

## Community Group Discussion Questions

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### “The Sacrifice of Stephen”

#### Acts 7:54-8:4

**Sermon Series Title:** “Church Beginnings”

**Sermon Series Summary:** From now until around Easter, we will be in the book of Acts, covering chapters 1-12. After the Ascension of Jesus Christ, we see the NT church being born by the power of the Holy Spirit. Through this series, we see the church being built, the kingdom going forth, and the gospel being proclaimed.

**Setting:** The book of Acts is a transitional book between the resurrection of Jesus and the established local churches of the epistles. With Jesus’ call to the church in Acts 1, we see how the gospel spreads to Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the end of the earth.

**Summary:** Our passage starts off with the stoning of Stephen after his fearless sermon. In it, we see Stephen witnessing the glory of Christ as he goes home to heaven. This martyrdom sparks even greater and more intense persecution against the church. But this is all under God’s sovereignty as the church is sent out and the seeds of the gospel are planted.

**Sermon Points:**

1. The Sacrifice of Stephen
2. The Scattering of the Church
3. The Sovereignty of God

**Main Idea:** *“The sovereignty of God and the hope in Christ give us the boldness to share the gospel with the world.”*

**Opening Question**

1. Are you afraid of death? Why or why not?

*(Answers will vary.)*

**Read Acts 7:54-8:4**

2. How does the death of Stephen move you? What can we learn from it?

*(Answers will vary.)*

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*We can learn many lessons from Stephen's death. First, we see that Stephen does not try to look for an escape or look at his enemies. He looks at God. In the midst of hardship and in the midst of the mundane, we are called to look up at God. We cling to Him for strength and hope. We cry out to Him in our prayers. We seek to spend time with Him in His word. We look to the things that are ultimate and eternal instead of the things that are temporary and finite.*

*Second, we see Stephen's vision of heaven and the glory of God. In it, Jesus is standing, welcoming him home and standing to his defense. Stephen catches a glimpse that true power and true glory are not found in earthly power and authority. They are found in the glory of God Himself in Christ. Many of us may not receive this vision before we die, but this will be our sight after we die. We will be welcomed and defended.*

*Third, though Stephen is deemed guilty of death according to man's courts, Jesus is his defense in the heavenly courts. That is the trial of greatest importance. This is what gives Stephen great boldness and peace in the face of death. Jesus is his redeemer and advocate, based on His sacrifice on the cross for him which has secured his place among the people of God for all eternity.*

*Fourth, Stephen's death shows us Christ's heart, as Stephen recites two prayers that Jesus prayed on the cross. We see submission to the Lord's will and trust in God as Sovereign. We see the heart of compassion and forgiveness for his enemies. If this is Stephen's heart in the face of death, this should be our hearts in the face of life.*

*Fifth, the sacrifice of Stephen proclaims Christ and glorifies God. We are reminded of the sacrifices in the Old Testament, killed for the glory of God. We may not be martyrs for Jesus in this life, but Paul calls us to be living sacrifices. We die to our sin, our selfishness, our self-salvation, and our pride, and we live out God's glory. We live for Him.)*

### 3. What does our passage teach us about God's sovereignty in suffering?

*(God uses Stephen's death for His glory and purposes. He is sovereign over death. The Jewish leaders kill Stephen to kill his message and to intimidate the church. But the story of Stephen is told throughout the generations and encourages the church in their faith. Though his death sparks even more persecution, God uses it to spread his gospel through the church to the ends of the earth. And we know that the death of Stephen plants the seeds of the gospel in Paul's heart for his conversion in the next chapter. Not only that, it influences his theology and teaching on death and the gospel.*

*Acts 8:2 shows us that heavenly hope does not mean that we don't mourn over suffering. It does not mean that we don't grieve over loss. We can lament, cry out, and be sorrowful over the brokenness from suffering. At the same time, we can be reminded of God's sovereignty and purposes for His glory and the redemption of the world. We*

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*can be reminded of God's ultimate hope and glory in heaven that this world and suffering in this life will never be able to reach. We can be assured of the love of God in Christ as we see God's sovereignty in suffering fully displayed through the cross.)*

***Final Thoughts:*** *Stephen's death may be inspirational or overwhelming. How can a man be moved to die for the glory of God and the proclamation of Christ with such peace, joy, and compassion? It's simple. He has experienced and known the love of God fully displayed through the sacrifice of Christ, which has secured for him a place in the people of God for all eternity. We may not be called to die as a martyr, but we are called to be living sacrifices, trusting in His sovereignty and proclaiming His good news for His glory. This is all because we have experienced the grace of our Savior, who loved us and gave Himself for us.*