



Stephen: Deacon, Martyr, and Agent of Change

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INTRODUCTION

With a study of Stephen, we are immediately drawn to specifics of his character, his boldness, his knowledge of the scripture, and his willingness to die for the cause of Christ. These observations are based solely on what we read in Acts 6–8. One striking quality about Stephen that made him ideal for the deacon position was that he was ready. He was qualified and passionate about who he was and why he was here on Earth. Stephen is the model of devoted followership and servant leadership; qualities every Christian should strive to emulate.

Literature on Stephen can support the overall study by pinpointing details that we might otherwise miss. An example of this is his name. Stephen is a Greek name not a Hebrew name. In fact, we find he was a Hellenistic Jew and Hellenists embraced the Greek culture and spoke the Greek language. Likewise, facts about the name Stephen can draw

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readers away by the questions that arise. For example, how did a Greek speaking Jewish man learn so much scripture? Why would he have been in Jerusalem if he were from outside Jerusalem?

In this chapter, we will discuss the qualifications of Stephen to be one of the first deacons and compare those qualifications to the present-day church office of Deacon as defined in 1 Timothy 3: 8–13. We will then take a comprehensive look at the accusation against him and his famous defense as captured in the sermon of Acts 7. We will then look at his subsequent martyrdom. Most importantly, we will analyze Stephen as a follower and transformational leader. Last, we will look at how Stephen was the catalyst for the spread of Christianity. The chapter will end with reflection on how Stephen’s follower and leader characteristics can shape followers and leaders in the twenty-first century. This reflective analysis will be built around the research of Robert Kelley, Robert Greenleaf, and James MacGregor Burns.

QUALIFICATIONS

The story of Stephen begins with a statement of need. We see in Acts 6 the following:

In those days when the number of disciples was increasing, the Hellenistic Jews among them complained against the Hebraic Jews because their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food. So the Twelve gathered all the disciples together and said, “It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to wait on tables. Brothers and sisters, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them and will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word.

This proposal pleased the whole group. They chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit; also Philip, Procorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas from Antioch, a convert to Judaism. They presented these men to the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them. (Acts 6:1–6, NIV)

The Hellenistic Jews were primarily Jewish Christians who had adopted the Greek language and culture. The Hebraic Jews were Aramaic speaking Jewish Christians. The Hellenists are complaining that their widows are not being taken care of. A couple of observations here before we

continue. The Twelve gather “all the disciples”—this includes both Jewish Christian groups and maybe others—and they direct the disciples to choose seven men to “wait on tables.” Charles Ryrie (1978) notes, “the Greek word for ‘serve’ is the one from which we derive ‘deacon,’ but these were ‘deacons only in the sense of being servants’” (p. 1548). Ryrie (1978) also notes that every deacon selected has a Greek name. This implies the disciples—“all the disciples”—chose men who could culturally relate to and communicate with this forgotten group, the widows. This passage also identifies what the important characteristics are; “full of the Spirit and wisdom.”

However, we cannot ignore that this event perhaps paved the way for what would become the requirements for the church office of Deacon as later defined in 1 Timothy 3.

In the same way, deacons are to be worthy of respect, sincere, not indulging in much wine, and not pursuing dishonest gain. They must keep hold of the deep truths of the faith with a clear conscience. They must first be tested; and then if there is nothing against them, let them serve as deacons.

A deacon must be faithful to his wife and must manage his children and his household well. Those who have served well gain an excellent standing and great assurance in their faith in Christ Jesus. (1 Tim 3:8–10, 12 & 13, NIV)

The list of deacons starts with Stephen and the words “a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit” are attributed only to him. Given Luke is writing on this account, he could have had a special fondness for Stephen, or these attributes could have stood out in Stephen over the others. Either way, when you compare these attributes with those listed in 1 Tim 3:8–10, 12 & 13 we see similarities. One other similarity is that the Twelve, or the Apostles, “prayed and laid their hands on them.” This was an incredible site to the other disciples because it showed they were worthy of respect and that they were being entrusted with an important function. Rushbrooke (1940) makes this observation about Stephen and the filling of the Holy Spirit:

He is not endowed with the Spirit because he is a martyr; he becomes a martyr because of the presence that fills his life. He is not “a man full of the Holy Spirit” because he is a church officer; he was chosen -for office because his fellow members found him already Spirit-filled. The tone and temper of his life marked him as one in vital touch with the Lord Christ. (p. 5)

Rushbrooke (1940) adds the Holy Spirit works independently from other things about Christianity. It is not dependent on the laying on of hands, or holy oil or baptism, but rather those things known as the fruit of the Spirit identified in Galatians 5:22 “*love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.*” Though the Book of Acts was written about 60 A.D., most Biblical timelines put Stephen about three years after the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ and of course sometime after the Day of Pentecost when the Holy Spirit arrives on the scene. It is quite possible Stephen was raised in a Christian home.

I am often taken by the sheer knowledge and wisdom some of the followers of Christ had back then. Peter’s sermon on the Day of Pentecost in Acts 2 is one example as is Stephen’s Defense which we will examine next. Did these men excel with scripture memorization and history? Did they each have committed family members that diligently taught them the scriptures? Or perhaps were the words they spoke God-breathed into them at the time. Remember these thoughts and questions as you walk through the next section.

The accusation against Stephen and his defense will be examined next. As we examine these things, we should ask why did these things happen to such a good man? Seems like an easy enough question, but could just the clear presence of God in a man bring others to anger? We will see how this is indeed what happened.

STEPHEN’S ACCUSATION AND DEFENSE

Stephen is next seen proclaiming Jesus and getting in trouble for doing it. But notice the first verse of this passage; “*Now Stephen, a man full of God’s grace and power, performed great wonders and signs among the people*” (Acts 6:8, NIV). So, in addition to “spirit,” “wisdom,” and “faith,” we see “grace” and “power” associated with Stephen.

The Accusation

The result was rising opposition. We see how the opposition begins with arguing but then quickly escalates to outright lies and false testimony against Stephen.

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. But they could not stand up against the wisdom the Spirit gave him as he spoke. (Acts 6:9,10, NIV)

Stephen spoke so passionately the opposition could not stand up to him and as the verses that follow show, false accusations were brought up against him and they stirred up others and even coerced some to testify against him. I pause here to ask, who else endured this kind of opposition at the end of his life? Jesus, of course.

I would like to interject an important point here before moving on to Stephen's defense, Hamon (1977) posits Stephen may have been under stress during this time period based on "observances" and that we can observe three things about his personhood.

Stephen was an inventor. In presenting claims of Jesus and His disciples, Stephen spoke from a point unique to any frame of reference, Greek or Semitic. Yet something beckoned him outside the safety of conventionality, and he answered the call.

Stephen remained an integrated person under the stress of argumentation and accusation. Stephen's adversaries...could not withstand the wisdom and the Spirit with which he spoke (Acts 6:10)'...and Stephen had ...become infused with the Holy Spirit such that he was 'full' of the Spirit. (Hamon, 1977)

Just before Stephen begins his defense, verse 15 states, "*All who were sitting in the Sanhedrin looked intently at Stephen, and they saw that his face was like the face of an angel*" (Acts 6:15, NIV). It should be obvious to the reader that God was present, and that God was on his side. Though the Sanhedrin did not want to admit this, they most likely knew it to be true. It is a safe assumption that Stephen knew his time was short and that now was the time to take a stand for Christ. The other thing this verse suggests is two more godly characteristics possessed by Stephen, peace and joy.

The Defense

"*Then the high priest asked Stephen, 'Are these charges true?'*" (Acts 7:1, NIV). And, with this question, Stephen begins his long defense. It is also known as Stephen's Sermon. The sermon is 51 verses in length. Ryrie (1978) describes the text of the sermon "as your fathers did, so do ye"

(v. 51) and notes, “Stephen recited the privileges of the nation Israel and their rejection of God’s messengers; then he laid blame for the slaying of Jesus squarely on his hearers” (v. 52) (Ryrie, 1978, p. 1549).

Stephen passionately and I might add, accurately, recounts the history of the children of Israel from the time of Abraham through the building of the temple by Solomon. It is what he says next that begins to stir people. The irony is that he is quoting the Old Testament (Is. 66:1,2).

However, the Most High does not live in houses made by human hands. As the prophet says:

Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool. What kind of house will you build for me? says the Lord. Or where will my resting place be? Has not my hand made all these things?

You stiff-necked people, with uncircumcised hearts and ears! You are just like your fathers: You always resist the Holy Spirit. (Acts 7:48–51; Is 66:1–2a, NIV)

These three verses are very important because if misinterpreted by the people listening, they can be a catalyst for extreme disagreement. Bovon (2003) notes,

First, the story of the tension in the Jerusalem church has been particularly noted. It is clear today, for the majority of scholars, that a quarrel existed between opposing and distinct Christian groups of Jewish origin: the Twelve, who spoke Aramaic and respected the Jerusalem Temple, and the Seven, who spoke Greek and presented a liberal understanding of the Mosaic law and opposed the sacrificial function of the Temple. (p. 284)

Thus, when Stephen boldly states God does not live in the temple and that sacrifices in the temple were no longer necessary (implied in the verses Acts 7:42b & 47), this was interpreted as blasphemy by some. Some scholars have gone so far as to refer to Stephen’s words regarding sacrifices in the temple as a cult (Bovon, 2003).

When we look at the final three verses in full context, we see the possible trigger that spurred the high priest to do what he did next.

You stiff-necked people! Your hearts and ears are still uncircumcised. You are just like your ancestors: You always resist the Holy Spirit! Was there ever a prophet your ancestors did not persecute? They even killed those who predicted the coming of the Righteous One. And now you have

betrayed and murdered him— you who have received the law that was given through angels but have not obeyed it. (Acts 7:51–53, NIV)

Even though he is defending himself, he boldly accuses the Sanhedrin of having hearts and ears that are uncircumcised. This is the equivalent of telling them that they are not set apart as the physical circumcision sets apart and have been resisting letting the Holy Spirit come into their hearts. To add a little more context, according to Harbour and others (1988) note Israel (the traditional Jews) told their history from the position of “God’s salvation for an elect people” but add, “Stephen told it as a history rejecting God’s leaders and leadership, a history of resisting the Holy Spirit, a history of climaxing in the violent rejection of the righteous Messiah” (p. 1374). He was figuratively pointing his finger at them.

He shows the boldness to speak to the hierarchy of the day, a trait of courageous followership. Stephen’s list of godly characteristics continues to grow: Spirit, Wisdom, Faith, Grace, Power, Peace, Joy, and now Boldness. Next, we will examine his martyrdom and how that led to the spread of Christianity.

THE MARTYRDOM

To believe in God so passionately that you are willing to die for him is a testament to the boldness and courage of Stephen. As stated earlier, at this point in the story, he knows he is going to die. He has thoroughly upset the Sanhedrin and says some things that seal his fate.

When the members of the Sanhedrin heard this, they were furious and gnashed their teeth at him. But Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, looked up to heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. ‘Look,’ he said, ‘I see heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God. (Acts 7:54–56, NIV)

Rushbrooke (1940) notes Stephen was the only person in Acts to call Jesus the Son of Man a name Jesus called himself. Jesus referred to himself as the Son of Man throughout the Gospels and is identified that way in Acts and Revelation. Rushbrooke (1940) posits, “The reason is that he is the first to realize that the Christ is no mere Jew, but the Saviour of the human race” (1940, p. 9). The Apostles, though saved and filled with the Holy Spirit, were still living as Jews. They had not grasped the full

meaning of their faith whereas Stephen had. Therefore, it makes sense that Stephen would be the first martyr. One could conclude here that the follower (Stephen) had become the leader in this moment in time which is another quality of courageous followership.

The “Son of Man” title is more relatable to human beings. It really is the more appropriate title for Jesus while on Earth. Some have noted the fact that Jesus is standing instead of sitting at the right hand of God illustrates a welcoming posture to Stephen as he is about to die. We will never understand the euphoria Stephen must have felt—though in tremendous pain from the stoning—seeing his blessed savior ready to welcome him.

At this they covered their ears and, yelling at the top of their voices, they all rushed at him, dragged him out of the city and began to stone him. Meanwhile, the witnesses laid their coats at the feet of a young man named Saul. (Acts 7:57–58, NIV)

The result of conviction, they (the Sanhedrin and others perhaps) chose not to accept the gift of God’s salvation and instead began the process of killing Stephen. There are numerous definitions of what stoning entailed. Some would have taken time to execute such as burying an individual up to their chest or neck or tying them to a post. Others would have tortured first by throwing smaller rocks. Based on what we read in the Stephen account, it seems to depict a very quick event; medium and large stones immediately onto a kneeling Stephen.

Verse 58 seems almost out of place or irrelevant to the story unless it points to something later. People standing around laying their coats at the feet of Saul. Why? We will explore this in the next section. But first we see the ultimate act of a courageous follower of Christ. Love.

While they were stoning him, Stephen prayed, ‘Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.’ Then he fell on his knees and cried out, ‘Lord, do not hold this sin against them.’ When he had said this, he fell asleep. (Acts 7:59–60, NIV)

To the very end, Stephen cared for and loved his fellow man. He knew they needed Christ. Before we examine the resulting spread of Christianity, it is necessary to understand why or how the resulting actions came about. We see in Stephen a committed follower, yet we also see

a leader. Therefore, next we will review the literature of followership—namely that of Robert E. Kelley—and applicable leadership concepts of James MacGregor Burns.

FOLLOWERSHIP

In this section we will briefly review the research of Robert E. Kelley. There are a growing number of researchers investigating followership. I am focusing on Robert Kelley's work because he was a pioneer in the field and has continued to refine his thoughts on followership. Others such as Kellerman (2007) and Chaleff (2009) have added to the research by introducing engagement and courageous followership into the discussion. What is fascinating about this literature review is the way Kelley builds off servant leadership concepts and introduces elements of followership that have proved foundational to more contemporary experts in the field. Ultimately this section connects traits identified as those of Stephen and what kind of follower he truly was.

Kelley (1988) originally looked at followers as being associated with critical thinking [or not] and whether they were effective [or not]. He noted that some followers are more effective than others and they could be illustrated in a box with four quadrants corresponding to Alienated Followers, Effective Followers, Yes People, and Sheep. The Alienated and Effective followers showed Independent, Critical Thinking behaviors. The Yes People and Sheep were Dependent, and Uncritical in their thinking. Likewise, Effective and Yes People were Active participants and Alienated and Sheep were Passive. In the very middle of the box Kelley identified Survivors.

Twenty years later, Kelley (2010) revised his quadrants to Alienated, Star or Exemplary, Yes Person or Conformist, and Sheep or Passive Followers. Survivors—the middle box—was replaced with Pragmatic Followers. The other big change was that Effectiveness was now identified in terms of energy; there is now Negative Energy and Passive Engagement and Positive Energy and Active Engagement. We'll come back this later.

Another very important thing came out of this later work. Kelly's (2010) Seven Paths of Followership illustrated in a circular fashion, where the polar labels were Followers Seek Self-expression and Followers Seek to Transform Themselves. The equatorial labels were Relationships have primary Importance and Personal Goals have Primary Importance. The

seven paths then form a circle—think pieces of pie—working clockwise around the circle:

- The Apprentice’s Path—“They understand the need to learn the ropes and pay their dues...hope to win the confidence of peers and supervisors” (p. 186);
- The Disciple’s Path—“To bond with and emulate the leader...one who believes” (p. 187);
- The Mentee’s Path—“Involves an intensive one-on-one relationship between mentor and follower...mentees entrust themselves” (p. 187);
- The Comrade’s Path—“Intimacy from belonging. Once you feel part of something, you transcend feelings of isolation and even feelings of self” (p. 188);
- The Path of Loyalty—“Requires emotional commitment to another...willingly given and unshakeable from the outside” (p. 188);
- The Dreamer’s Path—“Committed to their personal dream rather than to a particular leader...They are so focused on achieving their dream that it does not matter whether they are in the leader or follower role” (p. 188); and,
- The Lifeway Path—Follow out of conviction...followership is compatible with their personal makeup...may be inherently altruistic or naturally skilled at following” (p. 188).

When I think of Stephen, the Disciple’s Path and Lifeway Path seem most descriptive. The Disciple’s Path was illustrated by Kelley (2010) as follows:

For example, having read Plato’s dialogues, the seventeen-year-old Aristotle left his hometown for Athens to study in Plato’s Academy. For the next twenty formative years, Aristotle worked and studied with a brilliant group of disciples under Plato’s leadership. (Kelley, 2010, p. 186)

Disciples give up everything to follow another and they feel enlarged as a result. Though Stephen most likely was not going for the feeling, he knew he was enlarged if he was aligned with Jesus. The boldness he showed all the way to his death was beyond anything the Twelve had shown up to that point. His scriptural wisdom exhibited a desire to learn and a skill of persuasiveness. In a Crosswalk.com article, White (2017) suggests,

“instead of saying, ‘Everything rises and falls on leadership,’ perhaps the deeper truth is, ‘Everything rises and falls on followership.’” He concludes you cannot be a leader without first being a follower. I tend to agree with this except in extraordinary cases such as when a charismatic leader rises during a point in history where a leader is needed. So, the question to ask is, was Stephen a leader or follower?

Likewise, the Lifeway Path of followership describe those that “may be inherently altruistic or naturally skilled at following...following is a way of serving...they make helping others their goal” (Kelley, 2010, p. 187). So, what is altruism? Psychology Today defines altruism as, “acting to help someone else at some cost to oneself.” Stephen arrives on the scene as the first appointed Deacon. He is selected to serve! He paid the ultimate price. This kind of followership is very similar to servant leadership. Greenleaf (1977, 2002), the pioneer of Servant Leadership, noted...

Servant and leader-can these two roles be fused in one real person, in all of status and calling? If so, can that person live and be productive in the real world of the present? My sense of the present leads me to say yes to both questions. (Greenleaf, 1977)

Greenleaf and his contemporaries generally identify several component constructs for servant leadership which included Altruism, Empowerment, Humility, Agape love, Service, Trust, and Vision. It is evident from this list that Altruism and Service are common with the Lifeway path of followership.

So, was Stephen a leader or a follower? Several Biblical timelines agree that Stephen’s moment was just a few years after the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. It is quite possible Stephen could have been a witness to much of what happened toward the end of Christ’s life and after his resurrection. Most suggest that since he was a Hellenist Jew, he was foreign born. However, most also agree he lived in Jerusalem. One might also ask, why wasn’t he selected to fill Judas’ place among the Twelve? There were basic requirements to be an Apostle as we see in Mark 3:14–15. They had to be called by Jesus, they had to accompany/study under Jesus, and they had to be empowered by Jesus.

Then he appointed twelve of them and called them his apostles. They were to accompany him, and he would send them out to preach, giving them authority to cast out demons. (Mark 3:14–15, NLT)

According to these three qualifications, Stephen may have been one of the 120 disciples that Peter was addressing in Acts 1:15 regarding the need to fill the vacancy left by Judas. If so, he could have studied under Jesus, but we know that he was not called to be an Apostle by Jesus. He may have been empowered by Jesus but not in the sense meant by these requirements (i.e., healing, raising the dead, casting out demons, etc.). He was clearly empowered to serve and preach. Thus, he was not a leader in an apostolic sense. However, his martyrdom changed the world.

Though there were certainly aspects of leadership seen in Stephen, and there is overwhelming evidence to support Stephen's walk down the Disciples Path and the Lifeway Path as defined by Kelley (2010), he also showed evidence of being a courageous follower.

For the sake of review, Ira Chaleff (2009) identifies seven elements of courageous followership.

1. Courage to Assume Responsibility;
2. Courage to Serve;
3. Courage to Challenge;
4. Courage to Participate;
5. Courage to Take Moral Action;
6. Courage to Speak to the Hierarchy; and
7. Courage to Listen to Followers. (Chaleff, 2009, pp. 6–8)

Chaleff starts these with the word courage. The argument is a follower with the first six elements will exhibit traits of a leader. For example, having the courage to be responsible might go beyond just being responsible for yourself as it could also include observing a need and just jumping in and taking care of the need. For the elements of Challenging and Taking Moral Action, this may include direct follower to leader engagement and obviously courage. Same with Speak to the Hierarchy. It is very clear that Stephen had a good grasp of elements one through six. However, there is a seventh one; Courage to Listen to Followers.

The seventh element is clearly for leaders. It also involves courage. Some leaders do not want to listen to followers. When Stephen sees Jesus standing [not sitting] at the right hand of God, it could have signaled to Stephen that Jesus was listening and watching. As he is dying, Stephen says to God, “forgive them for they know not what they do,” and I would like to believe God (Jesus) heard him. That was a

transformative moment for Stephen as he attained that desired level of self-actualization as originally defined by Maslow (1943). Maslow (1943) noted that self-actualization is...

What a man can be, he must be. This need we may call self-actualization... It refers to the desire for self-fulfillment, namely, to the tendency for him to become actualized in what he is potentially. This tendency might be phrased as the desire to become more and more what one is, to become everything that one is capable of becoming. (p. 383)

The spiritual and physical came together in perfect union in Stephen and though being stoned to death, he was a child of God and knew he would be with Jesus in a matter of minutes.

TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP

Earlier we discussed Greenleaf's servant leadership and noted the parts of servant leadership that describe Stephen. James Macgregor Burns was an accomplished political scientist, historian, and writer having published numerous books beginning in 1949 with the book titled, *Congress on Trial*. One of his greatest accomplishments was his book titled, *John Kennedy: A Political Profile* (1960) which was a very intimate account of a young John Kennedy before he became President. The book gained Burns much notoriety and respect. Burns later focused much of his attention on the study of leadership and in 1978 wrote the book titled, *Leadership*. In the book he introduces the concepts transactional leadership—simply put I reward you if you do something for me—and transforming leadership. It is the transforming leadership that I believe applies to Stephen the Martyr.

Burns (1978) defines a Transforming Leader as someone who, “looks for potential motives in followers, seeks to satisfy higher needs, and engages the full person of the follower” (p. 4). He adds, “Such leadership occurs when one or more persons engage with others in such a way that leaders and followers raise one another to higher levels of motivation and morality” (Burns, 1978, p. 20). If we look back at Acts 6, we see an astonishing outcome that can be missed as it falls in the middle of two significant events. Acts 6:7–8 says, “So the word of God spread. The number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly, and a large number of priests became obedient to the faith. Now Stephen, a man full of God's grace and

power, performed great wonders and signs among the people” (Acts 6:7–8, NIV). This happened just after Stephen and six others were selected to be the first deacons but before Stephen was seized by the Synagogue of the Freedmen (Jews from Cyrene, Alexandria, and other provinces) and brought to the Sanhedrin. Already the transformation had started. Stephen’s ministry was more leadership than followership in that he created followers of Jesus. He was raising others to “higher levels of motivation and morality” (Burns, 1978). When this thought is juxtaposed next to Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs where the pinnacle of needs is met with Self-Actualization (Maslow, 1943), we can understand better how the events of Acts 6–8 triggered the spread of Christianity after Stephen’s death.

Hamon (1977) posits four points to suggest Stephen’s actions “point to an experiential process” which he suggests goes beyond self-actualization.

Point 1—“The experiential sanctification process had begun in Stephen at his first moment of belief in Jesus...and...accelerated at the point where Stephen saw the vision of Christ” (p. 295).

Point 2—“Stephen’s prayer is one of enlightened acceptance. Stephen accepts his death as the culmination of his desired sanctification” (p. 295) which transcends Maslow.

Point 3—“By asking God to absolve his killers of blood guilt, Stephen released them from any claim which the adversary (Satan) might have had on them concerning him” (p. 295).

Point 4—“Transcendent actualization begins with a willful invitation of the third person of the Christian ‘three-in-one’ God (i.e., the Holy Spirit) into one’s life through faith in Jesus Christ” (p. 296).

Connecting Burns (1978) and Hamon (1977), it is not hard to see Stephen as a Transformational Leader. Much of Transformational Leadership hinges on followers recognizing the vision of the leader, embracing it and making it theirs. When someone accepts Jesus as their personal Lord and savior—Point 1 above—they have accepted an invitation from God and have wholly embraced it. Stephen did this and shortly after he was ordained as a Deacon, he was part of the evangelism explosion that occurred and led to many coming to Jesus but also many Jews

becoming very angry with him. A close cousin of Transformational Leadership is Charismatic Leadership. Point 2 above from a leader's standpoint reminds me of Jesus's command to "Take up your cross and walk," and anyone that agreed to do that as Stephen did, recognized that the ultimate outcome of sanctification could possibly lead to glorification. So, the Charismatic Leader here could be God but also Stephen. And of course, from a Follower perspective, Stephen followed so far that it ultimately led to his enlightened acceptance. Regarding Point 3 above, it takes a lot of love for "*one or more persons engage with others in such a way that leaders and followers raise one another to higher levels of motivation and morality*" (Burns, 1978, p. 20). Stephen's prayer to God to absolve those killing him of any blood guiltiness, i.e., sin, was agape love through and through and it resulted higher levels of motivation and morality. That single act alone may have demonstrated love like never have been seen before; except for Jesus Christ himself. Point 4 is about achieving self-actualization and beyond and hones in on the Holy Spirit. Burns (1978) beautifully describes something like this using teachers and leaders as the catalysts. He notes...

The problem for them as educators, as leaders, is not to promote narrow, egocentric self-actualization but to extend awareness of human needs and the means of gratifying them, to improve the larger social situation for which educators or leaders have responsibility and over which they have power...and...They seek to help students rise to higher stages of moral reasoning and hence to higher levels of principled judgement. (p. 449)

Hamon (1977), when explaining Point 4, posits this about one's awareness of one's position in Christ and one's uniqueness as a person. He posits...

As this awareness increases, so does the awareness of the limitations sinful human conditions place on one which frustrate realization of the potential for hallowed 'Christ-like' personhood. As one attempts to resolve the imbalance between the completed position and the limited condition in daily Christian life the Holy Spirit teaches that such resolution is only done by the One who created the potential and Who makes possible the actualization of that potential, God. (p. 296)

Up to this point, we have been identifying distinguishing traits, or godly characteristics, about Stephen. We have also examined followership and

leadership traits Stephen had. The last section highlights the result of Stephen's moment in time. We investigate how Stephen, through his courageous followership and transformational leadership, was the catalyst that sparked the spread of Christianity.

THE SPREAD OF CHRISTIANITY

Several things contributed to the beginning of the spread of Christianity, but one event appears to stand out from the rest and that is the martyrdom of Stephen. We see in Chapter 8, with emphasis added, the following:

And Saul approved of their killing him. On that day a great persecution broke out against the church in Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria. Godly men buried Stephen and mourned deeply for him. But Saul began to destroy the church. Going from house to house, he dragged off both men and women and put them in prison. Those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went. (Acts 8:1–4, NIV)

We see here the witness' coats were thrown at the feet of the one who approved of (consented to) the stoning of Stephen. The scripture then immediately states, "On that day..." the persecution started and the subsequent spread of all "except the apostles" to Judea and Samaria. Stephen was the catalyst for change. Why not the Apostles? It is unclear why they stayed back or were spared being forced out of Jerusalem. They represented the Church at Jerusalem and of course would play a role in policy and missionary work later. We also know that all the apostles became martyrs except for John who was used by God later to write the Revelation of God. The point of Acts 8:1–4 is that a movement started. God used hostility and persecution toward Christians to move Christians beyond Jerusalem. This is defined even better in Acts 11 where we see the result of the scattering.

Now those who had been scattered by the persecution that broke out when Stephen was killed traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch, spreading the word only among Jews. Some of them, however, men from Cyprus and Cyrene, went to Antioch and began to speak to Greeks also, telling them the good news about the Lord Jesus. The Lord's hand was

Table 7.1 Summary of Stephen's traits, followership behaviors, and leadership behaviors

<i>Holy Bible Text (Acts 6–8 & 11)</i>	<i>Followership (Kelley)</i>	<i>Courageous Followership (Chaleff)</i>	<i>Servant Leadership (Greenleaf + Contemporaries)</i>	<i>Transformational Leadership (Burns)</i>
<u>Holy Spirit</u>	The	Courage to	<u>Altruism</u>	Looks for
<u>Wisdom</u>	Apprentice's	Assume	Empowerment	potential motives
<u>Faith</u>	Path	<u>Responsibility</u>	Humility	of the follower
<u>Grace</u>	The <u>Disciple's</u>	Courage to	<u>Agape love</u>	Seeks to <u>satisfy</u>
<u>Power</u>	Path	<u>Serve</u>	<u>Service</u>	<u>higher needs</u> of
<u>Peace</u>	The Mentee's	Courage to	<u>Trust</u>	the follower
<u>Joy</u>	Path	<u>Challenge</u>	<u>Vision</u>	Engages the full
<u>Boldness</u>	The Comrade's	Courage to		person of the
	Path	Participate		follower
	The Path of	Courage to		<u>Raise one another</u>
	Loyalty	<u>Take Moral</u>		<u>to higher levels</u>
	The Dreamer's	<u>Action</u>		of motivation/ morality
	Path	Courage to		<u>Transcendent</u>
	The <u>Lifeway</u>	<u>Speak to the</u>		<u>actualization</u>
	Path	<u>Hierarchy</u>		(Hamon)
		Courage to		
		Listen to		
		Followers		

with them, and a great number of people believed and turned to the Lord.
(Acts 11:19–22, NIV)

Salvation was being preached to both Jews and Greeks and both were becoming believers! Stephen was the catalyst that ignited the spread and the results of many Jews and Greeks being saved! He was an agent of change, a courageous follower, and transformational leader.

Chapter Takeaways

Table 7.1 shows the results of the examination of the story of Stephen in Acts 6–8 and in the review of the literature. The underlined characteristics represent my assessment of Stephen's traits and his character.

Reflective Questions

1. Was Stephen a follower or a leader? Why?
2. If Stephen was an agent of change, what was Paul (formerly Saul)?
3. Was Saul convicted by what he saw done to Stephen?
4. We discussed Transcendent Actualization in Stephen when he sees Jesus standing at the right hand of God. Was this a perfect coming together of wills; Stephen's and God's?
5. What is the take-away from this study of Stephen and how might we apply it to our own lives?

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