



Daily readings,
reflections and prayers

**Monday 24 August - Sunday 30
August
2020**

Monday 24th August

Acts 7v1-16

Opening Prayer:

Loving God, as I read your word, speak to me I pray and lead me into your truth. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Reflection:

Here we see Stephen defending himself and defending his faith before the religious leaders of his day, the Sanhedrin. And he begins by going through a lot of Old Testament history. In these 16 verses he speaks about Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Joseph. And I was struck by the fact that Stephen's faith was based on a good knowledge of the Bible. He knew his Old Testament history, and how God had worked in the past.

May we, likewise, root our faith in good Bible knowledge. One of the most valuable things we can do is to read the Bible regularly, daily if at all possible. Indeed, the more we do so, the stronger our faith will be.

So let me encourage you to make the daily reading of the Bible something that you commit yourself to so that, like Stephen, your faith might be strong, whatever challenges you face.

A prayer:

Loving God, help me, like Stephen, to read your word, to know your word, and to be strong in faith. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Prayer Focus:

- Pray for yourself and for those you know and love.
- Pray for our leaders that they may serve the good of all people, and not just of themselves.
- Pray for your Church leaders that they may walk in the footsteps of Christ.

Tuesday 25th August

Acts 7v17-43

Opening Prayer:

Loving God, as I read your word, speak to me I pray and help me to see you more clearly. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Reflection:

Stephen continues with his summary of Jewish Old Testament history and, as I read this, at first I found it a bit strange.

After all, he is speaking to the Sanhedrin, to Jewish religious leaders. So, they know all this stuff. So, why is Stephen telling them what they already know?

But then it struck me. He is trying to convince them of the truth of the Christian faith and, to do that, he needs to start with what they know. Or, to use a bit of jargon, to 'begin where they are at.'

This is a great model for us as we try to share our faith with family, neighbours and friends. We need to begin 'where they are at' and find the common ground between their life and beliefs and those of Christianity, and gently lead them on from there.

A prayer:

Loving God, help me to speak up for you, and to do so wisely; and to lead others from what they know, to what they don't know, and to a living faith in Jesus. In his name I pray. Amen.

Prayer Focus:

- Pray for your own needs and for your loved ones.
- Pray for all Christians who are persecuted for their faith. May God strengthen them in their troubles.
- Pray too for the Church here and around the world to faithfully proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ, like Stephen did.

Wednesday 26th August

Acts 7v44-53

Opening Prayer:

Loving God, as I read your word, speak to me I pray and lead me into your truth. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Reflection:

Here Stephen draws his speech to a conclusion, and so he tries to encourage and to challenge his hearers to trust in Jesus Christ.

He encourages them to see that, although they love their temple, God doesn't live in human buildings.

He challenges them to be different from their ancestors.

And he points out that Jesus was prophesied and predicted in the very scriptures that they honour.

I think we often struggle with this: with pushing and encouraging people to move on from where they are and to truly consider the claims of Christ.

May God help us to be bolder in speaking up for Christ.

A prayer:

Loving God, help me lead others to you, and to lovingly challenge their beliefs where these contradict what the Bible tells us about you. Amen.

Prayer Focus:

- Pray for your own needs and for your loved ones.
- Pray for all Christians today (including those in your Church) that we might be more effective witnesses for Christ.
- For those struggling with mental health battles; may God bring them his peace and his healing.

Thursday 27th August

Acts 7v54-8v3

Opening Prayer:

Loving God, as I read your word, speak to me I pray and lead me into your truth. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Reflection:

One of the great challenges that non-Christians often make against Christianity is, "Why does God allow suffering?" And it sounds like a slam-dunk winning argument. If God is all powerful and all loving, then surely he both can and will want to stop suffering; but he doesn't do so.

But in fact, there is one major flaw in that argument. Anyone who has read the Bible will see that all of its great characters suffer greatly. Stephen here is stoned to death. Joseph in the Old Testament was sold as a slave; Jesus was crucified.

And so, what is clear is that the Christian faith, and the Christian God, never promised us no suffering. What God does promise is that he will be with us through whatever we face.

And so, in our reading, we see that he was with Stephen, granting him a vision of heaven (v55-56) and, by implication, the promise of an eternal and joyful future in heaven with God.

Sadly, we will all suffer at times in our lives. But thankfully, when those days come, God will be with us.

A prayer:

May we, and all God's people, know God's peace and his presence during the dark times of our lives.

Prayer Focus:

- Pray for your own needs and for your loved ones.
- Pray for all those we know who are suffering today. May God be with them and grant them the knowledge of his love and his presence.
- Pray for British military servicemen and women. May God strengthen them, protect them and use them to bring peace and aid into His world.
- Pray for those taking much needed holidays for rest, renewal and restoration

Friday 28th August

Acts 8v4-7

1 Peter 4v12-16

Opening Prayer:

Loving God, as I read your word, speak to me I pray and lead me into your truth. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Reflection:

Sadly, the persecution of Christians that began with St Stephen continues to this day. Indeed, I read once that there were more Christian martyrs in the 20th Century than in all the previous 19 centuries put together. And that continues to this day.

But God has a way of working through disaster and trouble, and the persecution of the Church in v1 actually planted the seeds for the spread of the Church in v4 and, as his Christians were spread, so God's work spread, and the Church grew.

A prayer:

Loving God, thank you that nothing can stop your work, and so I pray not for peace nor for an easy life, but for the spread of your gospel. In Jesus' name. amen.

Prayer Focus:

- Firstly, pray for your own needs and for your loved ones.
- Pray for our brothers and sisters throughout the world who are persecuted for their faith. May God deliver them and help them.
- Pray for teachers. For a relaxing holiday and for good preparation for September.
- Pray for our neighbours and our community

Saturday 29th August

Leviticus 19v30-37
Acts 8v9-25

Opening Prayer:

Loving God, as I read your word, speak to me I pray and lead me into your truth. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Reflection:

I was really struck by the interesting story of Simon the sorcerer, partly because the interest in magic, witchcraft and the like is growing in our society, particularly among young people. And this story is like a cautionary tale. It reminds us that some of the spiritual powers of the occult are real. It also reminds us that, like Simon, people can become enticed and deceived by such powers; and finally, it shows us that the supreme spiritual power in this world is Almighty God who is the ultimate judge of us all (v22).

A prayer:

Loving God, may I follow you and you alone. Amen.

Prayer Focus:

- Firstly, pray for your own needs and for your loved ones.
- Pray for our churches and all they are doing.
- Pray for God's truth and love to reach all in our community and in our nation.

Sunday 30th August

Romans 12v9-21

Opening Prayer:

Loving God, as I read your word, speak to me I pray and lead me into your truth. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Reflection:

Paul's great 'hymn' about love in these verses is one of the most inspiring chapters in the Bible. It is worth reading and re-reading, and reflecting upon. As you read it, allow God to speak to you. Perhaps one clause will grab you. When it does, stop, and pray around that particular issue. And then move on and do the same again. Above all pray for yourself that you might grow in love, and that your love might be sincere and real. I certainly pray that for myself.

A prayer:

God who is love, I pray that your love might grow in my heart and in my life, and that I would increasingly act with love towards all who I meet. Amen.

Prayer Focus:

- Pray for your own needs and for your loved ones.
- But today, let us also pray for those who have received little love in their lives; who are hurting and in need. May they encounter the love of God and receive his healing.
- Pray for the Church that we may faithfully love our neighbours.
- Pray for all Christian aid agencies, bringing the love of God to those who are in need. May God bless their work.

