

## Stephen: The Witnessing Deacon

**Text: Acts 6:1–7:1; 7:51-60**

### A. Introduction: The Making of a Faithful Witness

1. The gospel has best taken root in places prepared by the blood of martyrs.
2. Before people can *give* their lives for the gospel, however, they must first learn to *live* their lives for the gospel.
3. One way God trains his servants is to place them in insignificant positions.
4. He tests our faith in the ordinary before entrusting us with the extraordinary.
5. Our willingness to serve Christ must translate into a willingness to serve people.
6. Greatness in God's kingdom is not measured by position, recognition, or applause, but by faithfulness. Stephen illustrates this principle beautifully.
7. Before becoming a martyr, he an effective administrator & messenger.
8. He was chosen to help administer the distribution of food to needy believers.
9. The early church faced serious social pressures, & social ostracism.
10. Jews who accepted Jesus as Messiah were usually cut off from their families.
11. As believers increasingly depended on each other, practical care became essential.
12. As the church grew, the distribution of resources became more complicated.
13. People were being overlooked. There were complaints.
14. Eventually, the number of believers made it necessary to organize the sharing.
15. They therefore appointed qualified men who were known for their good reputation, wisdom, & fullness of the Spirit. Stephen was among those selected.
16. He was not just an administrator; he was a man full of faith & the Holy Spirit.
17. Stephen's life teaches us that a faithful witness is developed through ordinary service, strengthened by God's Word, sustained by devotion to Christ, & expressed through compassion for others.

### B. The Organization of the Early Church (Acts 6)

1. The church faced dissention from within (Acts 6:1–4).
2. Rapid growth brought challenges threatening the unity & testimony of the church.
3. A growing church must not allow practical neglect to undermine spiritual unity.
4. Both spiritual ministry & practical service were necessary to the church health.
5. The first servants were chosen according to spiritual qualifications (Acts 6:3–6).
6. God's work requires godly character.
7. Stephen understood that serving tables was not beneath him simply because he possessed spiritual gifts, & he faithfully accepted the assignment given to him.
8. Never despise small tasks, as God may use it to prepare us for extraordinary ones.
9. Proper organization contributed to a remarkable growth of the church (Acts 6:7).
10. The church also faced opposition from outside (Acts 6:8–15).
11. Besides being a good administrator, Stephen was also a powerful speaker.
12. Stephen was confronted in the temple by various antagonistic groups.
13. His logic was convincing, which is clear in the defence he made to the council.
14. Unable to defeat his argument, his opponents resorted to false accusations.
15. They stirred up the people & brought him before the council.
16. Stephen must have known he was speaking his own death sentence.

17. Members of the council could not stand to have their evil motives exposed.
18. They stoned him to death while he prayed for their forgiveness.
19. Witnessing is not just speaking eloquently; it's the overflow of a God shaped life.
20. What enabled Stephen to stand so firmly when his life was threatened?
21. Acts 7 shows 3 essential strength: Scripture, surrender, & concern for souls.

**C. He Had Full Confidence in the Word of God (7:1-54)**

1. When Stephen began to witness, persecution began
2. He was accused of blasphemy, & called before the council to be judged.
3. False witnesses testified against him
4. Stephen relied on the Word of God in his witness before the council
  - a. His defence begins and end with the glory of God
  - b. His witness to the council is filled with Scripture
5. It is one thing to quote verse in church & another to stake your life on them
  - a. Stephen declared his faith in God's Word when to do so meant martyrdom
  - b. Witnessing with Scripture guarantee our words will be effective (Isa. 55:11)

**D. He Was Fully Committed to His Saviour (vv. 54-56)**

1. The council reacted violently to Stephen's witness
  - a. The council members were filled with anger at this bold believer
  - b. They rose up against Stephen, demanding his death
2. We should not be surprised when the World rejects our witness
  - a. Jesus said believers would be rejected because He was rejected (John 15)
  - b. Rejection should never still our tongues from their greatest purpose
3. The life committed to self will shrink from the danger of witnessing
  - a. That life will be faithful as long as it is convenient
  - b. That life will be surrendered only as long as it doesn't mean sacrifice
4. The life committed to the Saviour is bold even in the face of danger or death
5. The Saviour met Stephen in his time of need and gave him a glimpse of glory

**E. He Felt Compassion for the Lost (vv. 57--60)**

1. Heaven was real to Stephen; he looked up and saw Jesus
2. Jesus was standing to minister to his faithful servant
3. Stephen uttered a moving prayer just before his death
  - a. "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit"
  - b. "Lord, do not hold this sin against them"
4. Stephen's compassionate prayer must have affected Saul, the persecutor (8:1)

**F. Conclusion**

1. What lessons can we learn from Stephen's life?
2. Striving for excellence in small tasks readies us for greater responsibilities.
3. True understanding of God always leads to practical & compassionate actions
4. Stephen's sources of power were Scripture, Surrender, Souls
5. Has our neglect of them kept us from being dynamic witnesses?