

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDE

Sermon: “Grace Under Pressure” *The Stoning of Stephen*

Series: “Lessons from the First Church” Dave Sattler NSAC

March 10, 2024 Text: Acts 6:8-8:2

Sub-texts: Luke 23:34, Acts 5:29, Acts 6:5, Ephesians 2:8-9, 4:31-32, 1 Corinthians 15:55-57

I. Introduction Questions:

- Discuss the spread and growth of the First Church.
- Pastor Dave said, “The disciples’ allegiance to Jesus carries them into many precarious situations in which they face opposition head on with tremendous courage.” Read Acts 5:29. Why do you think the disciples had such courage?

II. Scripture Reading: Read Acts 6:8-8:2 (selected verses)

III. Biblical Passage Questions:

1. How does Luke describe Stephen? (6:5/6:8) What do you make of this description? Discuss.
2. Who opposed Stephen and what was their plan of attack? (6:9-14)
3. Read 6:10. What did Stephen’s opponents come up against?
4. Describe the strange and glorious reaction of Stephen. (6:15)
Describing Stephen this way is meant to give the impression of a devout person who *radiates* God’s presence—like Moses when he came down from seeing God on Mt Sinai. Yet, somehow the religious leaders miss this connection between Stephen and their beloved Moses.
5. Review Stephen’s stirring speech. (7:2-53)
Recalling God’s *land* promise to Abraham, Stephen warns against idolizing possessions (the land, the power, the nation) and forgetting the God Who’s given it all to them. With respect to the *law* passed on through Moses, Stephen challenges them to not be so fixated on smugly keeping the law (which is humanly impossible) that they lose sight of their dependence on *God* to save them. Pointing to the *temple* built by Solomon, Stephen reminds that God is not only present to His people through the temple, or, the temple system: “*the Most High does not [exclusively] live in houses made by human hands.*” (v48). In essence, Stephen’s saying that ... Throughout history, the people of God have constantly *rejected* God’s messages through the prophets, and, now through Jesus, the Messiah.
6. Describe the mob scene (7:54-8:2)
7. How does Stephen exhibit grace under pressure?
8. What is the significance of Stephen’s vision of heaven?
9. Why do you think Dr Luke includes Saul in his narrative?

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IV. Life Application Questions:

A. *Radiating Jesus in our world.*

- Stephen cut his teeth in ministry in an administrative role in an outreach ministry to vulnerable people in the city of Jerusalem. What impact might this have had on his character development?
- Pastor Dave mentioned some “quiet-yet-powerful” ways to serve God in our community: prayer warriors, cooks, organizer, number-crunchers, creatives, disciplers. How are these just as important as upfront roles?
- How might we radiate Jesus and His presence in our world?

B. *Extending grace and forgiveness to others.*

- How is it that Christ-followers have come to be branded as stiff, judgmental, and unforgiving?
- How does living with un-forgiveness affect people?
- Discuss the challenges of extending grace even towards those who have harmed us and are unwilling to fess up.
- Read Ephesians 4:31-32. Where does our ability to forgive others come from? Pastor Dave said, “It’s my conviction that we are only able to dole out forgiveness to the extent to which we experience it from God ourselves.” Thoughts?

C. *Being welcomed into eternity with Jesus.*

- Describe the Christian vision of death, resurrection, and eternity. How is this reflected in Stephen’s story? How did this vision infuse the First Church with courage?
Pastor Dave said, “As Christ-followers we need not fear death. For death is not the end of things. And there is much to look forward to with Jesus in eternity, where all pain and brokenness is gone!”
- Read 1 Corinthians 15:55-57. How does Jesus and His work on the cross impact the “sting” or “fear” people have when it comes to death?
- What do followers of Jesus have to look forward to? And, how might this impact how we view death and eternity?