

Acts 8:51-58

4 Principles for Advancing the Gospel

Image Church // One More Week 3

Introduction

Good morning, Image Family so good to be back with you this weekend!

If you're a guest... **Connection Center**

Exciting days ahead: NEW Space...

While we're talking about new- I want to let you know about something else that's new... We have a **NEW Giving platform!**

- Excited about this...
- Easier, cleaner and it streamlines, and it puts everything under one platform!
- **Here's what this means for you-** need you to discontinue any current reoccurring gifts and sign up on our new platform...
- Already available on the Church Center App.!
- You will get an email that we be a reminder and that will have further instructions...
- If you have any questions **Pastor Aaron** will be in the lobby...

Well, this morning we're diving back into series called **One More!** And the series is called what it is because this is what we want to be about as a church... We want to be about reaching **one more** person with the gospel!

- We want this to be at the core of who we are...

And what we want to do in this series is lay a foundation for how we do that together... I want you to feel empowered and equip to share the gospel!

I know that for many of you sharing the gospel can feel like a big task, one that you don't really feel equip to do... Or maybe you have a tough crowd that God's put you around... Maybe you've had an awkward or hard conversation in the past that has spooked you... I feel you!!

I have 3 non-Christians that live with me- their names are Adalyn, Braxton and Cole...

- We have lots of conversations with Adalyn...
- A while back when AG was younger we were driving past a graveyard...
- Adalyn's comment...

Gospel conversations can be challenging!!

I want to give you a confidence and a framework for your pursuit of **one more**...

If you have your bibles go ahead and turn to Acts 7... We're going to start in verse 51... *Let's go ahead and jump in.*

Acts 7:51-58

51 "You stiff-necked people with uncircumcised hearts and ears! You are always resisting the Holy Spirit. As your ancestors did, you do also. **52** Which of the prophets did your ancestors not persecute? They even killed those who foretold the coming of the Righteous One, whose betrayers and murderers you have now become. **53** You received the law under the direction of angels and yet have not kept it."

54 When they heard these things, they were enraged and gnashed their teeth at him.

55 Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven. He saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. **56** He said, "Look, I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!"

57 They yelled at the top of their voices, covered their ears, and together rushed against him. **58** They dragged him out of the city and began to stone him. And the witnesses laid their garments at the feet of a young man named Saul. **59** While they were stoning Stephen, he called out, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit!" **60** He knelt down and cried out with a loud voice, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them!" And after saying this, he fell asleep.

Bro, what are you doing here... where you going with this thing??
Stiff-necked people?? This guy also was killed- this feels like a lot...

Hang with me, Stephen is an incredible account of the first Christian martyr- who played a very key role at a very specific time that had massive implications...

And there's a lot that we need learn from Stephen, but really quick, let's back up and look at how he got here with Stephen...

Look at **Acts Chapter 6**...

Acts 6:1-15

1 In those days, as the disciples were increasing in number, there arose a complaint by the Hellenistic Jews against the Hebraic Jews that their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution.

2 The Twelve summoned the whole company of the disciples and said, "It would not be right for us to give up preaching the word of God to wait on tables.

3 Brothers and sisters, select from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Spirit and wisdom, whom we can appoint to this duty. **4** But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word." **5** This proposal pleased the whole company.

So they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit, and Philip, Prochorus (pro-cerous), Nicanor (Ni-cane-r), Timon (Ty-men), Parmenas, and Nicolaus, a convert from Antioch. **6** They had them stand before the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them.

7 So the word of God spread, the disciples in Jerusalem increased greatly in number, and a large group of priests became obedient to the faith.

8 Now Stephen, full of grace and power, was performing great wonders and signs among the people. **9** Opposition arose, however, from some members of the Freedmen's Synagogue, composed of both Cyrenians and Alexandrians, and some from Cilicia and Asia, and they began to argue with Stephen. **10** But they were unable to stand up against his wisdom and the Spirit by whom he was speaking.

11 Then they secretly persuaded some men to say, "We heard him speaking blasphemous words against Moses and God." **12** They stirred up the people, the elders, and the scribes; so they came, seized him, and took him to the Sanhedrin. **13** They also presented false witnesses who said, "This man never stops speaking against this holy place and the law. **14** For we heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and change the customs that Moses handed down to us." **15** And all who were sitting in the Sanhedrin looked intently at him and saw that his face was like the face of an angel.

And **chapter 7** would start off with the **high priest** asking *Stephen if these things were true* which would open the floor for Stephen to speak and he don't just speak, this man preaches...

In fact, it's the longest recorded sermon in the book of **Acts** where he uses the OT to give a detailed account of Israel's history...

Stephens conclusion is where we started this morning, when Stephen lands on the fact that all of Israel's history points to and culminates in **Jesus the Righteous One**... And then he was drug out and killed... So, we have looked at the two bookends of the account of Stephen, and what I want to hold up for you is:

4 Principles for advancing the gospel that we need to learn from Stephen...

1. God divinely enables you to do what He's called you to do

Acts 6:3 Brothers and sisters, select from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the **Spirit** and wisdom, whom we can appoint to this duty.

Acts 6:5 So they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and the **Holy Spirit**,

Acts 6:10 But they were unable to stand up against his wisdom and the **Spirit** by whom he was speaking.

Acts 7:55 **55** Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven.

Explain how we get the Spirit and what the Spirit does...

Empowers transformation and new life, empowers you for the mission and ministry...

Never seen this power?? Probably because you've never leaned into it!!

- Make it practical how you do this...

*Stephen was not an apostle, he was not a pastor, he was a normal guy that was empowered by the Spirit and did extraordinary things...

Acts 6:7 So the word of God spread, the disciples in Jerusalem increased greatly in number, and **a large group of priests became obedient to the faith.**

- This is HUGE!!

This is what God has tasked the church with... I think we often forget this but **2 Corinthians 5:20** shows us that God's plan for advancing His message and for drawing people to Himself is by making His appeal through YOU!!

- This is not optional this is imperative!
- For some of you, you've been neglecting your calling, you've been pushing away from your purpose to be ambassadors of Jesus...

2. Jesus is our motivation and our model

Stephen had encountered Jesus...

Changed everything for him...

Let me start with this, have you encountered Jesus??

Maybe you have any you've forgotten the implications... You've shy'ed off...

Stephen understood the magnitude of who Jesus was...

- Stephen was willing to endure discomfort for the sake of the gospel...

His encounter with Jesus lead to Him embodies the ways and words or Jesus...

59 While they were stoning Stephen, he called out, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit!" **60** He knelt down and cried out with a loud voice, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them!"

What we see here is the same gracious patience even in the face of death...

In Stephen we see grace and truth... modeled after Jesus who was also grace and truth...

It's important we have both/and- we do not want to be truth warriors...

Now you are probably not going to be stoned anytime soon for talking about Jesus...

3. Faithfulness is the goal, not success

We see something here that we don't see anywhere else in the bible...

55 Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven. He saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. 56 He said, "Look, I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!"

Why was Jesus standing????

- Receiving Stephen and affirming his faithfulness...
- We don't hear about the conversions; we see the celebrated faithfulness...

*Big appeal here for faithfulness and being relieved of success...

- We live in a performance-based world...
- If conversion is our goal we will be discouraged and we will get frustrated...
- We are not commission based as Christians...

Let's talk about faithfulness... it's uncomfortable...

- For Stephen, His faithfulness was uncomfortable, hard, challenging...
- He suffered rejection- he was killed, no worse rejection than that...

But watch this, he was rejected by men, received by Jesus...

- In the greatest way!

Get practical...

4. Know that the return on your faithfulness will be greater than you can see

The impact of Stephens faithfulness was catalytic...

Acts 8:1 Saul agreed with putting him to death. On that day a severe persecution broke out against the church in Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout the land of Judea and Samaria.

Gospel for the first time advances out of Jerusalem to Judea and Samaria...

Acts 1:8 But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come on you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.

I want you to hear this: You and I are here this morning because of Stephens faithfulness... Let the weight of that sink in!!

Who will that be true for because of you??

BTW: One of the greatest investments you can make is with those kids back there!

Important truth tucked in here... and all except the apostles were scattered throughout the land of Judea and Samaria.

The gospel advanced on the backs of everyday people, not the religious elite... Men and women like you were the ones that were responsible for taking the gospel beyond Jerusalem...

The faithfulness of those everyday people created and evangelistic explosion...

Very practically:

Some of you need to reorient your perspective... Some of you need to change your approach to life...

You cannot forget or miss your purpose... to be an ambassador of Jesus...

Not fulfilled?? Chances are you're not living out your God-given purpose...

Some of you are paralyzed- you need to take a step of intentionality to put into practice what we've talked about today...

- Write down the names of lost ppl God has put around you
- Pray for God to open you eyes to the opportunities in front of you...
- Open you mouth and take a step of faith and watch what God does...

There is no such thing as a Christian that doesn't share their faith...

Appeal to the non-Christian...

- You're here and you have been interested but never been impacted by Jesus...
- You have been around or drawn to Christianity but never embraced the message of Christianity...
- We exist for you... We are willing to do whatever it takes for you...

Conclusion [VAMP]

- 1. God divinely enables you to do what He's called you to do**
- 2. Jesus is our motivation and our model**
- 3. Faithfulness is the goal, not success**
- 4. Know that the return on your faithfulness will be greater than you can see**

What's stopping you from leaning in on these things??

Where have you had the wrong perspective??

Would you turn to Jesus, open your heart and your hands...

Pray...