

November 16, 2014

BECOMING THE CHURCH JESUS ENVISIONS

Making Your Life Really Count

Acts 6:8-7:60

Something profound happened in the lives of the early church—they became living witnesses to the power and presence of Jesus. The scriptures say they were recognized as people who “... *had been with Jesus.*” One of the leaders of the early church was Stephen, a man who gives us a model of how to live for the Lord and make our lives count. Let’s learn from his witness.

1. **Develop a character that honors Jesus and blesses people.**

“Now Stephen, a man full of God’s grace and power, did great wonders and miraculous signs among the people.” Acts 6:8 (NIV)

“As we know Jesus better, His divine power gives us everything we need for living a godly life. He has called us to receive His own glory and goodness! And by that same mighty power, He has given us all of His rich and wonderful promises. He has promised that you will escape the decadence all around you caused by evil desires and that you will share in His divine nature. So make every effort to apply the benefits of these promises to your life. Then your faith will produce a life of moral excellence. A life of moral excellence leads to knowing God better. Knowing God leads to self-control. Self-control leads to patient endurance, and patient endurance leads to godliness. Godliness leads to love for other Christians, and finally you will grow to have genuine love for everyone. The more you grow like this, the more you will become productive and useful in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.” 2 Peter 1:3-8 (NLT)

2. **Find strength in the Lord’s power for all of life.**

“Opposition arose, however... but they could not stand up against his wisdom or the Spirit by whom he spoke.” Acts 6:9-10 (NIV)

“Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be terrified; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go.” Joshua 1:9 (NIV)

*“Finally, be strong in the Lord and in His mighty power.”
Ephesians 6:10 (NIV)*

3. **Know God’s story and tell it!**

“To this he replied: ‘Brothers and fathers, listen to me! The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham while he was still in Mesopotamia, before he lived in Haran.’... Was there ever a prophet your fathers did not persecute? They even killed those who predicted the coming of the Righteous One. And now you have betrayed and murdered him-- you who have received the law that was put into effect through angels but have not obeyed it.” Acts 7:2, 52-53 (NIV)

“Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see. This is what the ancients were commended for. By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God’s command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible.” Hebrews 11:1-3 (NIV)

“These were all commended for their faith, yet none of them received what had been promised. God had planned something better for us so that only together with us would they be made perfect.” Hebrews 11:39-40 (NIV)

“But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect...”

1 Peter 3:15 (NIV)

“But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander.” **1 Peter 3:15-16 (NIV)**

4. Keep Jesus the focus no matter what happens!

“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. ‘Look,’ he said, ‘I see heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.’” **Acts 7:55-56 (NIV)**

“Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.” **Hebrews 12:1-2 (NIV)**

5. Let grace and truth define your life.

“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.” **Acts 7:60 (NIV)**

“Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And

over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.” **Colossians 3:13-14 (NIV)**

Questions for Discussion and Reflection

1. **Does my character truly honor Jesus?**
2. **Is my life’s vision and focus truly fixed on Jesus?**
3. **Is my life defined by the grace and truth of Jesus?**