

Session 9: Stephen, an Ordinary Hero

Session Summary: This session examines the life and martyrdom of Stephen, the first Christian martyr, from Acts 6-7. Pastor Jon emphasizes that God accomplishes His greatest work through ordinary people who are fully surrendered to Him. Stephen exemplifies godly character through being full of the Holy Spirit, wisdom, faith, grace, and power—even while serving in what many would consider a menial task of serving tables. Pastor Jon challenges believers to recognize that God has a purpose for their lives regardless of age or circumstance, and that complete surrender to God's will transforms ordinary people into extraordinary witnesses. Stephen's willingness to speak truth boldly, his vision of Jesus standing at God's right hand, and his prayer for forgiveness as he was being stoned demonstrate the power of a Spirit-filled life. His death was not a waste but a fruitful witness that likely influenced Saul's later conversion to become the Apostle Paul.

Key Points:

- God is not finished with believers as long as they have breath in their lungs; there is no retirement in Christian service
- True surrender means declaring "I am a prisoner of the Lord" and choosing daily to submit to God's authority
- Stephen was chosen as one of seven men with high qualifications (good reputation, full of the Spirit, full of wisdom) to serve tables, showing that no task is menial when done for God
- Stephen's inner qualities included being full of the Holy Spirit, wisdom, faith, grace, and power
- Grace is not just unmerited favor but God's divine power extended to us to accomplish what He calls us to do

- When filled with the Holy Spirit, believers receive dunamis power—dynamite power that changes everything around them
- Stephen's godly character was proven over time, not just in a moment
- Being spiritually minded rather than intellectually minded is essential for Christian maturity
- Stephen responded to persecution not by defending himself but by preaching truth and looking to heaven
- Stephen's final prayer for his persecutors' forgiveness demonstrated Christ-like love and likely impacted Saul's future conversion
- A fruitful death for Christ can have greater impact than we understand from our limited perspective

Scripture Reference:

- Acts 6:1-15
- Acts 7:1-60
- Ephesians 4:1-3
- Romans 12 (transformation by renewing of mind)
- 1 Thessalonians 5 (do not quench the Spirit)
- Acts 1 (promise of Holy Spirit power)
- Jeremiah 29:11 (God's plans for a future and hope)

Stories:

- The conflict between Hellenistic Jews and Hebrew Jews over the neglect of widows in daily distribution

- The selection of seven men, including Stephen, to serve tables while apostles devoted themselves to prayer and preaching
- Stephen performing great wonders and signs among the people
- Stephen's confrontation with the Synagogue of Freedmen who could not withstand his Spirit-filled wisdom
- False witnesses accusing Stephen of blasphemy against Moses, God, and the temple
- Stephen's sermon recounting Israel's history from Abraham through Moses to the religious leaders
- Stephen's vision of Jesus standing at the right hand of God
- Stephen's stoning with Saul (later Paul) holding the coats of those who stoned him
- Stephen's final words asking God not to hold the sin against his persecutors
- The preacher's personal story of God asking him if he would be willing to be His "paint roller"—used and then discarded when the task is complete
- The illustration of cleaning paint rollers and how residue remains, relating to incomplete surrender
- The analogy of a prisoner surrendering to law enforcement, paralleling spiritual surrender to Christ of Mount Everest