

iWitness - The Stoning of Stephen

Introduction:

Being a follower of Jesus is costly. Jesus said as much in Luke's Gospel. But it's worth it. For in losing this life, we find eternal life in Jesus. Jesus' talk about taking up our cross and following him every day is dramatically seen in the story of Stephen.

I'd encourage you to go beyond the suggested reading of Acts 7:54-8:1a and read the entire story of Stephen. His story begins in Acts 6. The church is growing and needs additional leadership to help with the distribution of food to the widows. They choose seven men to oversee this ministry; Stephen is one of them. Stephen does more than feed the widows and his reputation grows. Stephen is arrested for his witness to Jesus. (Martyr comes from the Greek word 'to witness'.)

In Stephen's trial he continues to proclaim Jesus, and this witness gets him sentenced to death. The means of his execution will be stoning. As the sentence is carried out, scripture makes it clear that Stephen is in the hands of God and not the crowd. He's comforted by a vision, the crowd is angered by it. Immediately before his death Stephen speaks words that echo Jesus, and we are told that Stephen "fell asleep."

Read Your Bible

- Luke 9:21-27
- Acts 7:54-8:1a

Apply God's Word to Your Life:

1. Do you know anyone who has suffered for the sake of Jesus?
2. What does it look like for you to daily pick up your cross?
3. When you read all of Stephen's story, what are the similarities to Jesus?
4. Verse 55 makes it clear that Stephen wasn't acting alone. Who was strengthening him?
5. How have you experienced the Holy Spirit working through you?
6. Who is mentioned in verse 58?
7. How might the stoning of Stephen have affected Saul?
8. How does Stephen's story encourage you in your life with Christ?

Reflecting on the text:

1. What have you learned about God?
2. What have you learned about the world?
3. What have you learned about yourself?

Pray

Father in Heaven, thank you for servant Stephen. Thank you for his witness to Jesus. May Stephen's witness encourage us to share your love even when difficult or dangerous. May your Holy Spirit strengthen and embolden us as we take up our cross and follow. In Jesus' name. Amen.