds us that we must always be carried by the Father. What does this moment tell us, as Stephen’s fellow witnesses, about the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives?

Steven will be the first martyr in the church. One way God trains his servants is to place them in insignificant positions. Such as Stephen, serving tables, taking care of widows, administration and eventually being a messenger. We are called to strive for excellence in small assignments which will prepare us for greater responsibilities. “Before people can give their lives for the gospel, however, they must first live their lives for the gospel.”

* + - How many risks do we take to in being Jesus’s followers?
		- Would we be willing to die for him?
		- Are we willing to live for him?

**III. Responding in Prayer:**

* Pray for the Stephens of Henderson Hills, scattered around the world, who willingly place themselves in danger to be a witness to God’s love for the lost.
* Ask God to give His church eyes and ears to recognize how He is at work all around us; that we would faithfully step into the work as the Holy Spirit gives grace and power for God’s glory.