

# Marks of Discipleship

Daily Prayer ■ Weekly Worship ■ Bible Reading ■  
Giving Time ■ Talents & Resources ■  
Spiritual Friendships ■ Service In &  
Beyond the Church

March 26, 2023

## Day 1: Acts 7:51-53

***"You stiff-necked people, with uncircumcised hearts and ears! You are just like your fathers: You always resist the Holy Spirit! Was there ever a prophet your fathers did not persecute? They even killed those who predicted the coming of the Righteous One. And now you have betrayed and murdered him-- you who have received the law that was put into effect through angels but have not obeyed it."***

Stephen has come to the end of his sermon. Up to now it has been received somewhat well but at the end he is beginning to offend (a preacher normally does not do this, especially if the audience might be hostile). He offends them by forcing them to recall past events when the so called religious people interfered with God's prophets. They even killed some of the prophets that told them what they did not want to hear. Stephen compares past events to the one that just occurred - Jesus being crucified. He accuses them of actually disobeying the Law and going against God.

**Question:** Who was Stephen talking to in this section? Who would he be talking to in today's world?

**Challenge:** If these folks were "resisting the Holy Spirit," how exactly were they doing that and what does it mean to "resist the Holy Spirit"?

**Scripture:** Acts 7:1-16

## Day 2: Acts 7:54-55

***When they heard this, they were furious and gnashed their teeth at him. But Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, looked up to heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God.***

As you can expect, no officials (government or religious) enjoy being talked to the way Stephen talked to them. They respond in a predictable manner, by trying to silence Stephen. At the moment when Stephen really needs to see Jesus, He appears to him. God will give us a vision of hope when we need it most. What happens too often today is that we expect to see God the way we want to and miss how God is really appearing. We should be willing to see God as God is, not as what we want God to be.

**Question:** What do you think is "the glory of God"?

**Challenge:** Read the editorials in the paper this week and note how you react to them. See especially the political cartoons.

**Scripture:** Acts 7:17-29

## Day 3: Acts 7:56

***"Look," he said, "I see heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God."***

Stephen now completes his sermon. He tells those listening that the reason for his belief and faith is that he can see Jesus. Stephen, like all the early Christians, knew that he served a living Savior. Jesus told his disciples that they would recall things about Jesus when they needed to. In John 14:25-26 Jesus said that the Holy Spirit will bring to their remembrance all that Jesus told them. Today we still have this assurance. When we need to, God will give us the words to tell people about our belief.

**Question:** If Jesus was sitting at the right hand of God, who would be there also?

**Challenge:** What do you think it means to have Jesus at the right hand of God?

**Scripture:** Acts 7:30-41

## Day 4: Acts 7:57-58

***At this they covered their ears and, yelling at the top of their voices, they all rushed at him, dragged him out of the city and began to stone him.***

Today when we tell folks what and why we believe, we may find them unreceptive but we most likely will not be dragged out and stoned. What might almost be worse, we may not be taken seriously. People may smile and think our testimony is quaint instead of taking it as truth. Our testimony does not often elicit anger but a shrug of the shoulder and an attitude of "what does it matter," as long as you are a good person you are all right. At least if you are stoned you are being taken seriously.

**Question:** When was the last time you were so angry that you could not even think straight?

**Challenge:** Is anger a problem for you? Can you think of a way to harness the energy created when you are angry to help you get something done?

**Scripture:** Acts 7:42-50

## Day 5: Acts 7:59-60

***Meanwhile, the witnesses laid their clothes at the feet of a young man named Saul. While they were stoning him, Stephen prayed, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." Then he fell on his knees and cried out, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them." When he had said this, he fell asleep.***

While Stephen was being killed and just before he died he prayed the prayer that Jesus did as He died on the cross. He asked that the crime might not be held against the ones throwing the stones because they did not know what they were doing. This is level of spiritual life that most of us could not attain. But we can at least forgive our enemies. We see in this passage that Saul (soon to become Paul) is leading the group stoning Stephen. Though Saul is not throwing stones, he is the leader of the group. You can see why later in Acts when Christians hear that Saul, now Paul, is preaching the faith he once destroyed it was hard to believe.

**Question:** Do the last words of Stephen sound familiar? Where have you heard or read them?

**Challenge:** Put yourself in Stephen's place. Could you say the same thing or would you even want to? If you had the power to curse those stoning, do you think you would?

**Scripture:** Acts 7:60-8:4

## Day 6: Acts 8:1-4

***And Saul was there, giving approval to his death. Godly men buried Stephen and mourned deeply for him. But Saul began to destroy the church. Going from house to house, he dragged off men and women and put them in prison. Those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went.***

The stoning of Stephen was the beginning of a general persecution of the Christians. The result was not the destruction of the movement but the spreading out of the movement. When the forces of evil try to destroy the Church it only grows and grows stronger. The Church has not had a problem with adversity. We have had problems with success. Saul is an example of religious zeal being turned by the forces of evil into something demonic. If anyone ever kills another in God's name (no matter what name you give to God) you are not acting for God but for evil. There may come a time you are forced to kill some one but we never kill in God's name.

**Question:** A hard question—what would you be willing to die for?

**Challenge:** The Church has always grown during persecution. Why do you think this is true?

**Scripture:** Romans 10:1-21