

I. Introduction:

- A. Stephen is perhaps most noteworthy for being the first Christian martyr in the biblical record. Although his time as a Christian is very brief, and what the Bible records of him is also very brief, we nonetheless learn a lot about his character. Tonight we explore a few noteworthy characteristics of this man of God, and how they instruct us today in our life.
- B. Scripture focus: Acts 6:1-8:2.

II. Stephen's availability.

- A. The backstory helps us understand the situation: Acts 6:1-7.
- B. The apostles needed a team of people to make sure widows were properly cared for as the Old Covenant required them to (Exodus 22:22; Deuteronomy 10:18, 14:29; Psalm 146:9). Charitable deeds toward widows and orphans, due to their especially vulnerable social position, was of the utmost concern in the early church (Galatians 2:10, James 1:27). We must carry on this heart in our Christian witness today. Vulnerable people in our contemporary culture are to be shown compassion, not contempt.
- C. Stephen was what we would describe as an "anointed" believer and leader, and yet he was willing to do the menial things more senior leaders could not focus on due to time constraints (Acts 6:2,4). This willingness to be available is an attribute of humility and others-centeredness (versus self-centeredness), and resulted in Stephen becoming incredibly useful to God. When we tear up the list of what we are unwilling to do, we find ourselves being used greatly by God.
- D. Personally, I purposed as a young believer to be as available as possible, and I seek to do that to this day. Encouragement: don't just attend church; serve the church, and be the church. There is no other way to live as a Christian!

III. Stephen's power.

- A. Acts 6:8-15.
- B. Stephen thought he was just going to help widows, but the Spirit anointed him to such a degree that we read of a power dimension released in his life with "great wonders and signs among the people" (Acts 6:8). Stephen is the first non-apostle recorded as ministering with signs and wonders. Nobody else in the New Testament is recorded as performing "great wonders."
- C. Many today want to be used powerfully by God, but few want to be available to serve. We are most powerful when we are most willing to serve others.

IV. Stephen's impact.

- A. We have only one recorded message given by Stephen (Acts 7). The gist of the message is that the entire history of Israel and its prophets points toward Jesus Christ—who his audience crucified. It was a profoundly anointed and heart-piercing message that ultimately resulted in his martyrdom by stoning.
- B. What seems like an anti-climactic story in the natural is actually perhaps the most significant moment in early church history.
 - 1. After Stephen's martyrdom, the gospel immediately begins to spread to Gentiles (non-Jews) for the first time.
 - 2. After Stephen's martyrdom, Saul of Tarsus has a radical encounter with Jesus and gets saved. We know from Acts 8:1 that Saul observed Stephen's death and heard his final prayers. God answered those prayers in the life of Saul of Tarsus.
- C. My hypothesis is that Stephen's willingness to lay his life down was one of the most impactful moments in church history (perhaps second to the crucifixion of Jesus). One day in glory, when we're sitting around a warm campfire with Jesus, Paul, Stephen and others, I think the Lord will give us the full scoop, and we will realize the full glory of Stephen's short but profoundly impactful life.

V. Personal application.

- 1. **Quote:** Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. said, "The end of life is not to be happy, nor to achieve pleasure and avoid pain, but to do the will of God, come what may."
- 2. **Questions for personal reflection:** Are we willing to be more available so we can be more empowered (like Stephen)? Are we willing to allow God to lead us as He seems fit so we can have the greatest impact even if it looks unsuccessful to others?

Help me improve my notes! The first person to point out a legitimate mistake/typo on this document (during service) gets \$1.

Greater Peoria House of Prayer Announcements for August 26, 2022.

1. **Welcome** to the Greater Peoria House of Prayer... we're glad you're here and blessed to be worshipping God with you! Be sure to pick up the **free** materials at the back table in the prayer room or the desk near the front of the downstairs fellowship area, which includes teaching notes, stickers, pens, prayer cards and more. **Daily schedule:** We have morning prayer right here in this room seven days a week from 7-8 a.m. Monday - Friday and 8-9 a.m. Saturday and Sunday. We have afternoon prayer four days a week: Monday, Wednesday, Friday and Saturday from 11:30 a.m. - noon. We have evening prayer with live worship from 6-8 p.m. Monday - Saturday. On Friday's, we have an extra prayer gathering from 10 a.m. - noon. Our **Friday Encounter Night** is from 6-9 p.m. and is our main corporate gathering each Friday evening featuring live worship and a teaching to inspire love for Jesus and prayer.
2. **UPCOMING EVENTS:** We pray from 7-8 p.m. every night seven days a week. Come on out! The Central Illinois Leadership Summit: Voices of Wisdom is September 7-9. Visit gphop.org/events for more information. The Central Illinois School of Prayer Fall 2022 semester begins September 15. Visit gphop.org/school for more information.
3. **Prayer room ministry opportunities:** If you are interested in leading or ministering during a live worship set by singing, playing an instrument, prayer leading or behind the sound board, please contact us at info@gphop.org. We'd love to have you serve on one of our teams! **Team ministry opportunities:** If you feel the Lord has gifted you in the prophetic (or would like to grow in this gifting) and would consider helping on a prophetic team, send an email to info@gphop.org. Contact Mandy Kistner at mandy@gphop.org if you would like to schedule a future healing ministry appointment or help out on the healing team.
4. **Missions:** Please keep the following missionaries we support in prayer as well as be sensitive to their financial needs: **Ashley Bucknam** (YWAM, Hawaii); **Alicia Wright** (India); **Tim and Blair Fraim** (Florianopolis House of Prayer; Florianopolis, Brazil); **Eric and Erin Simmons** (Minnesota House of Prayer Network; Twin Cities, MN); **Austin and Amy Zhu** and **Phil Kellenberger** (International House of Prayer; Kansas City, MO); **Babett Mueller** (111 Global; Kansas City, MO). Also keep friends **Tyler and Sarah Cook** and family in prayer who lead the Illinois Valley House of Prayer in Ottawa, IL.
5. **Military:** Please keep the following members of our military in prayer as they valiantly serve the United States of America: **Jake Gerst**, stationed in Grafenwoehr/Grafenwöhr, Germany. **Kyle Nix**, stationed in Lackland Air Force Base in Bexar County, Texas.
6. **Social media:** Follow us on Facebook (Greater Peoria House of Prayer - GPHOP), Twitter (@GPHOPrayer), Instagram (@GPHOPrayer), Vimeo and YouTube for regular updates and inspiration. Use these social media sites to get the word out, share pictures, quotes you heard, etc. Contact Derek at derek@gphop.org if you're interested in helping with GPHOP's social media.
7. **Haven ministries:** Do you need space to pray just one-on-one. Maybe your Christian group needs a place to meet every once in awhile. We're making available the upper Prayer Room and lower-level Gathering Grounds for rent by donation. Email info@gphop.org if interested.
8. We provide **free Wi-Fi** to everyone here! The password for the **GPHOP** router is on the chalkboard in the downstairs fellowship area. You can also connect to either the CableWiFi or xfinitywifi routers if you have a personal Comcast account.
9. **Prayer requests:** If you would like our community to pray for something specific, please submit it to info@gphop.org.
10. **Giving:** If you have been blessed by the GPHOP and would like sow financially into the ministry, we would be more than blessed. You can give in cash, but if you would like to give to GPHOP with a check, please make it out to "Greater Peoria House of Prayer" or "GPHOP"—your gift is tax deductible. Thank you for your generosity! It's helping make day and night prayer with worship possible in central Illinois. You can place your gift in the Saturday night offering during the 7 p.m. teaching or drop it in either of the two black donation boxes. Donations can also be mailed to our physical address at 117 East Washington Street, East Peoria, IL 61611. Donors can also use PayPal or our website (gphop.org/donate) to give electronically.

*Thank you for helping to **keep this prayer room sacred** by ensuring conversations with others are brief and kindly reminding others to do the same. Use the large Gathering Grounds fellowship area downstairs if you would like to chat at length.*