

**INTRO**

- If you could know the date of your death, would you want to know or not?

**READ**

Acts 6:7-7:2; 7:51-60

*Qu: what's your immediate reaction after reading this story?*

**REFLECT & RESPOND**

Stephen is the first Christian martyr. Jesus said in Acts 1:8: "You will be my witnesses." A martyr, from which we get the word witness, is one who bears witness to Jesus at the cost of their lives.

Whilst Christian persecution & martyrdom is very much real in our world today, for us the question isn't so much about being prepared to die for Jesus. Rather, are we prepared to live for Jesus?

**WHAT STORY ARE YOU IN?**

We all live according to a script/story/narrative. The story we embrace tells us the way the world works, our place in the world, how to interpret and act in the world. For example, "The American Dream" is a powerful story that shapes many people's lives (not just Americans).

*Qu: what are some other "stories" we are influenced to live by? (e.g. cultural, vocational, family, personal)*

**Stephen tells a better story by reorienting it**

Stephen got into trouble because he angered his contemporaries by reframing Israel's story according to Jesus. The indictment on the Jewish people and leaders was that their story was incomplete because they rejected Jesus. The good news for all of us is, all of our stories can bear reoriented around Jesus.

*Qu: If you had to sum up in a sentence or 2 the story God is telling through scripture, how would you do it?*

**Stephen LIVES a better story by apprenticing Jesus**

In his final moments of suffering and death, Stephen simply continued to follow Jesus by doing what Jesus did on the Cross: submit and forgive. Anyone can call themselves a Christian, but actually following Jesus takes guts:

And calling the crowd to him with his disciples, he said to them, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it. For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul?"

— Mark 8:34-36

*Qu: Based on this scripture, what contrasting stories does Jesus expose and invite you into?*

**Stephen DIES for a better story by being faithful to Jesus**

Stephen had no idea the impact his handling of suffering and death would have on Saul/Paul and the growth of the church. We have no idea what our simple faithfulness to Jesus through the ups and downs of our lives can have on others.

*Qu: Imagine you're at the end of your life before Jesus. What would you want him to say about your life? What regrets would you want to avoid?*

**RESPOND & PRAY**

- Pray for each one to be awakened to a greater vision for life following Jesus in whatever capacity
- Pray for rest, refreshment and reconnection over the summer