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What could it look like to rejoice in your present or future suffering?

### 3. Stephen's Defense in Front of the Sanhedrin

When Stephen stood in front of the Sanhedrin, he was accused of blasphemy against Moses and God. These accusations were lies, stirred up by those who opposed him, but Stephen did not plead his innocence or blame others of wrongful accusation. Instead, he preached a sermon. **Read Acts 7:2–50, taking a note of every time:**

1. **God speaks or a person hears from God.**
2. **God prepares his people for a new covenant or prophet.**
3. **People reject God's appointed servant.**

What do you notice about God's persistence with his people?

Why do you think people are so quick to reject God's prophets and servants?

Stephen's speech gives a panoramic overview of the Old Testament, not to point out things the Sanhedrin did not know, but to highlight that God is frequently calling his people to walk in faith and that his appointed servants, including Moses, are frequently rejected when they do what God calls them to.

Read Acts 7:51–53.

Do you think Stephen was being too harsh towards the Sanhedrin? Why or why not?

Stephen associates the Sanhedrin with the "stiff-necked" people of the Old Testament who rejected God's great servants, like Joseph and Moses. He reminds them that "your fathers" rejected God's servants (Nehemiah 9:26; Luke 6:23, 11:49, 13:34), and like them, the Sanhedrin had rejected and killed Jesus, the Righteous One. Stephen's accusers were the real



the church who were suffering for Christ.

Read Hebrews 12:1–4.

**What sin clings closely to you in your pursuit of Jesus?**

**What could you do to endure the path God has for you, as Stephen endured his?**

Just as Stephen saw Jesus, we are also called to “set our eyes on Jesus.” **What do you think that means?**

**What can you do to practice this command?**

Stephen and Jesus suffered death for the message God had given to them. We, like the recipients of Hebrews, have not suffered physical injuries for our beliefs. But this admonition is not meant to discourage us or encourage us to seek out violence. Instead, it is meant to encourage us so that we won’t give up the fight for our faith. If we aren’t opposed with violence, then we still have incredible freedom to share the gospel.

**In what ways does the life and death of Stephen encourage you?**

**What could you do in your daily relationship with Jesus to live with the boldness of Stephen?**

## **5. Acts 6–7 Reading Plan**

Acts is a long book, and we won’t be able to study every verse of it during each of these sessions. This reading plan will help you familiarize yourself with the entirety of the book so that you can dig more deeply into God’s Word.

This week, the reading guide will take you through Acts 6–7, the story of the church’s growth and scattering throughout Judea and Samaria.

Day 1: The Appointment of the First Deacons (Acts 6:1–7)

Day 2: Stephen’s Service (Acts 6:8–15)

Day 3: Stephen’s Defense (Acts 7:1–53) *Because of the length of this passage, we encourage you to read it over two days.*

Day 4: Stephen's Defense (Acts 7:1–53) *On the second day of reading Stephen's defense, notice the ways Stephen is proclaiming the gospel.*

Day 5: Stephen's Death (Acts 7:54–8:1)

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