



To be an unlikely hero of our faith...

- Jesus must be in you
- You must be ready to die for the name of Jesus
- You must love all people
- You must speak the truth of the gospel

Today's unlikely hero is named Stephen. He is first mentioned in the scripture in Acts 6:5. Acts 6:1-7

1 Now in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplying, there arose a complaint against the Hebrews by the Hellenists, because their widows were neglected in the daily distribution.

2 Then the twelve summoned the multitude of the disciples and said, "It is not desirable that we should leave the word of God and serve tables.

3 Therefore, brethren, seek out from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business;

4 but we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word."

5 And the saying pleased the whole multitude. And they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit, and Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas, a proselyte from Antioch,

6 whom they set before the apostles; and when they had prayed, they laid hands on them.

7 Then the word of God spread, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were obedient to the faith.

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He was unlikely hero in the early church because he was a Hellenistic Jew. Being Hellenistic meant he was not born in Israel and his primary language was Greek rather than Hebrew. His name Stephen is a Greek name and not a Hebrew name. He had moved to Jerusalem at some point and he became a member of the Hellenist converts to Christianity. We do not know when he was converted.

All the apostles were born in Israel and Hebrew was their primary language. When all the leaders of your organization speak one language and have the same culture, it is not easy to be recognized as a leader.

It took a crisis for that to happen. The Hellenistic Jews formed a minority in the early Christian community in Jerusalem. They complained in Acts 6 that the care of their elderly widows was neglected by the Hebrew-speaking majority. (The first social justice issue in the church.) When the problem was brought to the apostles of the church, they told the people to vote on seven honorable men that they could appoint to supervise the daily supply of food. The Hellenistic Jews selected Stephen.

He was selected for various reasons. He was a Hellenistic Jew. He would make sure that the Hellenistic widows were cared for. He certainly had gained the attention of the Hellenistic Jews because he had a thorough knowledge and understanding of the old testament. He was very familiar with both Jewish history and the messianic promises. His teaching style was very confrontational. He was fearless.

But he was also selected because of his character. He was full of faith and the Holy Spirit. This enabled Stephen to be a gifted teacher. But it also enabled him to be a servant!

He had developed a reputation as a servant, or he would have never been considered. When he was given the opportunity to take on this sizable and daily responsibility, he embraced it. He became a part of the solution to the crisis because he was a servant. He volunteered to be a member of a team that served these elderly widows every day. This must have been a sizable task because seven men were appointed by the church. These men were not officially called the first deacons, but it is clear, that is what they were.

Stephen was an unlikely hero of faith because he was a Hellenistic Jew. But he became a hero of the faith because he was a servant. His service launched him into a position of leadership that would cause him to be feared by the Sanhedrin as a serious threat to their faith. Stephen was the first to perform signs and wonders other than the apostles. He was the first to preach a sermon other than the apostles.

What a sermon it was! His systematic and thorough defense of his faith before the rabbinic court enraged his Jewish audience. He was taken out of the city and stoned to death. His final words, a prayer of forgiveness for his attackers (Acts of the Apostles 7:60), echo those of Jesus on the cross (Luke 23:34). He is the first Christian martyr in the church.

His death occurred early in the book of Acts, but it was several years after the day of Pentecost. His death began the persecution of the church in Jerusalem that scattered believers throughout Judea, Samaria, and to other parts of the world. Stephen's life and death were the catalyst for the first giant wave of Christian missionary work outside of Jerusalem.

This would have never happened unless Stephen was a servant!

To be an unlikely hero of our faith to others, you must be a servant!

The Greek Word servant is the word...

diakonos (dee-ak'-on-os); to run on errands; a waiter (at table or in other menial duties). The King James translates this word deacon in various places where it is obvious that the writer is talking about an office of leadership in the church.

Jesus told His disciples that being a servant is the main qualification of leadership in the kingdom of God and His church.

He said...

Mark 9:35

35 And He sat down, called the twelve, and said to them, "If anyone desires to be first, he shall be last of all and servant of all."

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Jesus modeled for His disciples what it looked like to be a servant.

- He took care of their daily needs  
He even washed their feet.
- He took care of the needs of others.

Jesus gave them opportunities to serve.

- He enlisted them to do menial tasks for their whole group at no charge.
- He enlisted them to do good works for others at no charge.

Jesus taught them that to be a servant, you must first have a servant attitude.

Having a servant attitude means...

A servant attitude is considering the needs and desires of others to be more important than your own!

Philippians 2:3-11

3 Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself.

4 Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others.

5 Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus,

6 who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God,

7 but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men.

8 And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross.

9 Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name,

10 that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth,

11 and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

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- **The church that has a servant attitude will win.**  
Win means we will have a great reputation with our brothers, our sisters, and our neighbors. We put ourselves in a great position to grow.
- **The married couple that has a servant attitude will win.**  
Marriage and family are also be very difficult when a husband and a wife have a self-centered world view and do not have a servant attitude toward one another. To win

in marriage is to have harmony in marriage. Harmony in marriage comes from two people that get up every day focused on serving the other. There will always be misunderstandings and miscommunication in great marriages. But, if both husband and wife have a servant attitude, those conflicts are easily resolved. A great Christian marriage is the closest thing to heavenly relationships on earth.

If a husband and wife are immature and do not have a servant attitude toward one another, your marriage will be more like hell on earth!

You will be like a pilot and a co-pilot battling over who is going to control the destination of the plane. The plane is going to crash. Selfish couples are headed toward a crash.

I have seen many marriages last when the wife is a servant and the husband is not. The world calls these women door mats. I call those Christian women saints.

If the husband is a servant and the wife is not, most of those marriages end in divorce in our society.

- [The child that has a servant attitude will win.](#)  
To win as a child means you honor your father and mother and you receive favor from God and others.
- [The employer or the employee that has a servant attitude will win.](#)  
To win in business means you have a great reputation with your co-workers and those you serve.

#### [How did Stephen get a servant's attitude?](#)

- [Stephen was born again of the Spirit of God](#)

He was a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit. We are all born with a sinful nature that causes us to consider our needs and desires to be more important than the needs and desires of others. We are all born narcissistic.

If this does not change in our hearts and our minds by our 12<sup>th</sup> birthday, we will use our growing independence to serve our needs and desires at the expense of others. The damage we do to ourselves and others because of our selfishness will begin to mount. Our secret sins will defile our conscience. We will begin to call wrong right and call right wrong.

The only way to change is to be born again by the power of Jesus Christ. Jesus is the only one who can change your nature to be like His! He is a servant by nature!

Unbelievers can modify their behavior. Only Jesus can give a human being a new heart like His!

If you are going to become a servant like Jesus, you must be born again by the Spirit of Jesus!

- Stephen was disciplined by the church to be a servant

He was taught what Jesus said. It was modeled for him by the apostles of Jesus and others in the church.

When we first receive Jesus, we are babes in Christ. We know our sins are forgiven. But our understanding of the gospel of Jesus is very limited. We are characterized by ignorance. We are a Christian, but we still think like an unbeliever.



The thinking of most new Christians is characterized by a self-centered world view. Most of the world thinks like this.

The world exists to serve me. The world includes my family, my friends, my school, my employer, my church, my government, etc. What I need and want is more important than what others need or want. If I do not get what I need or want I have a right to be angry.

When we become Christians, it is normal for us to view others as our servants rather than viewing ourselves as the servants of all. This self-centered world view is revealed through what we say especially when we do not get something we need or want.

Our minds and emotions can be changed to have a Christ centered world view. It takes discipleship to change.

Jesus built His church to help us change. Church is a team sport. Those who are mature, disciple those who are not. We need intentional leaders to model for us what it looks like to be a servant.

But we are all members of the body of Christ. As we meet and share life together, we disciple one another. We change as we hear but we change as we serve one another. We serve one another by sharing truth and by bearing one another's burdens. We help each other change mentally and emotionally.

Jesus modeled discipleship for us with His 12 disciples.

The church of Jesus was designed by Jesus to accomplish the purpose of Jesus.  
We need to follow His design in discipleship!

Jesus's goal is for every member of His church to change their minds and emotions and become like Him, servants of all.

If you are going to become a servant like Jesus, you must be disciplined by the church of Jesus!

Stephen was very young when he died. But his life made an incredible difference for the church of Jesus. He became an unlikely hero of our faith because he was a servant!

What difference will your life make?

What do you need to do to become a servant like Stephen?

- Be born again by the Spirit of God
- Be disciplined by the church of Jesus

(Prayer)

Lord Jesus, I know that I am a **sinner**, and I ask for Your forgiveness. I believe You died for my sins and rose from the dead. I turn from my sins and invite You to come into my heart and life. I will follow you beginning with baptism.

Lord Jesus, I surrender my life to your purpose for me. I will be committed to your church so that I can grow as your disciple and so that I can help others grow. I want to be like you, a servant of all!

Amen!