



Life Guide

applying God's Word to life

Spiritual Strength from Jesus May 15, 2021

Acts 7:54-60

⁵⁴ When the members of the Sanhedrin heard this, they were furious and gnashed their teeth at him. ⁵⁵ But Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, looked up to heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. ⁵⁶ "Look," he said, "I see heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God."

⁵⁷ At this they covered their ears and, yelling at the top of their voices, they all rushed at him, ⁵⁸ dragged him out of the city and began to stone him. Meanwhile, the witnesses laid their coats at the feet of a young man named Saul.

⁵⁹ While they were stoning him, Stephen prayed, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." ⁶⁰ Then he fell on his knees and cried out, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them." When he had said this, he fell asleep.

1. Name someone who is good at encouraging you. What do they do that encourages you?

Answers will vary. To get discussion going, ask "When you have a bad day, who do you want to see or call?" then follow up, "What are you hoping to get from that conversation?"

2. What things in the past month have required spiritual strength from you?

Answers will vary. For clarification Spiritual strength means the ability to live according to God's word when it becomes difficult. Examples: It take strength to obey the commandments, to love others above ourselves, and to continually remember God's forgiveness rather than our own self-condemning thoughts.

3. What parts of Stephen's story indicate his spiritual strength? (You can review his story in Acts 6 and 7).

- He was elected to be a church leader because he was "full of the Holy Spirit."
- He was gifted by God to do miracles.
- When he had a chance to be his own lawyer in court, instead he witnessed for God.
- He gave a remarkably bold speech before the Sanhedrin.
- He stood up to the Sanhedrin and called them to repentance when he was on trial.
- He went to a martyr's death rather than back off from his confession of God.
- He forgave his murderers in the moments before his death.
- He imitated Jesus throughout his biography.

4. Many details in Stephen's story are also part of Jesus' story. Agree or disagree: Every Christian's life will resemble Jesus' life.

Arguments for Agree:

- Jesus did say "**Follow me**" which may indicate we could have a similar path in life. (John 1:43)
- Jesus prayed in John 17, "**They are not of the world any more than I am of the world.**" and "**the world hated them**" as it hated him.
- St. Paul even says that we participate in Christ's suffering, filling up what is still lacking in Christ's sufferings. (Colossians 1:24)
- Jesus is our perfect role model, so St. Paul tells us to "**Be imitators of Christ.**" (Philippians 2)
- Jesus assures us that we will have trouble in the world. (John 16:33)
- We have an eternal outlook on life just like Jesus. (John 16:33)

Arguments for Disagree:

- We have not been tasked with atoning for the sins of the world.
- We live in a different culture and different time, which means our struggles may look different from Jesus'.
- We have the full support of a national church body, which Jesus didn't, so our experience may be quite a bit less painful. For instance, not every Christian is killed for their faith.
- God personalizes both our afflictions and our comforts, giving us exactly what we need from him. (Psalm 23)

Resolution:

- Our lives resemble the general arc of Christs, that is, suffering on earth, glory in heaven. But the details are different, specifically that we do not face God's wrath since Jesus did that in our place.

5. Give some examples of where the unbelieving world directs people to look for inner strength. For each example evaluate its benefits and pitfalls.

There are lots of examples—here are a few I noticed.

Look to yourself. *"I was always looking outside myself for strength and confidence, but it comes from within. It is there all the time."* -psychologist Anna Freud

- + God did not create us to be perpetual children, always relying on others. (Gen. 2:24)
- The heart of a person is only evil. (Gen. 6:5) (Jer. 17:9)

Find your passion. *"Find your passion, and you will find that your days are more fulfilling and produce more happiness and well-being."* -Lifehack.com

- + God designed us to seek meaningful work. (Gen. 2:15)
- Many passions that come to us naturally do not please God.

Listen to others. *"Our weakness creates a beautiful space in which others' strengths can fill the gaps."* – teacher Heather Plett

- + God created us for interdependent relationships. (Rom 12:10)
- Expecting from a person what we need from God will crush that person. (1 Cor. 4:1-5)

Ignore others. *"A truly strong person does not need the approval of others any more than a lion needs the approval of sheep."* - philosopher Vernon Howard

- + We don't need to please everyone, only God. (1 Thess. 1:4)
- God uses people to correct us and build us up. (Eph. 4:11-13)

Enjoy difficulty. *"Life is not about waiting for the storms to pass. It's about learning how to dance in the rain."* -novelist Vivian Greene

- + Jesus encourages us to accept suffering for him as a blessing from God. (Mark 8:34-38)
- Suffering apart from Jesus, is not a blessing. (1 Pet. 4:15-16)

6. From what source did Stephen find spiritual strength? How can you tell?

Jesus! He saw Jesus standing at the right hand of God as he was demonstrating his strength of confession and forgiveness near his death.

7. What are the three places you most often look for spiritual strength?

Answers will vary. Consider your answers to question 5. After everyone answers help them evaluate their answers by asking

- *According to God, what about that source of strength is good?*
- *According to God, what do I need to be careful about with this source?*

8. In John 17:6-18, Jesus prays for his disciples. Which parts of his prayer apply best to Stephen's needs in our text? Which parts apply best to you right now?

Stephen:

- Answers will vary. Consider...
- v. 8 – God gave Stephen the words for his testimony in court.
- v. 10—Jesus received glory through Stephen's sacrifice.
- v. 11—God protected Stephen from spiritual harm.
- v. 14—the world hated Stephen
- v. 15—God strengthened Stephen through his word.

Us:

- Answers will vary. Consider...
- v. 6—We learn about God's love through Jesus.
- v. 10—God gets glory through our worship.
- v. 11—God protects us in this world.
- v. 13—We get comfort and joy from hearing Jesus' prayer.
- v. 15—God strengthens us through his word.

9. Jesus strengthens us through his word. As a group, list seven ways you can hear God's word this week.

Answers will vary. Consider the following categories.

- Hear God's word in a group
- Hear God's word on your own.
- Hear God's word in music.
- Hear God's word out loud.
- Read God's word in a book.
- Use technology to get God's word.

Challenge each member in the group to try one new way of getting God's word before your next meeting.

10. Who could use some spiritual encouragement from you this week? Plan one way to help them see Jesus.

Answers will vary.

Consider the people God has put in your life.

Might you emulate a person you discussed in question 1?

How can you work God's word into your encouragement?

Plan the WHEN, the HOW, and the WHY you will encourage this person.

Pray for them right now before you forget!