



## DEVOTIONAL TIME

11-17-2014 @ 0900

**“There Is A Place for You  
Because It’s a Team Mission!”**

Acts 6:1-7

### SET MY SPIRIT FREE

Set my spirit free, that I may worship Thee!  
Set my spirit free, that I may praise Thy Name!  
Let all bondage go, and let deliverance flow!  
Set my spirit free to worship Thee!

#### Acts 6:1-7

“Some time later, as the number of disciples kept growing, there was a quarrel between the Greek-speaking Jews and the native Jews. The Greek-speaking Jews claimed that their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution of funds. So the twelve Apostles called the whole group of believers together, and said, “It is not right for us to neglect the Preaching of God’s Word in order to handle finances. So then, friends, choose seven men among you who are known to be full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, and we will put them in charge of this matter.”

### QUESTIONS FOR TODAY

- Have you ever found yourself griping about your church, and “the way things are done” (or not done) but never involved yourself, ‘cause “fixing the broken” is always somebody else’s job?
- Have you ever “noticed a special need”, or saw that “something needed doing”, and asked, “Why won’t anyone address this?” (without ever exploring how *you* could do it?)
- Did you ever accept an “invitation” to “make a difference”? What was it like to look back on a project that stretched your faith, tested your hope, and proved your love? Was God in it?

They’re known as “the faithful few”. Any “local church” depends on them; they are the “hard core” who appear “front and center” to do everything around the church that needs doing. There may be hundreds or more who *attend worship* at a “local church”, but only a hand-full who “step forward” when a genuine need surfaces. (Have you ever heard an announcement for “Saturday Clean-up” on a Sunday morning with full house, and found only a dozen or so “showed” for that Saturday clean up?) In today’s passage, Luke gives us a glimpse of the early church going through its growing pains. The numbers are increasing, the needs are increasing, but the workers or volunteers have not kept pace and people in need are being overlooked. But God has a plan for that, too, and this is where we all come in. How many of *us* in the church today actively look for what we can do for God and His Church? There’s no shortage of those who complain about the church worship, point out problems with the church outreach, and even “armchair quarterback” their pastors’ styles or priorities, but refuse to “be part of the solution”! When the early Church needed “help”, notice that the “called ones” were those “known to be full of the Holy Spirit”! Is this the “missing link” in our churches today? We can claim to seek the Holy Spirit. But talk is not enough. When God’s Spirit “fills us”, there are signs! Are we genuinely and fervently prayerful? Are we immersing ourselves in God’s Word? Are we sharing the Good News graciously, but with all boldness? Do we make time, talent, and “treasure” freely available, claiming nothing as “our own”? Do we serve others generously, and find “signs and wonders” manifesting in abundance? God, grant us the Grace of “Spirit-filled Life”! Teach us to walk the Walk of the Talk we talk! Help us tarry in prayer ‘til Your Spirit anoints us anew, study Your Word with full openness to Your Will, and work with a good will to accomplish the Mission to which You call us. We need to follow in the footsteps of Jesus Christ, going “all in” for Him and His Gospel, since He has freely gone “all out” to save us! May we do our part well in His “Team Mission”!



## DEVOTIONAL TIME

11-18-2014 @ 0900

“Will ‘Religious’ People Turn On You?”

Acts 6:8-15

### SET MY SPIRIT FREE

Set my spirit free, that I may worship Thee!  
Set my spirit free, that I may praise Thy Name!  
Let all bondage go, and let deliverance flow!  
Set my spirit free to worship Thee!

#### Acts 6:8-15

“Stephen, a man richly blessed by God and full of power, performed great miracles and wonders among the people. But he was opposed by some men who were members of the Synagogue of the Freedmen (as it was called), which had Jews from Cyrene and Alexandria. They, and other Jews from the provinces of Cilicia and Asia, started arguing with Stephen. But the Spirit gave Stephen such wisdom that then he spoke, they could not refute him. So they bribed some men to say, ‘We heard him speaking against Moses and against God!’ ...All those sitting in the Council fixed their eyes on Stephen and saw that his face looked like the face of an angel.”

### QUESTIONS FOR TODAY

- Have you ever witnessed a “group” within your own fellowship “come together” against another group over a “difference of opinion” in doctrine? Did they “act in love” or “attack in anger”?
- Did you ever face a moment you were challenged to “take a stand” for “God” or “Faith”, but fear of mockery or persecution “froze you in your tracks”?
- Were you ever able to observe an “authentic believer” address a skeptic, or a hostile crowd, with a genuine and joyous “faith-filled” response? What did that do to your own faith?

History is fascinating when it “comes alive”! Consider this passage from the history of the founding of the Church; it’s amazing how little things have changed over the millennia. Note how one “body of believers” engages “attack” rather than “love”! When they face a “new development” in the Work of God, one that contradicts their “established way”, they employ a vicious offense. Rather than go into prayer and discernment, they “dig in” and refuse to change and grow in response to the fuller “Way of Righteousness”. Taking what God had revealed to their “ancestors in faith”, they created a system of power and prestige in which they were quite comfortable. Rather than “lose” or “jeopardize” what they had come to treasure, they “pull out all the stops” to counter the “threat”. (Even “integrity” means very little to them, as they are willing hire liars to help their cause.) Contrast Stephen’s response; is he completely unaware of his danger? Is he just a “clueless fanatic”, or fully aware of a higher Calling and Responsibility? Do we see here a true “love of Jesus Christ”? Is this a man *completely devoted* to Him? Is this someone who is utterly convinced that Jesus Christ *is* his Salvation, Justification, and Sanctification? Is he fully persuaded that Christ’s crucifixion was an actual historical Event? Did he hold a vivid consciousness of the pain of the thorns, whipping post, or of the nails, let alone the agony of dying by suffocation? Was he equally certain of the wondrous Resurrection and Ascension that followed? If so, Stephen “got it”, and was willing to go to any length to proclaim the Good News, no matter what that cost him! Stephen has gone on to his Reward; now the ball is in our court! Does this Gospel actually “burn within *us*”, aching to be told? Does Jesus’ Love ever transport *us* to new heights of wonder and gratitude? God, grant us the Grace of fervent Gratitude! As You send forth Your Spirit to a new generation of Apostolic People, let the “Fire” of Your Love burn in our bones! Let the “Light” of Your Truth illumine our minds ‘til Your Peace emboldens our spirits! By Your Grace, we will become the “living Gospel” Stephen exemplified, blazing anew in an Age he could hardly imagine!



## DEVOTIONAL TIME

11-19-2014 @ 0900

**“Boldness to Tell the Truth  
When the Chips Are Down”**

Acts 7:1-60

### SET MY SPIRIT FREE

Set my spirit free, that I may worship Thee!  
Set my spirit free, that I may praise Thy Name!  
Let all bondage go, and let deliverance flow!  
Set my spirit free to worship Thee!

#### Acts 7:1-60

“The High Priest asked Stephen, ‘Is this true?’ Stephen answered, ‘Brothers and Fathers, listen to me! (Shares the Jewish history) .... Was there any prophet that your ancestors did not persecute? They killed God’s messengers, who long ago announced the coming of His Righteous Servant. And now you have betrayed and murdered Him. You are the ones who received God’s Law—that was handed down by angels—yet you have not obeyed it!’ As the members of the Council listened to Stephen, they became furious and ground their teeth at him in anger. But Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, looked up to Heaven and saw God’s Glory, and Jesus standing at the right side of God. ‘Look!’ he said. ‘I see Heaven opened, and the Son of Man standing at the right side of God!’ With a loud cry, the Council members covered their ears with their hands. Then they all rushed at him at once, threw him out of the city, and stoned him.”

### QUESTIONS FOR TODAY

- Have you ever known the gut-wrenching pain of the “call to testify” to “Truth” at a “bad time”, in a “tense” atmosphere, to a most hostile crowd? If you “waffled”, did you feel you *failed*?
- Have you ever witnessed the brutal assault on a friend or colleague who was ostracized, (or worse,) for standing up for an unpopular cause or discredited belief?
- Did that experience cause you anxiety or confusion in your own attempts to “take a stand” for a person or cause to which you were personally and passionately committed?

Decisions, decisions! “Life or Death” choices! How often we agonize over “difficult options”, or at least, the “side to pick” in the thick of crisis and strife! “Problematic choices” between “principles and ideals” and “peer pressure and social status” can leave us feeling torn and confused, unless and until the Spirit of God brings “clarity” to our inner vision. Then, like Stephen, we can see truly where our course must take us. Family, friends, careers, social standing...all become “negotiable”, and even “negligible factors” when “stacked up” against the Gospel we are given. Either Jesus Christ is Savior, or He is not; either He holds our total allegiance, or He is not worth our attention. Such choices are always a part of life, no matter who or what we are, and every choice we make comes with a life-changing consequence. These consequences create the “problems” and “crises” that torture the “half-hearted” among us. Many among us want the *security* of Christianity, (we don’t want to go to Hell,) but don’t want the *stigma* of being “too Christian”, “Churchy”, or “mystical”. In other words, we want to be “just Christian enough” to make it to Heaven, but not so “Holy” we might have to “take a stand” for God or His Gospel. Taking that “stand” could involve some severe consequences, change (or even *end*) life as we know it. Stephen is not blind to any of this; yet he boldly “makes his stand”, knowing whatever happens, Christ has him. God, grant us the Grace of Spirit-driven Clarity! When we must “make a stand” for You and Your Good News, fill us with Your Spirit of Truth and Peace. We are likely to face much opposition in this world if we are true to You. Let Stephen’s heroic witness strengthen our own; as he remembered Jesus, may we do in our day, to the glory of Your Name!



## DEVOTIONAL TIME

11-20-2014 @ 0900

“Loving Tough” When Loving is Tough!

Acts 7:54-60

### SET MY SPIRIT FREE

Set my spirit free, that I may worship Thee!  
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Let all bondage go, and let deliverance flow!  
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### Acts 7:54-60

“As the members of the Council listened to Stephen, they became furious and ground their teeth at him in anger. But Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, looked up to Heaven and saw God’s Glory, and Jesus standing at the Right Side of God. ‘Look!’ he said, ‘I see Heaven opened, and the Son of Man standing at the Right Side of God!’ With a loud cry, the Council members covered their ears with their hands. Then they all rushed him at once, threw him out of the city, and stoned him! The witnesses left their cloaks in the care of a young man named Saul. They kept on stoning Stephen as he called out to the Lord, ‘Lord Jesus, receive my spirit!’ He knelt down and cried out in a loud voice, ‘Lord! Do not remember this sin against them!’ He said this and died. And Saul approved of his murder.”

### QUESTIONS FOR TODAY

- Can you think of some person or group who has hurt you so badly you still find it difficult (if not impossible) to forgive them? Who’s the real “victim” of this bitter state?
- Can you think of some person or group who you have hurt so badly they will neither forgive nor forget, even if you would give anything to “heal the breach” that has arisen between you?
- Have you ever known a “healing” of a broken relationship, (family, friend, co-worker,) that left you wonderstruck at the generosity of your “forgiver”? How did that mercy make you feel?

Stephen is astonishing! What an amazing ability to be merciful! Can you imagine facing a murderous crowd, being able to ask God’s forgiveness on the very people who are bashing you with big rocks, all meaning to kill you *to please God*? Pretty incredible, right? Mercy seems much more “selective” in our world. Isn’t it amazing how we willingly forgive certain people for almost anything, yet refuse to forgive others for smaller slights, no matter what? What explains such a “difference”? Is there some mysterious bond between manifest mercy and a “loving” heart? Selfless Love is the driving force behind “Biblical” forgiveness in every situation. The reason we desire to be forgiven of our own transgressions is our love for ourselves. In Matthew’s Gospel, Jesus commands that we love our neighbor as ourselves, assuming that we love ourselves, whether we choose to admit it or not. So the very reason we “have trouble” forgiving others lies in our *lack of love* for them. Our lack of love for those around us demonstrates a lack of knowledge regarding God’s Love for us all. 1 John 4:8 affirms: “He that doesn’t love doesn’t know God, for God is Love!” Therefore, if we do not find enough love within us to forgive someone, we do not truly know God yet. The reason Stephen’s mercy baffles us is that we still need to grow our “knowledge of God” to appreciate the power of His Love. Through the Love of God, Stephen held so much love for others within him he couldn’t hate them, even as they mutilated his body in the midst of their anger. Instead of hating them, Stephen’s heart was breaking for them, and he found himself praying for them even as they were killing him. This is “loving tough” when loving is tough! God, grant us the Grace of Loving Tough! By the infilling of Your Holy Spirit, make us ready to release all our hate, let go of our grudges, and engage Your amazing Love and awesome Forgiveness, especially to those who hurt us most! Help us grow willing to go “all in” for Jesus Christ, the “Merciful One”! He loved us “tough”, in Him, we’ll love others with such toughness!



## DEVOTIONAL TIME

11-21-2014 @ 0900

**"Tough Times" Don't Last; Tough People Do!**

Acts 8:1-4

### SET MY SPIRIT FREE

Set my spirit free, that I may worship Thee!  
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Join us for a  
**SERVICE OF  
THANKSGIVING**  
at our "Chapel of Hope"  
(1X-104)  
Wednesday,  
November 26, 2014

### Acts 8:1-4

"And Saul approved of his [Stephen's] murder. That very day, the Church in Jerusalem began to suffer cruel persecution. All the believers, except the Apostles, were scattered throughout the provinces of Judea and Samaria. Some devout men buried Stephen, mourning for him with loud cries. But Saul tried to destroy the Church; going from house to house, he dragged out the believers, both men and women, and threw them into jail. The believers who were scattered went everywhere, preaching the Message."

### QUESTIONS FOR TODAY

- Can you remember a time you were utterly certain of the "rightness" of your "cause", and went about with a passionate zeal to convince all you met of their need to "see it your way"?
- Are there other moments in your memory which hold bitter feeling of "persecution" and grave "injustice"? Were you forced to "make yourself scarce" 'til things "cooled down" again?
- If you were arrested for your faith in God, would the "prosecution" be able to "convict you of the crime"? Which of your people, places, things, and times would "seal your fate"?

The "Honeymoon" is over! With the death of Stephen, feelings run high over what is to be done about these believers who insist on trumpeting the Name of Jesus of Nazareth; the established authorities in the Temple leadership cannot allow this continuing ferment in the city which is their "Center of Holy Influence" and "Control Base". Beatings have not deterred these upstarts. Jailing their spokesmen has only hardened their resolve. Popular opinion is swinging their way in the wake of miraculous healings and inexplicable jailbreaks. It's time for more extreme measures. Saul of Tarsus steps into the breach; he is a foreigner and a Pharisee, but well-schooled in the Law, and quite zealous for the honor of the Lord. Unleash him on this rabble; he'll put a stop to the nonsense! Thus begins the growth of the "Jerusalem Fellowship" into a world-wide, Spirit-driven, Gospel-guided "Church"! What looks like a total disaster at the outset of the persecution is really a "springboard to evangelization" which might never have begun if the "People of the New Way" had merely remained one more sect within the wider population in and around Jerusalem. But what His Church's enemies meant for evil, God used for Glory, putting believers in new situations in which their vibrant love, contagious joy, and Gospel faith would win hearts and minds elsewhere in Israel. Stephen was "history"; his courageous testimony would ever remain one of the "jewels" of steadfast witness. Fellow believers saw to his honorable burial, and "those who could escape" made for "safer digs". Saul made life miserable for the rest who could not, (or would not,) "flee the wrath". (Were they depending on Jesus to "return as promised" by the angels on Olivet?) Nevertheless, God blessed the testimony of the "scattered", and set in motion the wider preaching of "the Message" that would ultimately bring down an Empire, and change a *world*. We are beneficiaries of that first persecution, and every subsequent "oppression" raised against "God's Own". Now, we, too, face challenges of ours. O God, grant us the Grace of Holy Resolution! When Your "opposition" seeks to silence or coerce us, strengthen our faith. When misunderstood and scattered by hostile people or tragic events, restore our hope. One in Your Son, may we continue to share His Gospel, living out His Love in the Grace and Mercy of Your Holy Spirit!