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WARM UP

What is something you've done or you do by yourself that you wouldn't normally do on your own?

WORD

Read **Acts 6:1-15**

With the spread of the gospel, many new people are becoming followers of Christ on a daily basis. In this environment, new leaders were emerging and these men were recognised and released as apostles - leaders in the new and growing Church. One of these leaders emerged quickly in power and authority. His name was Stephen - a man who rose in Spirit and in wisdom as he preached and performed signs and wonders. There were two familiar responses from those around Stephen: amazement and disdain.

NOTES

1 Full of It

⁸And Stephen, full of grace and power, was doing great wonders and signs among the people. ⁹Then some of those who belonged to the synagogue of the Freedmen (as it was called), and of the Cyrenians, and of the Alexandrians, and of those from Cilicia and Asia, rose up and disputed with Stephen. ¹⁰But they could not withstand the wisdom and the Spirit with which he was speaking.

Acts 6:8-10 (ESV)

Stephen was full of grace, power, wisdom and the Spirit. There was an immediate recognition of God in him: none could withstand him, despite their attempts to dispute him. God gives Stephen the grace to walk in a recognisable relationship with him.

- Do you have a relationship with God? If so, can people see your relationship with him manifest in grace and power? If you don't have a relationship with God, would you like to? Why or why not?

2 Face of an Angel in the Face of Anger

¹²And they stirred up the people and the elders and the scribes, and they came upon him and seized him and brought him before the council, ¹³and they set up false witnesses who said, "This man never ceases to speak words against this holy place and the law, ¹⁴for we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and will change the customs that Moses delivered to us." ¹⁵And gazing at him, all who sat in the council saw that his face was like the face of an angel.

Acts 6:12-15 (ESV)

Stephen's preaching of the gospel causes a stirring amongst the elders and scribes. False witnesses attempt to bring charges of blasphemy against him. But there is still an amazing, gaze-worthy, angelic appearance that Stephen carries while being under the power of the Holy Spirit. Despite persecution and false accusation, Stephen remains steadfast in the Spirit, which was undeniable to his persecutors.

- Have you ever experienced false accusation? How did you respond?
- Have you ever been persecuted because of your faith in God? If you have, what was it like? Were you able to stay steadfast in the Spirit?

3 Standing Ovation

⁵⁴Now when they heard these things they were enraged, and they ground their teeth at him. ⁵⁵But he, full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. ⁵⁶And he said, "Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God." ⁵⁷But they cried out with a loud voice and stopped their ears and rushed together at him. ⁵⁸Then they cast him out of the city and stoned him. And the witnesses laid down their garments at the feet of a young man named Saul. ⁵⁹And as they were stoning Stephen, he called out, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." ⁶⁰And falling to his knees he cried out with a loud voice, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them." And when he had said this, he fell asleep.

Acts 7:54-60 (ESV)

Stephen becomes the first martyr of the church, dying at the enraged hands of his persecutors who stoned him for his faith in Christ. Christ responds to Stephen, and in his bold step of worship, giving him a standing ovation with his last words, forgives his persecutors. Looking on at Stephen's execution was a young man by the name of Saul, who although at that time was a persecutor of Christians, would later become an apostle named Paul, planting churches, writing a large portion of the New Testament, and eventually also be killed for his faith in Jesus. God has called us to live lives that are offered wholeheartedly for his glory. As we passionately worship Jesus with all we have, we, too, will have onlookers who will observe our lives and be inspired to know the God that we serve and live for.

PRAYER

- If you don't know Christ or believe there is a new level to knowing him in a way you haven't yet experienced, pray that you will know him in such a way. Pray that you will encounter the Christ who was willing to lay his life down for you out of love.
- Pray for boldness to live for God without compromise.
- Pray for those who are onlookers in your life, that they would see Christ in you.