



Acts 7:54-60:

Now when they heard these things they were enraged, and they ground their teeth at him. But he, full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. And he said, "Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God." But they cried out with a loud voice and stopped their ears and rushed together at him. ...

Then 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. And as they were stoning Stephen, he called out, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." And 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.

- Acts 7:54-60

In Stephen, we see deep conviction and faith as he faced the greatest threat of his life with the cost of his life.

3 Questions to Ask:

1. What would make someone under immense pressure and threat give up their life for Christ?
2. When faced with the greatest threat in his life, what held Stephen together?
3. How was Stephen able to respond without becoming demoralized by his circumstances nor bitter towards his enemies?

Under great pressure and threat:

Verse 54: Now when they heard these things they were enraged, and they ground their teeth at him.

Verses 57-58: But they cried out with a loud voice and stopped their ears and rushed together at him. Then 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.

What would make someone under immense pressure and threat give up their life for Christ?

This question is an important one to ask ourselves, especially for us in San Diego/Southern CA.

Two responses some might have:

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2) *"I am a Christian, but if I am honest, I'm not sure I would have the faith to respond the way Stephen did."*

A reframing is needed:

Instead of focusing on yourself and thinking about the amount of faith you may or may not have, focus on Jesus and ask, "What is it about Christ's love that is so beautiful and compelling that it's worth sacrificing everything for?"

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Verses 55-56: But he, full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. And he said, "Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God."

Key point:

What held Stephen together was beholding the glory of God and the risen Christ who stands.

1) Behold

a) The Greek word for "gaze" means to "fix one's eyes with unwavering attention."

b) What you gaze (behold) matters greatly. When it's on your circumstances, there will be fear. But when it is on the Lord, as we see with Stephen, there is peace and power that overcomes fear.

2) Beholding the **glory of God**:

The Glory of God:

a. The display of all that God is - His greatness, power and beauty (Hebrew word is Cavod)

b. God's presence that brings awe and wonder. Because of the gospel, we have access to the very presence of God (the veil has been torn and the access is made through Christ)

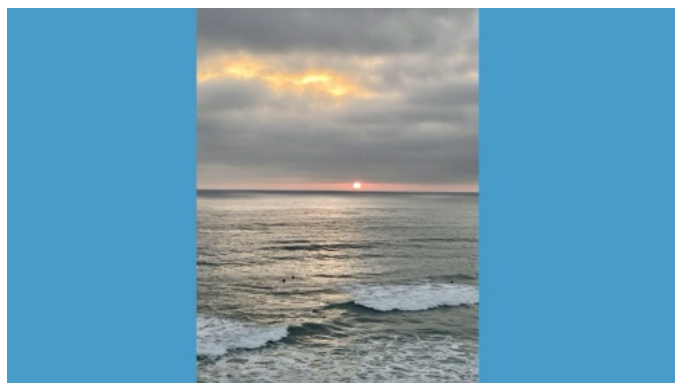
3) When it comes to beholding the glory of God:

a. God reveals his power, love, and presence in supernatural and sovereign ways that we cannot control or fabricate, and yet, as his children, we approach, engage and ask...

3) When it comes to beholding the glory of God:

b. We behold God's glory in His created world (Psalm 19) as "sunbeams to the sun."

When we are overcome with worries and threats in our lives, God often uses creation (such as nature, songs, art) to declare his glory to us, remind us of His power and greatness, and to both direct and deepen the hope we have in the gospel.





Isaiah 55:12: "The mountains and the hills shall break forth before you into singing, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands."



Psalm 8:3-5: When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is man that you are mindful of him, and the son of man that you care for him? Yet you have made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honor.

3) When it comes to beholding the glory of God:

c. We behold the glory of God through his word, and in particular, to the One whom his word points to: Jesus!

Such was the case with Stephen!

Verses 55-56: "But he, full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and **Jesus standing** at the right hand of God. And he said, "Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the **Son of Man standing** at the right hand of God."

What holds us together is knowing that Jesus is the Risen King (Son of Man) who holds all things together!

What holds us together is seeing Jesus standing!

F. F. Bruce: *"Stephen has been confessing Christ before men, and now he sees Christ confessing his servant before God."*

One more thought:

As Stephen faces the greatest threat of his life, beholding God is not a form of escape. God does not remove the suffering but instead, He reveals himself within the suffering!

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Verses 59-60: And as they were stoning Stephen, he called out, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." And 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.

Two thoughts:

1. As Stephen gazed upon the glory of the Lord in the risen Christ who stood for him, he was able to *trust in Christ's love and release his very life to God.*

Verse 59: *"Lord Jesus, receive my spirit."*

Two thoughts:

2. As Stephen gazed upon the glory of the Lord in the risen Christ who stood for him, he was able to *extend grace and forgiveness to his enemies.*

Verse 60: *And falling to his knees he cried out with a loud voice, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them."*

Conclusion:

As Stephen faced the greatest threat of his life with the cost of his life, look at what Luke says at the very end:

Verse 60: And when he had said this, *he fell asleep*.

Heidelberg Catechism Question #1:

Q: What is your only comfort in life and in death?

All: That I am not my own, but belong—body and soul, in life and in death—to my faithful Savior, Jesus Christ. He has fully paid for all my sins with his precious blood, and has set me free from the tyranny of the devil. He also watches over me in such a way that not a hair can fall from my head without the will of my Father in heaven; in fact, all things must work together for my salvation. Because I belong to him, Christ, by his Holy Spirit, assures me of eternal life and makes me wholeheartedly willing and ready from now on to live for him.