



WEEKLY STUDY

Stranger Things - Week One

Our August series is a look at the strange and unexpected events that take place in the book of Acts. While we are keenly aware of what is going on in the physical world in and around us, we sometimes lack awareness of the spiritual world which is just as real, only less visible. We'll look with spiritual eyes at the events of the early church to see how God was moving in those days, and what it might mean for our time.

Please note our prayer focus for the week in the box below. Join us in seeing what God will do as we unite in prayer.

Peace of Christ,
Pastor Mark Youngman

If you are studying with your Providence Small Group or Discipleship Group, you can share from your own daily reflections and consider the Group Discussion questions below. If you would like to get connected visit prov.church/smallgroups.

Prayer Focus:

- Pray for those whose physical reality is made unbearable through sickness, famine or violence. Pray that victories in the spirit would encourage them to face the difficulties of this world with power and grace.

DAILY STUDY

MONDAY: ACTS 6.8-10 (NIV)

Now Stephen, a man full of God's grace and power, performed great wonders and signs among the people.⁹ Opposition arose, however, from members of the Synagogue of the Freedmen (as it was called)—Jews of Cyrene and Alexandria as well as the provinces of Cilicia and Asia—who began to argue with Stephen.¹⁰ But they could not stand up against the wisdom the Spirit gave him as he spoke.

- As the story of Stephen unfolds, it is reiterated that he was “full of” five distinguishing marks: the Spirit, wisdom, faith, grace, and power. (see Acts 6:3, 5, 8) These are the things that made him stand out even among the seven selected to serve the widows in the church. Luke emphasises his qualities in these verses leading up to a great speech that would lead to Stephen’s death. Which of these five marks seen in Stephen are needed in your life today? All of them? Can you name specific situations in which you need wisdom, faith, grace and power?
-
-
-
-

- **Prayer Prompt: The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom; all who follow his precepts have good understanding. To him belongs eternal praise. (Psalm 111.10)**
- *God, I don’t know much about the character of Stephen, but I know that he must have known you well. Draw me close to see the truth of who you are. Give me wisdom, faith, grace and power as I face the challenges of the world around me. Amen.*

TUESDAY: ACTS 6.11-14

¹¹ Then they secretly persuaded some men to say, “We have heard Stephen speak blasphemous words against Moses and against God.”

¹² So they stirred up the people and the elders and the teachers of the law. They seized Stephen and brought him before the Sanhedrin. ¹³ They produced false witnesses, who testified, “This fellow never stops speaking against this holy place and against the law. ¹⁴ For we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and change the customs Moses handed down to us.”

- A smear campaign had begun! Stephen’s debate skills were so powerful that his adversaries had to revert to slinging mud. They accuse him of speaking against the temple and the law. These are the two defenseless acts that would equally offend everyone. The lies they told and rumors they spread weren’t a complete fabrication, rather a misuse of Stephen’s words. Have you ever had anyone use your own words against you in a way that didn’t seem fair? How can you imagine Stephen was feeling while these misleading rumors were spreading?
-
-
-
-

- **Prayer Prompt: Jesus answered, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.” (John 14.6)**

- *God, I am sometimes frustrated by the ways of this world. Enemies tangle words and misrepresent thoughts for their own gain. Teach me to stick to the truth that I have come to know in Jesus, even when it is not easy. Amen.*

WEDNESDAY: MARK 6.15 (NIV)

¹⁵ *All who were sitting in the Sanhedrin looked intently at Stephen, and they saw that his face was like the face of an angel.*

- The look on Stephen's face in the middle of a growing crisis was noticeable. The Sanhedrin was caught up in the swirling narrative and case against Stephen, and yet his countenance made him look like an angel—and they saw it. It must have been alarming when the one whose blood pressure should have been on the rise seemed to be at peace. Usually overwhelming accusations lead a person to cave...not so with Stephen. Have you ever had so much confidence in the truth and faithfulness of God that it gave you peace in a stressful situation?

- **Prayer Prompt: You, dear children, are from God and have overcome them, because the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world. (1 John 4.4)**
- *O God, today I lean on your truth. Steel in me the confidence to be at peace, and to be an instrument of your peace amidst the physical struggles of this world. Amen.*

THURSDAY: MARK 15.27-30 (NIV)

They crucified two rebels with him, one on his right and one on his left. ²⁹ Those who passed by hurled insults at him, shaking their heads and saying, "So! You who are going to destroy the temple and build it in three days, ³⁰ come down from the cross and save yourself!"

- The accusation of a destroyed temple and a destroyed law were also levied against Jesus and he rebuked the accusations in his claim to fulfill the law rather than abolish it. We can see how the rhetoric was recycled to attack whichever enemy was in front of those in power. Even when he was on the cross, it seemed that Jesus was a threat to those who passed by. They were mocking him, but they sure seemed to remember his words. Stephen echoed the words of Jesus in a way that kept the threat alive. What they failed to realize in Acts is that the work of resurrection on the third day had already taken place! Are there buildings or rules that hold such an important place in your society that it can be difficult to see the bigger thing God is doing?

- **Prayer Prompt: May our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father, who loved us and by his grace gave us eternal encouragement and good hope, ¹⁷ encourage your hearts and strengthen you in every good deed and word. (2 Thessalonians 2.16-17)**
- *God, may the kingdom perspective of Jesus guide my words and actions today. Amen.*

FRIDAY: EPHESIANS 6.10-12 (NIV)

Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. ¹¹ Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. ¹² For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.

- In this world there will be deceit and struggles for power. Paul invites followers of Jesus to be prepared to stand strong against the devil's schemes. Putting on the armor of God allows us to set our sights higher. We can begin to see where spiritual forces are infiltrating the workings of our world. The armor mentioned by Paul allows us to operate out of God's strength and to become proactive in the face of evil. What does it mean for you that the struggle is not against flesh and blood?

- **Prayer Prompt: Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. (2 Corinthians 4.16)**
- *God, renew my faith today...and everyday. Build me up to capably wear the armor of God. Amen.*

SATURDAY: EPHESIANS 6.13-18a (NIV)

Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. ¹⁴ Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, ¹⁵ and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. ¹⁶ In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. ¹⁷ Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

¹⁸ *And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests.*

- Paul describes the attributes of this armor of God. We can live in truth and righteousness. We can experience the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. We are protected by faith in salvation through Jesus Christ and we carry around the word of God to defeat darkness. What helps you to stand against evil? From where do you gather the strength to overcome darkness?

-
-
-
- **Prayer Prompt:** since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. ²⁰ For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse. (Romans 1.19-20)
 - *God, open my eyes to all of the ways you are at work in the world around me. Let it bring encouragement and hope. Make it plain to me, your plan of salvation! Amen.*

GROUP DISCUSSION

Pastor Jacob shared a story that has become foundational for Providence Church. It was a story in which his wife Rachel encouraged their daughter who was ready to be done with school by reminding her of what was true: she is Brave, Strong, Known and Loved. What is it about God that makes these descriptions true of you?

Brave- I am brave because God _____

Strong- I am strong because God _____

Known- I am known because God _____

Loved- I am loved because God _____