

Sunday 13th September – 'Lessons from the life of Stephen'

Leaders: Please do not limit yourself to these questions or feel that you need to answer all of them. Pick and choose and create your own based on the needs of your group.

As a teenager I read books about the faith of those who paid the ultimate price for following Jesus. People like Jim Elliot who at the age of 28 was one of 5 missionaries killed by the Auca Indians in their attempt to bring the good news of God's love to the people of Ecuador. His story was written by his wife Elisabeth Elliot in the book 'Shadow of the Almighty'.

- What stories of Christian martyrs has inspired your faith?

Read Acts 6-7 and observe the character qualities you see in Stephen.

- What was Stephen's role in the early church? How would you describe him?
- What does it look like practically to live a life "full of faith and of the Holy Spirit" (6:5)? Does this describe your life? Why or why not?
- Do you have a "good reputation" (6:3) with your family, friends, co-workers, neighbours? If not, what needs to change?
- Stephen was "full of wisdom" (6:3,10). How did he become so wise?
- What will you do in the months ahead to grow in wisdom like Stephen?
- When have you had an opportunity to take a courageous stand for Jesus? How did it go?
- Have you forgiven those who've harmed you like Stephen does?
- What makes forgiveness so hard?

One of those who watched the stoning of Stephen and listened to his testimony and his dying prayer was Saul of Tarsus (Acts 7:58 and 22:20) and there is little doubt that the whole incident wrought deep conviction in the heart and conscience of this young enemy of the gospel.

Thus, the death of Stephen was at once fruitful in Saul's conversion (Acts 9:1-17). But that was not the only immediate benefit of his death. Look up Acts 11:19. The Christians were scattered, and so the gospel was spread! What a great truth is contained in Philippians 1:12.

Begin to pray that God will help you to truly forgive. Pray for three people in your life who don't yet know Jesus. Pray that God's Spirit would give you courage to share the gospel with them and that He would draw them to faith in Jesus.