

Trusting in Christ in Life and Death

Summary and Goal

Several of the previous sessions have focused on the coming of the Holy Spirit. In this session, we will look specifically at how the Spirit's work enables the church to trust Christ in matters of life and death. The Holy Spirit empowered the earliest Christians, like Stephen, to speak boldly about Jesus and to interpret the Scriptures wisely concerning Him, but the Spirit also empowered believers such as Stephen to endure persecution to the point of death for the sake of the gospel.

Session Outline

1. God's people speak boldly, empowered by the Spirit's presence (Acts 6:8-10).
2. God's people proclaim God's Word, empowered by the Spirit's understanding (Acts 7:44-51).
3. God's people face persecution, empowered by the Spirit's filling (Acts 7:54-60).

Background Passage: Acts 6-7

Session in a Sentence

The Holy Spirit empowers and enables God's people to preach Jesus boldly even in the face of death.

Christ Connection

In his death as the first martyr, Stephen followed in the footsteps of His Savior. Both Jesus and Stephen were falsely accused and charged with blasphemy. Both Jesus and Stephen prayed for their executioners. Both Jesus and Stephen entrusted their spirits to God as they died. As a follower of Jesus Christ, Stephen reflected His Master in life and in death.

Missional Application

Because we have been saved through the sacrifice and death of Jesus, we bear witness to His great glory, even when we are maligned or persecuted for our faith.

Group Time

GROUP MEMBER CONTENT

Introduction

EXPLAIN: Use the two paragraphs on page 66 in the DDG to put forward the gospel as the best story ever told in comparison with popular superhero movies and comic-book stories.

Superhero movie franchises and the latest iteration of the *Star Wars* saga show the power of a good story. Grown men and small children alike dress up in costumes, stand in line for hours, and spend roughly \$62 on a bucket of popcorn and a soda just to watch larger-than-life heroes do the unthinkable. People are riveted by a good story that seems otherworldly, and they're willing to scrounge up the money and time to invest in the experience if they're convinced they'll enjoy themselves.

The gospel, however, is the best story ever told. But in the true story of Jesus, our Hero is not a man in tights from another planet or a demigod from another realm. No, He's God in the flesh. He's not a mere superhero—He's the Creator of the universe. He came to defeat our great enemies: Satan, sin, and death. Enemies that would make the greatest comic-book villains quake in their boots.

INTERACT: Ask group members the following question.



How might the “superheroes” in your life affect the way you esteem and perceive Jesus? (be prepared to give an answer of your own to jump-start the conversation)

SUMMARIZE: The power of a good story is at the heart of this session. Here we will look specifically at how the Spirit's work enables the church to trust Christ in matters of life and death. The Holy Spirit empowered the earliest Christians, like Stephen, to speak boldly about Jesus and to interpret the Scriptures wisely concerning Him, but the Spirit also empowered believers such as Stephen to endure persecution to the point of death for the sake of the gospel.

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Point 1: God's people speak boldly, empowered by the Spirit's presence (Acts 6:8-10).

READ Acts 6:8-10 (DDG p. 67).

⁸ Now Stephen, full of grace and power, was performing great wonders and signs among the people. ⁹ Opposition arose, however, from some members of the Freedmen's Synagogue, composed of both Cyrenians and Alexandrians, and some from Cilicia and Asia, and they began to argue with Stephen. ¹⁰ But they were unable to stand up against his wisdom and the Spirit by whom he was speaking.

EXPLAIN: Use the first paragraph in the DDG (p. 67) to set up Stephen's identity and the opposition he encountered for the sake of Jesus' name.

Stephen had been chosen by the church as a deacon to help the church serve the widows who were in danger of being overlooked. He was described as a man "full of faith and the Holy Spirit" (6:5) and "full of grace and power." Stephen was an ordinary and godly man, and God performed great miracles through him. Yet the work of God amongst the people raised eyebrows and opposition. The leaders in particular wanted to squelch this Jesus movement that threatened their religious power and authority.

- Stephen wasn't special; he wasn't a super-human. He was a human being like you and me. The requirements for all of the deacons in Acts 6 were the same: "of good reputation, full of the Spirit and wisdom" (6:3). Those considered were all qualified and able to do the task, and Stephen became an example for the type of Spirit-led follower we should all seek to be.
- Though Stephen was healing people and had a good reputation among the church and the community (1 Tim. 3:7-8), he was accused of wrongdoing. His opponents wanted Stephen and his Christian message to go away.

SAY: Many of us will face various versions of this, especially if we actually tell people we are Christians and seek to proclaim the gospel. In fact, it is impossible that any Christian could go a lifetime without facing some sort of opposition, however small, for proclaiming the name of Christ (John 16:33).

INTERACT: Ask group members the following question.



What are some ways you have witnessed opposition to the gospel? (be prepared to give an answer of your own to jump-start the conversation)

EXPLAIN: Use the second paragraph in the DDG (p. 67) to emphasize that the Holy Spirit was Stephen’s ultimate weapon in dealing with arguments against the gospel.

Stephen had wisdom, possibly a form of wisdom he gained through life experience, training, and reading the Scriptures. But Stephen’s ultimate weapon for dealing with arguments against the gospel was the wisdom from the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 2:13-16). Stephen didn’t merely win a debate; he defended the work of God in their midst in a way that was inarguable and unexplainable apart from the Holy Spirit’s presence and power.

- Most people who are fearful of evangelism tend to have two basic excuses.
 - For some, *they are afraid that they are not “smart enough” to answer the questions a non-believer might have.* Even if they’re extroverted and not overly fearful to talk to a stranger, they never feel “prepared” enough to take the plunge. We will cover this concern in the next section, but this excuse is mostly false, with one caveat.
 - For others, evangelism is scary because *they subconsciously believe it is up to them to save people.* They might say, “I know only God can save,” but functionally they are riddled with evangelistic paralysis because they put too much pressure on themselves to persuade someone to believe the gospel. This is different from the first excuse because even the most knowledgeable “Bible Quiz” champions still place too much pressure on themselves to convert others.
 - As we consider what it looks like to speak boldly for Christ through the power of the Spirit, two foundational truths should undergird our conversations.
 - First, we should always proclaim Christ with humility, patience, and long-suffering.** Some will reject us regardless of how kind we are or how long we endure their scorn or disinterest; however, we should never create a stumbling block by being arrogant, excessively assertive, or dismissive of their doubts and questions. If we are rejected, it should be on the basis of the offense of the cross (Gal. 5:11), not because we are jerks.
 - Second, we should remember that the Holy Spirit is living within us and speaking through us as we seek to share the gospel.** Our boldness is not wrapped up in our ability to wow people with our speech; rather, our boldness is the willingness to share the gospel at all, knowing that it is difficult and uncomfortable but also acknowledging that we can do nothing in our own power.
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SAY: As we seek to share the gospel and stand for Christ, we do so from a position of humility, knowing that the Holy Spirit is the One who has helped us to believe the very gospel we proclaim. The pressure is off of us to save anyone. We cannot, but the Spirit can.

INTERACT: Ask group members the following question.



What is the biggest fear you face in evangelism or in publicly identifying with Jesus, the church, and the gospel? *(be prepared to give an answer of your own to jump-start the conversation)*

Point 2: God's people proclaim God's Word, empowered by the Spirit's understanding (Acts 7:44-51).

SAY: Barna Research recently released statistics on Bible reading: 88 percent of American households own a copy of the Bible, but only 37 percent of people read it once a week or more. People said they don't read the Bible because they don't have enough time and they struggle to understand the words.¹ The following passage speaks to the necessity of reading and knowing God's Word but also our need to be humble to receive what the Holy Spirit has to say to us through Scripture.

READ Acts 7:44-51 (DDG p. 68).

⁴⁴ "Our ancestors had the tabernacle of the testimony in the wilderness, just as he who spoke to Moses commanded him to make it according to the pattern he had seen. ⁴⁵ Our ancestors in turn received it and with Joshua brought it in when they dispossessed the nations that God drove out before them, until the days of David. ⁴⁶ He found favor in God's sight and asked that he might provide a dwelling place for the God of Jacob. ⁴⁷ It was Solomon, rather, who built him a house, ⁴⁸ but the Most High does not dwell in sanctuaries made with hands, as the prophet says: ⁴⁹ Heaven is my throne, and the earth my footstool. What sort of house will you build for me? says the Lord, or what will be my resting place? ⁵⁰ Did not my hand make all these things? ⁵¹ "You stiff-necked people with uncircumcised hearts and ears! You are always resisting the Holy Spirit. As your ancestors did, you do also.

EXPLAIN: Use the first paragraph in the DDG (p. 68) to fill in the storyline from the previous passage to this one and to highlight Stephen's emphasis on the Holy Spirit for understanding the Scriptures.

Because Stephen spoke the truth about Jesus, he was falsely accused of speaking against Moses, God, the temple, and the law. When brought before the Jewish authorities, he was given a chance to defend himself, which he did with a sermon that practically followed the storyline of the Old Testament (Acts 6:11–7:43). Stephen argued that his audience rejected the truth about Jesus because they resisted the Holy Spirit and His message through the Scriptures.

- The New Testament is rife with the idea that really knowing the Old Testament Scriptures leads to belief in Christ and His words (see Matt. 12:5; 19:4; 21:42; Luke 24:27,44; John 5:39). Furthermore, believing in Christ and receiving the Holy Spirit He sends helps us rightly read and interpret the Old Testament as pointing to Christ (John 14:26; 1 Cor. 2:10-16; 2 Cor. 3:13-16).
- Stephen spoke to the assembly believing that Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for rebuking and correcting (2 Tim. 3:16). Furthermore, he trusted the Word of God to do the internal work of changing the heart, something he could never do himself (Heb. 4:12).

INTERACT: Ask group members the following question.

 How have you seen the Old Testament point to the coming of Christ? (God promised the seed of the woman would defeat the serpent; Moses promised a the coming of a prophet greater than he; the sacrifices pointed toward the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross; God promised a son of David would reign on an eternal throne; Isaiah foretold the Suffering Servant who would die a substitutionary death for His people)

EXPLAIN: Use the second paragraph in the DDG (p. 68) to credit the Holy Spirit’s illumination for any right understanding of God’s Word that we might possess.

Through the illumination of the Holy Spirit, our spiritual eyes are opened to the supernatural, life-giving truth of God’s living Word. The Spirit lives within us as believers to help us understand God’s will and character and to see the Son of God through the pages of Scripture.



Voices from Church History

“Divine Scripture is sufficient above all things.”²

–Athanasius (d. 373)

- When we open its pages, the Bible speaks to us and calls us to “taste and see that the LORD is good” (Ps. 34:8). Instead of going to our Bible simply for a nugget of wisdom to get us through the day, we should open it ready to worship the God who meets us there.
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FILL IN THE BLANKS: Provide group members with the answers for the call-out in their DDG (p. 68).

Illumination of Scripture: Because of the vast difference between God’s **wisdom** and ours and because of humanity’s **sinful** state, human beings are incapable, on our own, of fully grasping spiritual truth without being aided by the **Holy Spirit** through the process of illumination.

Essential Doctrine “Illumination of Scripture”: Because of the vast difference between God’s **wisdom** and ours and because of humanity’s **sinful** state, human beings are incapable, on our own, of fully grasping spiritual truth without being aided by the **Holy Spirit** through the process of illumination. When it comes to understanding the meaning of God’s Word, Christians do not rely ultimately upon human reason in the process of interpretation, nor do we rely solely upon an institution or body of scholars. Instead, a Christian’s ultimate reliance is upon the work of the Spirit of God, who illuminates the Scriptures in the heart and mind (John 14:15-18; 16:7-15).

Point 3: God's people face persecution, empowered by the Spirit's filling (Acts 7:54-60).

READ: Ask a volunteer to read Acts 7:54-60 (DDG p. 69).

⁵⁴ When they heard these things, they were enraged and gnashed their teeth at him. 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!"

⁵⁷ They yelled at the top of their voices, covered their ears, and together rushed against him. ⁵⁸ They dragged him out of the city and began to stone him. And the witnesses laid their garments at the feet of a young man named Saul. ⁵⁹ While they were stoning Stephen, he called out, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit!" ⁶⁰ He knelt down and cried out with a loud voice, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them!" And after saying this, he fell asleep.

EXPLAIN: Use the first paragraph in the DDG (p. 69) to point out how, being full of the Holy Spirit, Stephen was able to face his persecution with faith and forgiveness, just like Jesus.

When we believe in Jesus, we don't merely receive the blessings of Christ that make us excited about eternity, such as forgiveness of sin, we also receive the counter-intuitive blessings that our flesh wants to avoid—self-sacrifice, persecution, and suffering. The way of Jesus is not easy (Matt. 16:24-25; John 15:20; Acts 14:22; 2 Tim. 3:12), yet the Holy Spirit empowers us to endure the persecution we sometimes face.

- With one of his last breaths, Stephen—full of the Spirit—cried out in the same way as his Savior: "Lord, do not hold this sin against them" (Acts 7:60; cf. Luke 23:34). Because of the Holy Spirit, Stephen was able to obey his Savior by blessing those who cursed him and praying for those who persecuted him, just as Jesus did (Luke 6:28).

Commentary: "Stephen died as only one who was 'full of the Holy Spirit' could (v. 55). He seems to have consciously followed the pattern of his Master as he faced his own death. His last words, 'Lord Jesus, receive my spirit,' echoed those Jesus prayed from the cross. This was the same basic commitment of his life to his Lord that Jesus made to the Father in his own dying moments (Luke 23:46). There is a certain trusting innocence in these dying words of Stephen and of Jesus. The words are an ancient Jewish prayer, based on Psalm 31:5, which children were taught to pray at bedtime. 'Lord, do not hold this sin against them' reminds us of Jesus' prayer for the forgiveness of those who crucified him (Luke 23:34). And so Stephen 'fell asleep,' perhaps in fulfillment of his prayer in v. 59. The early Christians often used the concept of 'sleep' for death, a confession of their assurance of resurrection. No one ever died with greater assurance than Stephen. He fell asleep with the vision of his risen Lord at God's right hand still fresh on his mind."³

INTERACT: Ask group members the following question.

 Why do we find it difficult to pray for and forgive those who hurt us? (we aren't full of the Holy Spirit; it doesn't seem fair to let people off the hook for causing us pain; we don't think it will make a difference in the life of the other person; human nature is to seek revenge)

EXPLAIN: Use the second paragraph in the DDG (p. 69) to emphasize that because of the Holy Spirit, Stephen didn't renounce his faith or cave to the pressure of persecution, and we can do the same.

The Holy Spirit lives inside of us to sanctify us through spiritual disciplines, faithful obedience, and even through the trials of life in a fallen world. Because of the Holy Spirit, Stephen didn't renounce his faith or cave to the pressure of persecution. With the Holy Spirit living in us, we can do the same, knowing our trials ultimately bless us.

- Jesus Christ didn't see His own persecution or our persecution as a negative. Rather, it was ultimately a blessing because of the great reward to follow in heaven. Persecution is a cause for rejoicing because it means you are following in the steps of the faithful prophets and our faithful Savior who have gone before us (Matt. 5:11-12).
 - When we are persecuted because of Jesus, we show our obedience and allegiance to Him and His kingdom by sharing in persecutions like He experienced. The author of Hebrews put it this way: "Endure suffering as discipline: God is dealing with you as sons. For what son is there that a father does not discipline? ... No discipline seems enjoyable at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it" (Heb. 12:7,11). The word "discipline" in the context of Hebrews 12 is related to persecution and suffering. Though we are persecuted in this life, God uses it as a way to build our endurance, like a runner trains for a marathon (Heb. 12:1). God's discipline is not punitive; it's an endurance boot camp.
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SAY: Jesus, God's Son, faced persecution and trials. If we are united with Him by faith through the Spirit (Rom. 8:9), then we should expect to be treated as sons too—like the Son Himself. We know we are God's children in part by virtue of our suffering on His behalf. What seems like a negative to our flesh is a blessing in God's eyes. The road to New Jerusalem is paved with trials, suffering, and persecution. And yet, it is not wasted. Our momentary afflictions are nothing compared to our eternity (2 Cor. 4:17).

INTERACT: Ask group members the following question.

 How have you seen trials serve as a blessing in your life or the lives of others? (be prepared to give an answer of your own to jump-start the conversation)

My Mission

EXPLAIN: Trusting Christ *in life* is hard enough, but we are also to trust Him *in death*. For the early church, this often meant actual physical death. But for any Christian at any time in history, the call to die to ourselves is a clear command that encompasses all of life. As Jesus told His disciples in Matthew 16, His suffering and persecution would become theirs—and that’s good news! Indeed, Jesus told Peter that to stop His death would be to hold back the very plan of God. By dying to ourselves, we can truly live (Matt. 16:25). Persecution takes many forms, but the call is the same. By God’s grace, through the power of the Spirit, we can take up our cross and follow Jesus—both in life and in death. As Paul stated, “To live is Christ and to die is gain” (Phil. 1:21).

READ the following missional application statement in the DDG (p. 70), and encourage group members to choose at least one of the options below as a way to respond to the truth of God’s Word.

Because we have been saved through the sacrifice and death of Jesus, we bear witness to His great glory, even when we are maligned or persecuted for our faith.

- **What are some ways you will take up your cross and follow Jesus?**
- **How are people in your group facing trials and persecution, and how can your group support and encourage one another?**
- **Who do you need to forgive and pray for so they can hear the gospel and believe in Jesus?**

Voices from the Church

“Jesus prays that our lives would be saturated with the truth. This means all aspects of truth—information, internalization, transformation, and application. Because this is the will of God, we can dive into the Word of God with gospel confidence that the Spirit is working the Word into our hearts and minds for God’s desired ends.”⁴

—Eric Mason

CLOSE IN PRAYER: Lord Jesus, You came to end our suffering, and You are also present with us in our suffering through the Holy Spirit. Help us to proclaim Your lordship and kingdom boldly even as we face persecution. Thank You for giving us what we need to follow You in obedience to the Father. May You find us faithful to the end, just as with Stephen. Amen.

PACK ITEM 8: SUFFERING FOR JESUS: Pass out copies of this handout about the sufferings of Christians in the first part of Acts so your group members can reflect on these during their **Daily Study** this week.

INSTRUCT: As your group departs, encourage group members to read and respond to the **Daily Study** devotions in their DDG (pp. 71-73), which build and expand upon the group study. Also advocate for small groups or families to use **Encourage One Another** (p. 74) for mutual accountability and fellowship grounded upon the foundation of God’s Word.

Daily Discipleship

Throughout the week following the session, use the ideas below to remind and encourage your group members to live as disciples of Jesus Christ. The **Daily Study** devotions in the DDG (pp. 71-73) will help group members get into God's Word and study it for themselves. **Encourage One Another** (p. 74) will help group members and families fellowship with one another with purpose.

Daily Study

Brief daily devotions in the DDG (pp. 71-73) will help group members take initiative in their own discipleship.

- Make sure all group members have access to a Bible to read. Have some Bibles available to give to guests who may need one, or offer to get one and arrange a time to meet to give it and show how to navigate it for the devotions.
- Share the following idea from the devotion for **Day 4** as a part of point 2 in the session: **Unlike the religious leaders at the time, we should listen to the Holy Spirit as He speaks to us through the Scriptures and makes Himself known to us.**



Consider leading by example and reading the daily devotions yourself with your own DDG. Based on your study, use brief messages throughout the week (group text, email, social media) to encourage your group to keep up with their daily time in God's Word and to live it out. Here are a couple of examples you can use:

- **Day 3: "God the Son had Himself come in the flesh to save His people. Rejecting Him is a rejection of God's work in the most egregious way."**
- **Day 5: "The Holy Spirit cannot be tamed, drowned out, or ignored—not even the gates of Hades can stop the kingdom's advancement."**



Visit www.GospelProject.com/Blog for additional content and resources you can use to help group members gain more insight into their daily studies. Send group members a link or a portion of a blog post or other content that you believe will be helpful and encouraging for their time in God's Word.

Encourage One Another

This brief plan for fellowship and accountability in the group member's DDG (p. 74) will help groups of 2-4 people to meet sometime during the week to reflect on the session and to share how God is working and they are responding. It could also be used for family discipleship with students and children who are using *The Gospel Project* in their groups.

- **Encourage group members to challenge one another to stay mindful of their need of the Holy Spirit throughout their daily lives.**
- See yourself as a member of the group who also needs encouragement in the faith, and participate in such a group this week.

Additional Commentary

Point 1: God's people speak boldly, empowered by the Spirit's presence (Acts 6:8-10).

“The primary interest here in Acts, nevertheless, was not in these ‘extraordinary miracles’ (19:11) as spectacles, but in the sovereignty of God the Creator over his creation (17:24–29) and over its laws, not only at the beginning of time but throughout and to the very end (28:23) ... ‘Stephen ... did great wonders and signs.’ In many ways the key to terms used in connection with miracles—[*dunamis, thambos, semeion, teras, phaneron*]
—in the vocabulary of Acts, and in the vocabulary of the New Testament generally, is [*semeion*] [sign], which explicitly points beyond the deed, howsoever spectacular it might be, to that *signatum* for which the deed served as *signum*. A miracle was not a stained-glass window to be looked at, but a transparent window to be looked *through*. Therefore [*semeion*] often appears in combination with one of these other terms and as a clarification of it, as in ‘mighty works and wonders and signs’ (2:22), ‘wonders and signs’ (here and in 2:43; 7:36), and ‘signs and wonders’ (4:30; 5:12; 15:12).”⁵

“Stephen had been chosen as one of the seven because he was ‘full of the Spirit and wisdom’ (6:3), ‘full of faith and of the Holy Spirit’ (6:5) and *full of God’s grace and power* (6:8). He was also mighty in performing *great wonders and signs*. As such, he attracted attention, both positive and negative. The first opposition came from the *Synagogue of the Freedmen* (6:9). The ‘freedmen’ may have been descendants of Jewish prisoners who had been captured by the Roman general Pompey in 63 BC. These Jews had ended up in places like *Cyrene and Alexandria* in North Africa and *Cilicia and Asia* (Roman provinces in what is now Turkey). They took issue with Stephen (6:9), but it is not clear what exactly the disagreement was about. Probably they were engaged in some kind of religious disputation with him and could not counter Stephen’s Spirit-given wisdom and rhetorical gifts (6:10).”⁶

Point 2: God's people proclaim God's Word, empowered by the Spirit's understanding (Acts 7:44-51).

“Stephen’s argument is thus concluded; all that remains is to drive it home to the conscience of his audience. He has answered the charges brought forward by the prosecution. As for the charge of subverting the Mosaic tradition, it is not he but the nation, and preeminently its leaders, that should plead guilty to this: their guilt is amply attested by their own sacred Scriptures, back to Moses’ own lifetime. As for the charge of blaspheming God by announcing the supersession of the temple by ‘this Jesus of Nazareth,’ he makes no attempt to deny it but justifies his position by the claim that it is the position occupied by the patriarchs and prophets, whereas the position of his opponents involves a point-blank denial of the consistent witness of the Scriptures.”⁷

“Jesus stands as the last in the long line of God’s prophets, and he too was persecuted by his own, even to the point of death. The great difference between the prophets of old and Jesus is that *they* spoke of the Righteous One to come, whereas Jesus *is* that Righteous One. It was through the persecution and death of the Righteous One that our sin was removed and we can now share in his righteousness (2 Cor. 5:21). Stephen then recalls the days of David and Solomon, showing how the Jews have mistakenly associated God’s presence only with the temple. But even in the Old Testament, God was not limited by a structure made with human hands (Acts 7:49-50). God is near to all who call on him (Ps. 145:18), and he has drawn near to us most fully in Jesus ... Christ’s incarnation, ministry, death, and resurrection are the true fulfillment of the Old Testament promises of God. Jesus did not overrule and obliterate the revelation of God that had been entrusted to the Jews; he embodied and fulfilled it.”⁸

Point 3: God’s people face persecution, empowered by the Spirit’s filling (Acts 7:54-60).

“The angry mob gets ‘enraged’ by Stephen’s message and, like animals, ‘gnashe[s] their teeth at him’ (7:54; cf. Job 16:9; Ps. 35:16). Instead of responding to the man’s message in humble repentance, the self-righteous are outraged by it. But, like Jesus, Stephen has a heavenly perspective prior to his death. Stephen can view death positively because of heavenly realities. As the wolves prepare to attack, Stephen catches a glimpse of heaven (vv. 55-56) ... Our brother Stephen endured a horrible death. People were hurling rocks at him, and he eventually died from the many blows they landed to his head. But before Stephen passed away, he offered prayers to the Lord Jesus, his words reflecting the prayers Jesus prayed to the Father while suffering on the cross (vv. 59-60). This beautiful truth helps us see how one filled with the Spirit lives and dies. Stephen asks Jesus to welcome him home, and then Stephen prays for his murderers! Only people who know the forgiveness of Jesus at a deep level can offer such grace.”⁹

References

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4. Eric Mason, *Unleashed* (Nashville, TN: B&H, 2015), 61.
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8. Justin S. Holcomb, “Acts,” in *Gospel Transformation Bible* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013), 1462, n. 7:1-53.
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