

A NEW CREATION:

MENTOR 1: STEPHEN

CHECKLIST: WHAT YOU NEED

- Labels or pieces of paper, masking tape and pen
- Copies of the downloadable 622 service booklet
- Copies of the lesson handout
- Copy of the leader’s notes
- OPTIONAL: Bibles (ESV or similar recommended)
- OPTIONAL: A white board, easel pad, or chalk board with markers/chalk
- OPTIONAL: Have notebooks on hand for teens to take home and use as prayer journals if they wish

ICE BREAKER: WHO AM I?

Prepare a number of labels with famous or familiar names on them. As the teens arrive, tape one of the labels to each person’s back. The teens must then try to guess who they are by asking questions of one another that can only be answered with a “yes” or “no”.

622: BEGINNING WITH PRAYER

Begin the formal part of the lesson by saying together the first part of the order of service for young people in the booklet, up to the middle of page 4.

AT THIS POINT IN THE LESSON, ASK IF THE TEENS SUCCEEDED IN DOING LAST WEEK’S CHALLENGE, HOW IT WENT, AND WHETHER THEY HAVE ANYTHING TO SHARE.

DISCUSSION: INSPIRATIONAL PEOPLE

As an introduction to the lesson ask the teens to discuss the following questions.

DEPENDING ON THE COMFORT LEVEL FOR SHARING IN YOUR GROUP, IT MAY BE EASIER TO HAVE THEM VOLUNTEER ANSWERS WITH ALL RESPONSES WRITTEN TOGETHER ON A BOARD.

- Brainstorm to come up with a list of people that you find inspirational. What is inspirational about them?
- Hebrews 11 contains an awesome list of Old Testament saints. The writer describes them as people “of whom the world was not worthy”. Is there anyone you know (or that is on the list we just came up with) that you would describe in that way?
- What comes to mind when you hear the words “saint” and “martyr”?

A few things worth pointing out (if they don’t otherwise arise during the discussion):

- *This is a good opportunity to share a personal story of someone you admire and are inspired by.*
- *If we are very lucky, every now and then we meet or become aware of someone who is living their faith out in an amazingly constant and sacrificial way. Those people can inspire us in our own efforts to live out our faith with greater devotion.*
- *Today in many settings both of the words “saint” and “martyr” can have negative implications. People are sometimes called “saints” with a measure of sarcasm, suggesting that the person is smug or looking for attention. A martyr might be someone who puts on an exaggerated show to get sympathy from others. But when we use these words in the Church, we are speaking of (in the case of a saint) someone whose holiness of life is a model for other Christians, and (in the case of a martyr) someone who was killed for their faith.*

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- *Note: Your discussion may veer into current events as it relates to terrorists seeking “martyrdom”. This may present a good opportunity to contrast individuals who seeks to harm others, killing themselves in the process, with the example that we’re about to look at today of someone who is not seeking death, not seeking to harm anyone, but is murdered for his faith, and even prays for his enemies as he is dying. And his reward? To see Jesus and go to be with him.*

THE LESSON: ACTS 6, 7

The first part of the lesson portion can be read aloud. Then the teens are asked to read the Bible text (either silently to themselves or aloud together), followed by some additional questions for discussion.

The book of Acts tells us the story of the spreading of the Gospel. Jesus had been raised from the dead and had ascended into heaven. The Holy Spirit had been sent to indwell his disciples. The apostles were preaching the good news. But not everyone was happy to hear it. In fact, many of the religious power-brokers who had felt threatened by Jesus were angry to discover that killing him had not ended the story. Instead, the message of Christ was gaining more and more followers.

The Church in Jerusalem grew to such an extent that it became necessary to appoint new leaders to share in some of the duties that the apostles no longer had time for. Several men were appointed to this role, including Stephen, who was described as “a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit”.

Christians honour Stephen as the “*protomartyr*” – the first martyr of the Church. In his death, Stephen follows in the footsteps of Christ and models for us not just how we should live, but also how we should face persecution and death.

Stephen’s faithfulness to the very end bore fruit beyond his death. Immediately following this event, a persecution broke out which caused believers to scatter, resulting in the Gospel being spread more broadly throughout the known world. And who would have guessed at the time that the man collecting the coats of the executioners, listening to Stephen’s speech and approving his murder, would himself become one of the greatest missionaries in the history of the Christian Church?

Refer to Acts 6: 8-15, 7 :1-3, 9, 30, 39, 44, 48, 55-60.

(VERSES HAVE BEEN CLIPPED FROM THE READING FOR THE SAKE OF BREVITY AND FOCUS, BUT IF YOU HAVE TIME TO EXPLORE THE PASSAGE FULLY, FEEL FREE TO READ IT IN ITS ENTIRETY: ACTS 6: 8 - 7: 60.)

(THE TEXT IS PROVIDED ON THE BACK OF THE HANDOUTS AND IN THESE LEADERS’ NOTES SO THAT EVERYONE CAN MARK IT UP AND MAKE NOTES ON IT IF DESIRED. ALTERNATIVELY, YOU CAN READ OUT OF A BIBLE).

Read through the text. Then ask the teens to respond to what they’ve just read. Here are some questions to help guide the discussion.

- When the high priest said, “Are these things so?” what would you have done in Stephen’s place?
- Why do you think the writer (Luke) says that Stephen “fell asleep”?
- Do you think Stephen wanted to die?
- What was Stephen’s focus while he was being stoned?

A few notes and reflections for reference:

- *It’s probably fair to say that most of us would not launch into a lengthy sermon (the longest one in Acts, reduced in our reading), which directly and truthfully responds to the charges in a way likely to enrage the very people who have it in their power to kill us. But Stephen is courageous and uncompromising. The words that end his speech are not gentle, but it’s worth keeping in mind how his demeanour is described in verse 15 (his face was like the face of an angel), and that his very last words are a prayer for the men who have killed him.*

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- *Scripture sometimes speaks of death as sleeping. This image reminds us that death is not the end, rather it is a transition point between our temporal world and eternity.*
- *Stephen's life was filled with purpose. He'd come to faith in Christ. He'd been appointed a leader in the Church. And he was actively engaged in a ministry that showed every sign of God's blessing. The passage tells us he "was doing great wonders and signs among the people". Stephen did not choose to stand up for his faith and accept the consequences because he wanted to be done with life! Rather, like Paul, he understood that "For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain". (Philippians 1:21)*
- *The scene before Stephen was of a group of furiously angry men, grinding their teeth and throwing stones hard enough to kill him. But this is not what he was focused on. Why? Presumably because what he was seeing was far more powerful: the heavens opening and Jesus at the right hand of the Father, ready to receive him.*

DURING EACH LESSON, IF THE TEENS RAISE THEOLOGICAL OR BIBLICAL QUESTIONS THAT YOU DON'T FEEL CONFIDENT ABOUT ANSWERING, SAY SO, BUT LET THEM KNOW THAT YOU'LL FIND THE ANSWER AND RESPOND AT THE NEXT MEETING.

PREVIEW: AT-HOME CHALLENGE

Take a brief moment to look at the at-home challenge together.

THE WEEKLY "AT-HOME CHALLENGE" IS TYPICALLY A SIMPLE ASSIGNMENT TO SPEND SOME QUIET TIME IN PRIVATE PRAYER. ENCOURAGE THE TEENS TO GET NOTEBOOKS THAT CAN BE USED AS PRAYER JOURNALS. ASSURE THEM THAT THEY WILL NOT BE REQUIRED TO SHOW THEIR JOURNAL OR THEIR PRIVATE PRAYERS TO ANYONE.

Each morning and evening, follow the rule of prayer that you created for yourself.

(If you didn't make one, try saying the morning and evening prayers from the "Forms of Prayer to be used in Families," which begins on page 728 of the BCP. If you don't have a copy, you can look it up here: <http://prayerbook.ca/resources/bcponline/family-prayer>.)

Spend some time considering the example of Stephen. Ask God to help you to see your life and death from a heavenly perspective. Close with this prayer adapted from 2 Thessalonians 1: 11, 12: ***"God, make me worthy of your calling and fulfill every resolve for good and every work of faith by your power, so that the name Jesus may be glorified in me, and I in him, according to your grace. Amen."***

- AND/OR -

Take some time to pray through this collect, pausing to reflect after each phrase.

Grant, O Lord, that in all our sufferings here upon earth, for the testimony of thy truth, we may steadfastly look up to heaven, and by faith behold the glory that shall be revealed; and, being filled with the Holy Spirit, may learn to love and bless our persecutors, by the example of thy first Martyr Saint Stephen, who prayed for his murderers to thee, O blessed Jesus, who standest at the right hand of God to succor all those that suffer for thee, our only Mediator and Advocate. Amen. (COLLECT FOR ST. STEPHEN THE MARTYR, BCP PAGE 108)

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Close with any prayers that might be appropriate in the context of the discussion of the day.

AT THE END OF EACH LESSON, IF YOU FIND THAT YOU STILL HAVE LOTS OF TIME REMAINING, YOU MIGHT CHOOSE TO TAKE SOME TIME TO EXPLORE THE "PRAYERS AND THANKSGIVINGS" SECTION IN THE BCP (PAGES 39-62, OR YOU CAN USE THE DOWNLOADABLE BOOKLET). AS YOUR GROUP MEMBERS

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COME ACROSS PRAYERS THAT THEY FIND RELEVANT, PAUSE AND PRAY THEM TOGETHER. IF YOU'RE PRESSED FOR TIME, YOU MIGHT CLOSE WITH THE THEMED PRAYER FROM THE AT-HOME CHALLENGE.

Then finish with the “Grace”, the final prayer in the booklet.

ACTS 6, 7: THE PROTOMARTYR AND WHAT HE SAW

6 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. ¹¹Then they secretly instigated men who said, “We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses and God.” 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.

7 ¹And the high priest said, “Are these things so?” ²And Stephen said:

“Brothers and fathers, hear me. The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham when he was in Mesopotamia, before he lived in Haran, ³and said to him, ‘Go out from your land and from your kindred and go into the land that I will show you’... ⁹“And the patriarchs, jealous of Joseph, sold him into Egypt; but God was with him... ³⁰“Now when forty years had passed, an angel appeared to Moses in the wilderness of Mount Sinai, in a flame of fire in a bush... ³⁹Our fathers refused to obey him, but thrust him aside, and in their hearts they turned to Egypt... ⁴⁴“Our fathers had the tent of witness in the wilderness, just as he who spoke to Moses directed him to make it, according to the pattern that he had seen... ⁴⁸Yet the Most High does not dwell in houses made by hands... ⁵¹“You stiff-necked people, uncircumcised in heart and ears, you always resist the Holy Spirit. As your fathers did, so do you. ⁵²Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? And they killed those who announced beforehand the coming of the Righteous One, whom you have now betrayed and murdered, ⁵³you who received the law as delivered by angels and did not keep it.”

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.