



# Shepherd's Path

## A Shepherd's Personal Devotions

### The Early Church Series, Lesson 56

**Lesson Title:** The Winning Church

**Take Home Point:** Winning is giving your best for Jesus.

#### **Warm-Up:**

A friend of mine has a high school-age son who has taken piano lessons since he was very young. As is typical, it is usually difficult to get him to practice regularly. He recently asked his son if he wanted to continue taking lessons. In reply, the boy said, "I like to play piano; I just don't like what I have to go through to play it." But he did agree that what he considered an unpleasant ordeal was required for him to do his best. He recognized that was the way to reach fulfillment in the music he enjoyed. His perspective helped him to be faithful to practicing because of what was on the other side.

**Read:** Acts 6:8 – 8:3

#### **Observation (What happened?):**

What characteristics did Stephen demonstrate? What actions did he perform? What was the response?

What happened to Stephen for his faithfulness to the message of Jesus as God and Savior?

#### **Interpretation (What does it mean?):**

Why do you think some of the Jews stirred up the city against the believers?

What two words are used to describe what happened to Stephen as a result of being stoned? What does it tell you about God's perspective on death?

#### **Insight:**

Stephen was on the winning team, even though he paid a price in earthly terms. As the first Christian persecution began, many were injured or killed for their faithfulness to Christ. But the story doesn't always stop there. Consider those dragged off to prison by Saul. Do you suppose they had children or spouses left behind to fend for themselves? What happens to children of Christians killed for their faith today in Sudan, China, or Middle Eastern countries? Sometimes the cost of faithfulness is borne not just by the person directly involved but by those around them. In our faithfulness to God, we need to be prepared to accept the impact on others. But we can trust God with all of our sorrow, fear, pain and uncertainty for the future. He is big enough to handle it all.

#### **Application (What does it mean to me?):**

How do you respond when you encounter evil in response to the good you do in following Jesus? Has this ever happened to you?

Where in your life is God calling you to be faithful to him even though it may hurt you, and even hurt those around you, such as family members?