

# Sermon Discussion Questions



LOOKOUT  
MOUNTAIN  
PRESBYTERIAN  
CHURCH

## “SEARING LOSS AND SOVEREIGN GRACE”

**Big Idea:** Searing loss is one more opportunity for the Sovereign Lord to show his grace.

### Discuss

19th-century Scottish pastor Alexander Whyte described Stephen’s character and death in this way: “In the stoning of Stephen there was lost to the Pentecostal Church [i.e., the early church] another Apostle Paul. Stephen was a young man of such original genius and of such special grace, that there was nothing he might not have attained to had he been allowed to live.”<sup>1</sup> Whyte greatly admired Stephen’s courage and eloquence and even hypothesized that Stephen’s abilities and wisdom outstripped the gifts and abilities of Peter, James, and John. Yet, as we know, God, in his infinite wisdom, allowed Stephen to be put to death in the earliest days of his ministry.

- 1) “When God closes a door, somehow he opens a window,” says Maria in *The Sound of Music* as she heads from the abbey to her new job as governess of the von Trapp children. This saying is not, of course, in the Bible and was probably coined by the librettist Oscar Hammerstein.
  - The big idea of this week’s sermon recognizes the searing loss of Stephen to his friends and the church, while at the same time proclaiming that very loss as an opportunity for the Sovereign Lord to show his grace. Are Maria’s words of comfort to herself saying the same thing? What do we mean when we talk about God’s sovereignty over Stephen’s death?
  - How does Stephen’s story fit into the larger story of the early church and the advance of God’s Kingdom?
  - Of what did both Stephen’s vision and his long speech (Acts 7:2-53) assure the early church?
- 2) How is Stephen’s death like the death of Jesus? How is it different?
  - What exactly does the plea to “not hold this sin against them” mean? (v. 60) If time, consider the request in the Lord’s Prayer about forgiveness of sins as well as Romans 3, vv. 10-12 and 23 as you answer this question.
- 3) We are told twice in the book of Acts that Stephen was “full of the Holy Spirit.” (6:5 and 7:55)
  - Were the other members of the early church just as full of the Spirit as Stephen? Are we?<sup>2</sup> (See Joel 2:28-29) Explain your answer.

I fear no foe, with thee at hand to bless:  
ills have no weight, and tears no bitterness.  
Where is death’s sting? Where, grave, thy victory?  
I triumph still, if thou abide with me.  
*from “Abide with Me: Fast Falls the Eventide,” Henry F. Lyle, 1847*

DATE: November 10, 2019

SPEAKER: Joe/Chad

SERIES: Acts

PASSAGE: Acts 7:54-8:3

### Pray

Lord Jesus, our Mediator and High Priest, we know that only because of you can we boldly approach the throne of grace with our requests. We come today asking for your guidance and help as your church. Show us how we can best proclaim the Gospel. Fill us with wisdom when we face questions about our faith or opposition to it. We think in wonder of what Stephen did in the face of persecution, but we celebrate with even more awe what you did on his and our behalf. You ensured our salvation and made it possible to present us “before your glorious presence without fault and with great joy.” (Jude 24) Stephen “fell asleep,” and you welcomed him into heaven. How incredible to know that whatever kind of death befalls us, we, too, like Stephen, will go to sleep and be with you. In your name we pray. Amen.

**PRAY FOR HOME MISSIONS**

Hope Unlimited

**PRAY FOR WORLD MISSIONS**

Chernobyl Children’s Program

<sup>1</sup>Alexander Whyte, *Bible Characters*, “Stephen”  
<sup>2</sup>Kelly Kopic recently raised this issue in the Kingdom Sunday school class at LMPC. See also his book, *The God Who Gives*, chapters 7 and 8.