

I. My Notes ... WWC message 11/1

II. Series: A Disciple's Life – Our Daily Journey

- Title: Growing in Grace
- Text: Acts 6 and 7
- Quote: Discipleship is a daily discipline; we follow Jesus a step at a time, a day at a time. Warren Wiersbe (Pastor, Author)

III. Introduction

- The “Spirit led” or “Spirit filled” life is transformative. It leads one down a path that is different than where society attempts to put us to. Living this way is a choice, it is a decision to keep our Lord God at the center of each moment, and to follow the promptings and guidance the Holy Spirit gives us. Jesus said, **“13However, when the Spirit of truth comes, He will guide you into all truth. For He will not speak on His own, but He will speak what He hears, and He will declare to you what is to come. 14He will glorify Me by taking from what is Mine and disclosing it to you....” (John 16:13-14 BSB)**. We, as people and believers, need a guide. Otherwise, we get lost and stumble.
- The need for grace isn't just because we recognize our need for a Savior. It is a need for change. Life doesn't work on our terms. Even though we would like to think that we have the answers, many have the sense there is a lacking deep inside our being. This is where the Holy Spirit fills the void. Grace isn't just what saves us—it's what shapes us. It teaches us to serve without recognition, to speak with courage, and to endure with forgiveness. We are looking at a passage in Acts that shows this firsthand.
- Stephen didn't just die well—he lived well. And that's the invitation for us: to grow in grace, wherever we are planted. You are surrounded by your “mission field.”
- It begins with understanding you need a Savior. It continues with a choice to honor God with our actions and attitudes. It is seen in the way we treat others.

IV. Spirit-Led Service: Acts 6:1-7

- Growth was happening – growth in numbers. The community of Christ followers in Jerusalem was expanding. And doing so quickly. People were searching for hope, for

relief, for a change in their circumstances. Does this sound familiar? The truthful message brought by the Apostles was having an impact and people were turning to Jesus.

- As with any rapid change, there were issues. The Greek-speaking widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food. The apostles did not ignore the issue, nor did they try to do everything themselves. They said, *“It would not be right for us to give up preaching the word of God to wait on tables.”* (**Acts 6:2 CSB**). Pay attention, they didn’t diminish the task. They elevated it.
- **Acts 6:3-4 CSB:** *“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.”* They knew their calling, their duty. And they understood the importance of meeting real needs in real ways. This decision - the choice they made, and the priorities established, was appealing to all who were involved (Acts 6:5)
- The Apostles put the responsibility back onto the people as to who would serve them. The Apostles set the criteria – those that served were to be full of the Spirit and have wisdom. The Apostles were looking for people to minister in the same manner that they would have. Seven men were chosen and one of them was about to be key to this letter Luke was writing.
- *“They chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit...”* (**Acts 6:5**). Spirit-led service isn’t about platform, it’s about posture. Whether you’re leading worship or stacking chairs, the Spirit empowers you to serve with grace and authority. Stephen didn’t start with a sermon—he started with a tray. And God used him mightily.
- Here is a story you may or may not know ... Chuck Colson was once known as President Nixon’s “hatchet man,” deeply involved in the Watergate scandal. After being sentenced to prison, Colson experienced a radical spiritual awakening. Amid disgrace and confinement, he surrendered his life to Christ. That decision did not just change his heart—it redirected his entire life.
While still in prison, Chuck Colson began to sense a divine calling. He founded Prison Fellowship, which grew into one of the largest outreach ministries for prisoners, ex-prisoners, and their families. His Spirit-led journey was marked by humility, repentance, and a relentless pursuit of justice and mercy for the incarcerated—many of whom society had forgotten.

- Very similar to Stephen’s ministry, Mr. Colson’s ministry began in obscurity and suffering—but it bore fruit that changed lives across generations. His story reminds us that Spirit-led service can emerge from broken places and still carry resurrection power.

V. Spirit-Led Witness: Acts 6:8-7:53

- **Acts 6:8 CSB** – “*Now Stephen, full of grace and power, was performing great wonders and signs among the people.*”
- I don’t know if it’s human nature or jealousy or something else … Maybe it’s a combination of all these things that make people want to curb what is happening when you are allowing the Spirit to work through you.
- Things were happening and this was getting the attention of others. Faithful service led to opportunities to point others to Jesus. This is a lesson for believers today. It’s not about fame or recognition; it is about finding the joy and peace that comes from serving others and showing them the grace of God.
- Even though good things were happening, this choice to serve met resistance. And when the resistance couldn’t change what was going on, it turned into outright opposition and false accusations. This alone can cause people to throw up their hands in exhaustion and despair. Stephen remained faithful to his duty.
- This faithfulness landed him in front of the Sanhedrin, with more accusers and more lies being told.
- Stephen didn’t come from a family of leaders and preachers. He was just following the guidance of the Holy Spirit. After hearing the accusations, he wasn’t defeated or deterred. He appeared to be at peace … “*And all who were sitting in the Sanhedrin looked intently at him and saw that his face was like the face of an angel.*” (**Acts 6:15 CSB**). Peace comes as we keep our focus on the Lord God.
- Stephen spoke – he told them facts that they would have known very well. This wasn’t just a recitation of past history; it was pointed out that their choices and actions (their sins) were condemning them in the same way that they were condemning Stephen.
- Stephen didn’t just know scripture—he knew the story. He saw how every thread pointed to Jesus. Each point that Stephen made told all who were listening about God’s character, His nature. It addressed their misunderstandings.

- Stephen begins with God's initiative—how the Lord called (who became Abraham, their father of faith) while he was still in Mesopotamia. This sets the tone: God's presence and promises are not confined to land or temple.
- He continues the story through Jacob and his sons, focusing on Joseph (7:9-16). This part of the story pointed to the suffering servant (a foreshadowing of Jesus Christ) and the results of remaining faithful to God's purpose.
- God's word, His purpose, His plan will always come to pass. It might not be in the way it was expected to. It might not be in the timing that makes us comfortable. But God is faithful, He is consistent. Stephen continues ...
- He points out that Moses, too, is initially rejected by his people. Stephen emphasizes that Israel resisted Moses even as they received the law—mirroring their rejection of Jesus.
- Stephen challenges the Sanhedrin's temple-centric theology by quoting Isaiah 66: *"Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool. Could you build me a temple as good as that? Could you build me such a resting place? My hands have made both heaven and earth; they and everything in them are mine. I, the Lord, have spoken!"* (**Isaiah 66:1-2 NLT**). God's presence transcends buildings. It is not about the building; it's about the relationship.
- At last, Stephen calls them out. The Sanhedrin was being consistent to what their previous leaders had been. Rejecting the truth, refusing to listen, unwilling to bow. Their attitude of being right, of superiority, of power would be their downfall.
- **Acts 7:51-53 CSB:** *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."*
- Their rejection continued, they missed the message of truth and hope.
- In a world of soundbites and shallow faith, we need believers who can tell the story of redemption with clarity and compassion. Stephen's words were bold, but his heart was burdened. He wasn't trying to win an argument—he was trying to awaken hearts.

- I have learned that people, when confronted with truth, usually respond in one of two ways. Either repentance or rage. The Sanhedrin, the crowd, became enraged.
“54 When they heard these things, they were enraged and gnashed their teeth at him.”
(Acts 7:54 CSB).
- Crowd pressure can be upsetting and uncomfortable. Throughout this part of Luke’s letter, he has referred to Stephen being yielded to the Holy Spirit, following the Spirit’s guidance. We are about to see it again.
- **Acts 7:55-56 CSB:** *“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!”*
- This further angered the crowd. They had to do something. They wanted to silence the truth.
- Stephen stood firm in his faith and trust in the Lord. As stones flew, Stephen prayed, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.” And then, echoing his Savior, he said, “Lord, do not hold this sin against them.” (vs. 59-60).
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- Spirit-empowered endurance is not just about surviving trials—it’s about seeing Jesus in the midst of them. Stephen saw heaven open. He saw Jesus standing at the right-hand of the Father. And he forgave those who took his life. That’s resurrection power. That’s Spirit-led living—rising above the struggle, not by strength, but by Spirit.

VII. Wrapping Up

- Stephen’s journey is a portrait of growing in grace. He begins by serving tables—faithfully, humbly, Spirit-filled. That grace deepens as he speaks truth with wisdom and conviction. And it culminates in a moment of radiant forgiveness, as he sees Jesus standing in glory.
- This story ends with the first person martyred for the belief in Jesus. And it introduces us to an important person in the foundation of the church – Saul. This young man was a Pharisee from Tarsus, the start pupil of Gamaliel (remember him?), and possibly the instigator of this trial. The critics laid their robes at Saul’s feet before stoning Stephen (vs. 58).

- It was because of this moment that things began to change. Persecution of the church in Jerusalem grew. Growth happens because of persecution. People leave the areas of distress and find a new place to thrive. And they bring with them the Gospel message.
- **Acts 8:1 CSB** – *“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.”* Remember what Jesus had told them prior to His ascension … You will be my witnesses in Judea, Samaria, and all over the world” (see Acts 1:8). It looks like Stephen was the catalyst for this to happen. The church moved from Jerusalem to all over the world. The Gospel message, preached primarily to the Jews, was not being told to every person that would listen.
- This story will continue next week.
- Let's Pray
- Grace First, Grace Always