

October 18-22, 2021 Edition

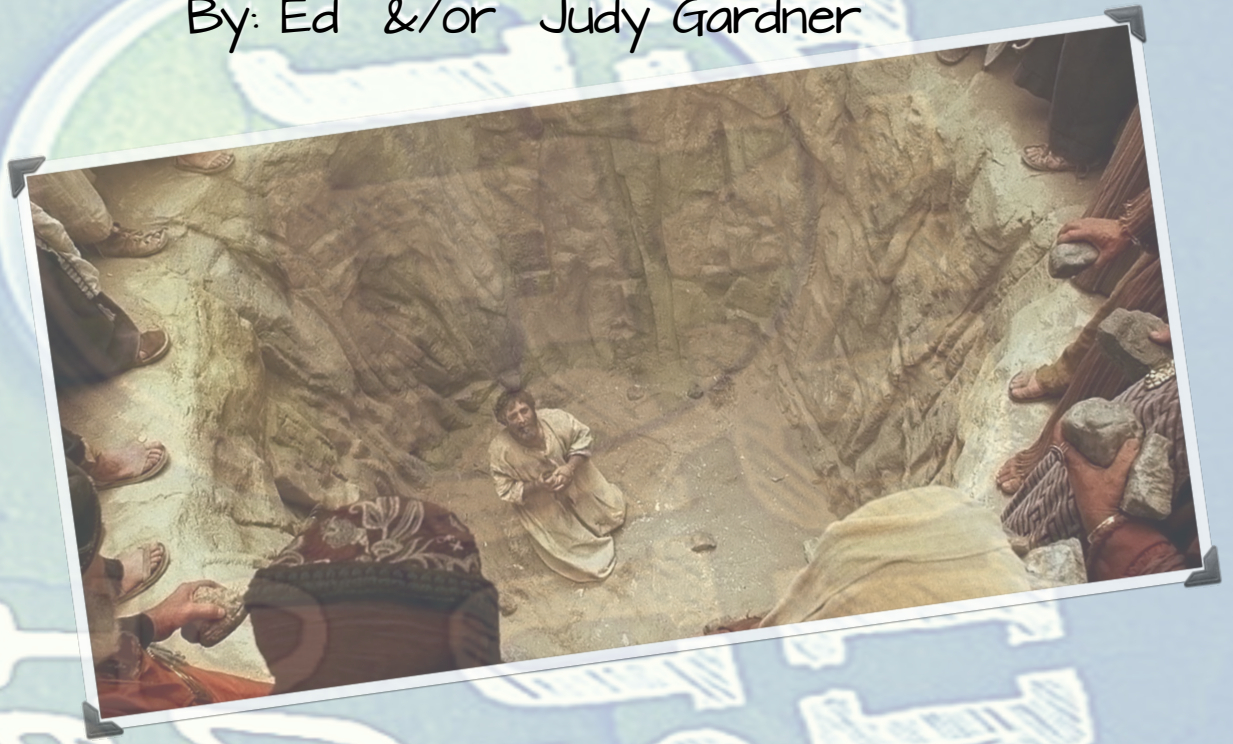
The "BIG Story" Of The Bible #74

The Gospel According To Moses #2.5

The First Christian Martyr

By: Ed &/or Judy Gardner

October 16/17, 2021



When you read the Bible ask yourself if there's anything you're reading where God is speaking to you personally... anything that you need to start applying in your own life. Then try to reflect on what you read... what you heard from God throughout the day and we know you'll be blessed.

*** These are EXTREMELY rough drafts so if you see typos... well yuo knew the rest ;0) These are essentially the ramblings of thoughts running through Ed or Judy's mind the week before Ed teaches a lesson on these concepts. They are pretty much how Ed gets ready for the weekends. They are not necessarily coherent so if they don't make much sense... sorry about that.

**** Also these devotionals are the product of both Judy & Ed's experiences and education. Figuring out which are from Judy and which are from Ed (sometimes both are contained in a single day) is half the fun.

You can also get these devotionals on Riverside's Facebook page (www.facebook.com/EagleRiverside). You don't have to have a FB account to read them but if you do have an account if you "like" the Riverside page and click the box to get updates the devos will show up on your wall every weekday (along with other news and event updates).

Monday Reflection: Today we are looking at the story of the very first person to be killed because of their faith in Jesus. His name was Stephen and he must have been an absolutely amazing person. He was a follower of Jesus. He was Jewish but he wasn't from Israel- he was one of the vast number of Jews who were scattered across the globe during the times of the Assyrian, Babylonian, Greek and eventually Roman empires. So to kind of set up what's going on let's look at something Jesus said during the Last Supper:

You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you. And you will be my witnesses, telling people about me everywhere. Acts 1:8 (NLT)

Now that little word, "witnesses" is an interesting one. The word Jesus uses is the word *marturia* (pronounced mar-too-ree-uh) and it was the Greek word for "witness". It's where we get the English word, martyr, from. Today that word means to give your life for your faith but it didn't until the Christian church came along. But once the church began and people started being hauled into court because of their faith in Jesus the word simply meant witness. The verb form of this word simply means to testify. But it soon became synonymous with dying for your testimony as Christians were killed by the hundreds, then thousands and eventually the tens of thousands. What gave them the courage to stand before their accusers? Jesus did- plain and simple:

I told you these things so that you can have peace in me. In this world you will have trouble, but be brave! I have defeated the world. John 16:33 (NCV)

He told them to be brave and they were brave. The same guys who ran like mice just a few weeks before when Jesus was arrested because they were afraid they'd be arrested next suddenly and inexplicably had become some of the most courageous people this world has ever seen. And it wasn't just the apostles who displayed this courage:

Stephen, a man full of God's grace and power, performed amazing miracles and signs among the people. But one day some men from the Synagogue of Freed Slaves, as it was called, started to debate with him. They were Jews from Cyrene, Alexandria, Cilicia, and the province of Asia. None of them could stand against the wisdom and the Spirit with which Stephen spoke. Acts 6:8-10 (NLT)

But it wasn't just the courage of the Christians that changed the world. Notice Stephen is described not just as somebody that was courageous and powerful. What else does Luke tell us about Stephen? He was full of "God's grace". It wasn't just the power and courage of the early Christians that got the attention of the rest of the world- it was also the grace with which they lived their lives and faced their deaths and how they treated their accusers. The apostles saw how Jesus stood before His accusers. They took it to heart and they told anyone who would listen about Jesus. About how He died but also about how He lived. They invited people to live like Jesus and if they must- to die like Him as well. And it turned out that it was in the "living like Jesus lived" that the first martyr found the power and courage to die like Jesus died. So let me give you the Ed's Notes on the story of Stephen:

Stephen was one of the men chosen to be the first deacons of the church. One of the main reasons Stephen was chosen was because he had a servants heart- he loved to be a blessing to other people (sound like anyone else we've been talking about for the last 10 months in this

studying of the story of the Bible?)- just like Jesus (ok... I gave it away... sorry about that). He was "full of grace" and because of that I would say he was also full of power. He could really preach (although we only have one recorded sermon of his but that one sermon is a doozie as we shall see). Because he is so effective at drawing people to Jesus he is arrested and hauled before the Sanhedrin to be tried for heresy. During his trial he is accused of two things: claiming the Temple was no longer needed and claiming the Law was no longer required. He basically affirms both charges against him which ignites the entire Sanhedrin against him. Why? Because the Sanhedrin was made up of the Sadducees and the Pharisees. The Sadducees were made up of the priests who controlled the Temple and claimed the way to God was through them. The Pharisees controlled the Law of Moses and they claimed to only way to God was through the Law and they were the official interpreters of God's Law. With one amazing sermon Stephen claims that Jesus has made the Temple obsolete because now our bodies have become the Temple of God and we connect with Him by asking Jesus to live within us. Then Stephen affirms the goodness of the Law but says that they were never able to follow it anyways. They couldn't follow it and neither could their forefathers.

Stephen finishes one of the greatest sermons ever preached by telling the Sanhedrin that they were responsible for murdering the Son of God and they lost their minds. They raged against him and as they did the Holy Spirit gave Stephen a vision of what was going on right that minute in Heaven- God seated on His throne and Jesus standing next to Him. I don't know if Stephen pointed hoping the members of the Sanhedrin could also see and be saved themselves or not but this was the last straw. They grabbed Stephen and dragged him outside of the city and threw him in a pit and threw huge stones at him until he was dead. But before he died he did one more thing.

He had lived his life the way Jesus lived His life. And now Stephen would do his best to die the way Jesus had died. He prayed that God would forgive those who had accused him and were now going to kill him. And in so doing we see Stephen illustrating something that the apostle Paul (who was there that day [not long before he would meet Jesus face to face and make a u-turn and become a follower of Jesus himself and change his name to Paul] organizing the whole thing and spurring on the killing of this man who followed Jesus) would write years later:

And all of us... can be mirrors that brightly reflect the glory of the Lord. And as the Spirit of the Lord works within us, we become more and more like him and reflect his glory even more. 2 Corinthians 3:17-18 (NLT)

I wonder now if Paul was remembering the glory of Jesus reflecting brightly off of Stephen even as he died? This week will be all about how Jesus' power to live with grace and power and to die the same way is unleashed in my life today. Want His power and blessing in your life? You can't separate His grace, power and blessing from His glory shining and reflecting off of our lives. It's like we say all the time around Riverside- God shares His power and His blessings with those of us who are actively developing the character of Jesus in our lives. You can't have one without the other. So what did the character of Jesus reflecting off of Stephen's life look like? Tomorrow...

Tuesday:

So accept each other just as Christ has accepted you; then God will be glorified.

Romans 15:7 (NLT)

Accept other believers who are weak in faith, and don't argue with them about what they think is right or wrong. Romans 14:1 (NLT)

Who are you to condemn someone else's servants? They are responsible to the Lord, so let him judge whether they are right or wrong. And with the Lord's help, they will do what is right and will receive his approval. Romans 14:4 (NLT)

Reflection: In the Old Testament, God frequently had to endure the complaint from His people, "Aw, come on, all the other nations are doing it!" Here He is, a loving and faithful parent, trying to teach His people how to live a blessed life. He fed them when they were hungry. He gave them holidays and events to celebrate. He provided rules and structures to protect the weak and build a blessed community. He instructed them to rest regularly to set an example to the other nations. He taught them to welcome foreigners who desired to join their community, but He also required that they not dilute their heritage by turning their backs on His laws and teachings for them. To join them, you had to become like them. In that way, the Jews had an exclusive role in the development of God's blessings to the human race.

Sadly, as seems to be the nature of us all, they didn't really appreciate their national heritage until they lost it and were enslaved and scattered throughout the other nations. Only then did they realize the consequences of living in societies who figured out their own rules, aside from the instructions of God. Only then did they see the true value in having a kingdom designed and ruled by God. It was at that point that they began to long for the Messiah who would restore them so they could once again be a blessed and powerful people.

But instead of behaving like the Messiah that they expected Him to be, Jesus constantly confounded them. He showed them an intimate picture of a God almost too good to be true - a Divine power that cares for everyone & everything, even the wildflowers and the little birdies. He spoke about even the marginalized and messed up being "homes" in which God wanted to take up residence. He fed and healed and taught, but not just His own people. He extended His attention into Samaria, beginning with a woman of questionable lifestyle. He healed the child of Roman Centurian. He taught the people of the 10 cities of the Decapolis (a region of 10 cities made up almost entirely of gentiles) and He fed them too. He lived His life as though there were a sandwich sign that He constantly wore that read:

"Everybody's Welcome"

The church that Jesus inspired and inhabited with His Spirit, was a community in which everyone was welcome. It was an all inclusive community. There were no exclusions based on culture, gender, social standing or religious upbringing. Was it easy? Heck no! Most of the letters of the New Testament were written to help people smooth out their differences and learn how to live out the "Everybody's Welcome" lifestyle that Jesus lived His life with.

Jesus' disciples learned what He already knew after spending 3 1/2 years with only a few dozen of them- diversity and inclusion make for one messy community! But Jesus wouldn't have us take the easy path of only welcoming those who know how to fit in. Learning how to serve and accommodate people who are "not our people" provides a depth in His kingdom that can't be accomplished in a friction free environment. It's almost as though Jesus' plan was that those who needed Him most would be welcome. And then those who needed Him most would act as a grain of sand inside of an oyster creating the beautiful pearl that is only created through irritation and friction. I don't know if you've noticed this or not but people can be a really good source of irritation and friction. No... I'm not talking about you! How could you ever be a source of irritation and friction... it must be other people, right?

Nope... it's you too. And me. And my wife Judy (although if you tell her I said that I might have to break one of the ten commandments and lie about it... she terrifies me! ;o) We all need to realize just how important that sign, "Everybody's Welcome" is for ourselves individually. Jesus welcomed us wholeheartedly, unreservedly. He didn't make us wait until we were cleaned up to join His community. After all- it's His community that gives us the push we need to keep moving forward into His image in our lives. That process does not happen in a vacuum.

So how are you doing at welcoming people? Would the people in your life say that the sign, "Everybody's Welcome" is one that you are doing a pretty good job of living up to in your life? And if not... why not ask Jesus to help you with that one. He spent 3 1/2 years training His disciples to really understand that one. He'll spend as long as He needs to for you & me to get good at it as well.

Prayer: Father, thank You that I am welcome in Your family. Forgive me for the times I've lived my life exclusively rather than inclusively. I want to learn how to live my life by the sign that everybody is welcome. Show me how to do that. In Jesus' Name, amen.

Wednesday:

Make allowance for each other's faults, and forgive anyone who offends you. Remember, the Lord forgave you, so you must forgive others. Colossians 3:13 (NLT)

Reflection: Did you know there were three places in the New Testament where the Bible says, "Jesus did this for you, now you need to do this for each other"? We looked at one of them yesterday from Romans 15:7 where the Bible says, "So accept each other just as Christ has accepted you; then God will be glorified."

Today we're going to look at another of those amazing statements that pretty much describe how Jesus lived His life and therefore describe how we are to live our life as followers of Him. And I'll just warn you right now, it's not going to be easy to swallow. Well, from one perspective it will be very easy to hear but from another very difficult. Are you ready? Here it is:

Make allowance for each other's faults, and forgive anyone who offends you. Remember, the Lord forgave you, so you must forgive others. Colossians 3:13 (NLT)

We love it when Jesus forgives us. It's one of my favorite things about Jesus. But when He turns that around and says, "ok, Ed... now you need to forgive the people who have hurt

you" well then things get kind of sticky in my mind. But if there's one thing I've learned in my life it's that Jesus' community (the church) is supposed to live this way towards the world. If everywhere Jesus went it was thought there was a metaphorical sign hanging around His neck that deals with acceptance that said, "Everybody's Welcome" then we need to look again and recognize there's a second metaphorical sign hanging around His neck that deals with forgiveness. That sign says:

"Nobody's Perfect"

Aren't you glad that's one of the signs of Jesus' life and community? Doesn't that make you breathe a sigh of relief? Forgiveness is one of the things Jesus dealt with most while He was training His disciples to carry on His legacy on this earth by creating a community that called itself by His Name- I haven't done the research but I would imagine forgiveness is only second to humility when it comes to subjects Jesus has to keep returning to over and over with those guys (and good thing too because I don't know about you but both of those are a HUGE problem for me too!). Maybe the most striking place that He explains just how important it is that we forgive is found in the Lord's Prayer. If you've ever memorized it and recited it in church or at meetings you may or may not attend on a regular basis then maybe the seriousness of it has been lost to you. I know it had been on me. Have you ever known something so well and done it so much that you don't really think about it when you do it anymore? I have to be careful that I don't do that with listening to my wife... because most of the time I'm so practiced at it I can get away with it but there are times when "yes dear... mmmm hmmmm... and how did that make you feel?" doesn't cut it.

Anyways, I'll never forget one time reciting the Lord's Prayer. I was in cruise control and wasn't really thinking about it. Instead I was thinking about how irritated I was with another person that was sitting in the same room with me. I thought they had wronged me and I was holding on to it. Here's how I remember that moment:

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. (look at that guy... just praying along like nothing's the matter...) Your Kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. (... yeah right! If God's Kingdom were to come right now you'd be in pretty sad shape buddy...) Give us today our daily bread, (I know what I'd like to give to that guy...) and forgive us of our sins, JUST AS we forgive those who sin against us...

And at that point I was suddenly taken off of cruise control. I felt like I could clearly hear God say to me-right after I prayed that He would forgive my sins JUST AS I forgive others who sin against me- "are you sure you want to pray that part of the prayer right now, Ed? Are you sure you want Me to forgive you the same way you are currently forgiving that guy sitting across from you? I can do that for you but I'm not sure you'd like the results..."

"Ummmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmm.... no thank You, Lord. I'd really rather be forgiven if it's all the same to You." But it isn't, is it? I mean all the same to God. Our forgiveness from Him is directly linked to our forgiveness of others. That doesn't mean you have to be perfect at immediate and total forgiveness to such an extent that it no longer impacts the way you feel. God can deal with amateurs who are failing miserably at their feeble attempts to forgive. What God cannot work with is someone who says, "I will NEVER

forgive that person..." But God can/does/will absolutely work wonders with a person who says, "Lord, I have no idea how I'm ever going to forgive that person... I am struggling with these feelings, Lord... help me learn what it means to let go and forgive." God will do miracles in the life of a person who prays prayers like that.

In fact, forgiveness isn't what the Hallmark channel has taught us it is. Forgiveness isn't immediately going back to the way things were before you were hurt or wronged. In fact, just because you forgive someone does not mean you have to put yourself in the position to be hurt by them again. But it does mean you give up your right to get even with them. You give up your demand that justice be done and you leave that department to God. He is the only One Who can judge fairly because He sees what's on our hearts at any given moment.

So how you doing with this one? Nobody's perfect, huh? Boy you can say that again! And some of us are less perfect than others... and when they're imperfect with me sometimes it leads me to being imperfect in the way I deal with them- I guess it's a good thing this is one of the signs of Jesus' community ;o)

Prayer: Father, I want to learn to forgive. Please teach me how to let go. Please show me how to forgive. I know I am not perfect and I'd really like to have the unforgiveness in life making me even more imperfect- help me Lord. In Jesus' Name, amen.

Thursday:

So now I am giving you a new commandment: Love each other. Just as I have loved you, you should love each other. Your love for one another will prove to the world that you are my disciples. John 13:34-35 (NLT)

Reflection: (I've shared this story fairly recently but this is from an old devotional I did a few years ago where I tell that story from a different perspective to make a different point so it's ok if you skip the story if you already know everything that's going to happen in it ;o) Ok... so the first two signs that defined how Jesus lived His life and that are to be a description for Jesus' community here on earth (you know... the church?) are, "Everybody's Welcome" and "Nobody's Perfect". There's one more sign that truly describes the way Jesus treated every human being He encountered-

"Anything's Possible"

What Jesus' friends realized after a while was that when people were allowed to bask in the spiritual glow of those first two signs then the third sign became a true reality. What they noticed was that when people were accepted unconditionally right where they were and forgiven for whatever wreckage they had left in their past then anything was truly possible. With that kind of climate to live in you can't give up on anyone.

If you've been around Riverside long you've probably heard this story but it is a window into how this whole thing works. When I took over at Riverside in January of 2000 I didn't know

what I was doing (I know... I still don't but now I'm at peace with that and I was terrified by it back then) so I leaned on a pretty amazing group of people to help me navigate our little group into the kind of community Jesus had planned for us. We were a group of professional, life time Christians and that's the kind of church we knew how to be. But we felt like God was asking us to try an experiment- be a group of people and the kind of church where the folks who needed the love, acceptance and forgiveness of Jesus more than anyone else would feel welcomed... and not just welcomed but would feel like they belonged. So we decided we'd accept and forgive ANYONE God sent through our doors.

The first test of that decision came very soon- a family who had almost no background in church joined us. They were recovering addicts and had always gotten their spiritual sustenance from AA meetings but as their little girls grew up they started to realize that an AA meeting was not necessarily the best place for a five year old. So they decided they would find a church to belong to. They told me they had a system in place where they would go to a different church each month of the year. They would attend each church for a month and then decide after the year which one fit them best. They had already gone to two and let me know neither one were really contenders for them.

And they were weird... they were rough but the mom of the family (I'll call her Barb) was also very "spiritual" and very leery of "church people". I didn't know where they would end up fitting in but we loved them the best we could from the very beginning and at the end of the second week they told me they had made their decision... they weren't going to visit any more churches- they would make Riverside their home. I was SO excited! They were not only the first people to join our church since I had taken over- they were our first visitors so our retention rate was pretty high back then ;o)

They constantly tested our commitment to this strange way of doing church but also made us feel like we were on the right track. She told us about her spiritual journey one night during midweek Bible study. She was an addict and had gone to AA to recover her life. They told her she had to pick a "higher power" but she told them she didn't believe in God. They basically told her to make one up because the program wouldn't work without a higher power.

She left the meeting and saw a huge tree and thought, " that tree is bigger than me. It's been here longer than me... I'll make that tree my higher power." And she did. She prayed to the tree and over time she said that as her prayers started to be answered in ways she couldn't deny she started to realize there was a personal force behind the tree- something or someone that had made the tree and had made her too. She thought of this "someone" as God but was totally against the God of the Bible because of experiences she had growing up with people who claimed to speak for Him. I'll never forget when she told our group, "the whole "God thing" saved my life so we figured... why not give the "Jesus thing" a try?"

I held my breath... what would our little group of professional Christians think of that? Before anyone could say anything I said, "well the "Jesus thing" didn't just save me... He transformed my life in ways I never thought would be possible... I think He's going to do the same for you if you let Him." and the study went on without any hiccups. A few weeks later we had a guest speaker. He preached on baptism and when he was done I got up and told our

people that if anyone had any questions I'd be around til everyone else was gone to just ask me. I prayed and before I could get off the stage the dad from our little family (I'll call him, Ralph) said, "I've got a question!" So I said, "what is it?" and he said, "why should I get baptized?"

Ed- "Well... you should."

Ralph- "Ok... let's do it!"

Ed- "What... now? But the waters not heated up!"

Ralph- "I don't mind if you don't!"

So while our little group of churchy people gathered around Ralph and Barb I worked on getting the cover off the baptistry and scooping the dead spiders off the top of the water. I went back as asked if they were ready to get baptized and Ralph said, "HELL YES!"

Again I held my breath to see how our group would react. To my absolute delight and pleasure they all laughed out loud and in we went. We got in the water at it was FREEZING! But they both got in with me and Ralph went first. I asked him, "Ralph, do you believe Jesus is the Son of God and your Savior?" He didn't even hesitate... he said yes. Then I asked him if he was willing to follow Jesus for the rest of his life and he said yes again and so I dunked him under the ice cold water. Then his wife stepped up.

I asked her the same question- "Barb, do you believe Jesus is the Son of God and your Savior?" and there was this long..... pause.

Remember- she hadn't been sure about the whole "Jesus thing". Suddenly I realized I hadn't walked through this process with them before hand. I started praying like I've never prayed before, "please Lord... You've gotta save me here... what's going to happen if she says no?" It's not like I stopped what I was doing to pray that prayer- you'd be amazed at how much prayer can happen in the midst of a situation when nobody but God knows you're even praying. I was getting worried as I looked at her and wondered what was going on in that head of hers when suddenly her entire countenance changed (yes... I know "countenance" is an archaic word but I couldn't think of a better one to describe what happened). She almost seemed to glow as she looked up at me and smiled and said, "yes... I do believe Jesus is the Son of God and my Savior... and I am willing to follow Him for the rest of my life!" She almost looked mystified that she actually believed that.

I silently promised Jesus my first born and anything else He'd ever want from me and before she could say anything else I blurted out, "then I baptize you in the Name of the Father, the Son & the Holy Spirit" and I dunked her too.

And the entire church (all 35 of us) bursted out in applause and shouts.

It. Was. Awesome!

I. Was. Hooked!

I have never seen such a change come over someone in such a short amount of time and it never would have happened in a tiny little group of churchy, life long Christians who had no idea what we were doing or what we had gotten ourselves into hadn't been willing to put these three signs out in front of the church (metaphorically speaking of course)-

"Everybody's Welcome, Nobody's Perfect & Anything's Possible." We have witnessed the power of God working through those three concepts over and over again but it's still not always easy to live out those values, but it's worth it. It's like nothing else I've ever experienced and don't know any other way of doing church anymore. It's a wild ride. It can be confusing and frustrating and scary and then exhilarating and exciting and awesome and then frustrating and confusing and scary again. But is it this environment that changes the world- and I've seen it change one human being at a time. So how about it? Are you willing to be part of a community that is trying their best (and sometimes failing miserably) to create the kind of atmosphere of belonging that Jesus cultivated while He was on this earth? It's not easy, but you will never be the same if you make this your goal in life.

Prayer: Father, open my eyes to focus on the good things in other people instead of the negative that can come from the same values and personality traits. Help me accept others the same way You accepted me. In Jesus Name, amen.

Friday Reflection: What does this have to do with Stephen and the first Christian martyr? Well, the reason he was able to die like Jesus did was because he had been living like Jesus did. He had been patterning his life after Jesus' and living his life as though he was wearing these three signs around his neck: Everybody's Welcome, Nobody's Perfect & Anything's Possible. He was one of the people who saw that a voiceless group of Christians were being overlooked. He was looking out for the powerless... just like Jesus did. He also spoke up for Jesus whenever Jesus asked him to. Even when speaking up for Jesus might be dangerous. Jesus' power flowed through Stephen's life because Stephen had patterned his life after Jesus' life.

And when Stephen was hauled into court and accused Stephen could stand before his accusers with poise and confidence. Why? Because he knew something that we often forget- even when everyone else is pointing at us and screaming guilty, unworthy, undeserving we know better. We know that the verdict in the only court that matters is not-guilty, loved, valued. Jesus even gives Stephen this vision just before he was killed by the people accusing him:

He said, "Look! I see heaven open and the Son of Man standing at God's right side." They rushed at him and dragged him out of the city and began to stone him. His accusers took off their coats and laid them at the feet of a young man named Saul. As they stoned him, Stephen prayed, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." He fell to his knees, shouting, "Lord, don't charge them with this sin!" And with that, he died. Acts 7:56-60 (NLT)

Two things- first Jesus is **STANDING** next to the Father's Throne in Heaven. And the fact that Jesus is standing up in this vision that Stephen is given is very strange. Just about every other time that Jesus is described in Heaven He is seated on the right hand of the Father. But here He is standing. Why? Because when Stephen needed Him the most Jesus wasn't just sitting by watching. Jesus was standing pleading for Stephen before His Father's Throne. Not pleading that God would save Stephen- Jesus could have done that if it was in His plan. But pleading for Stephen's eternal destiny. And not even just that.

Jesus said at one point in the gospel that if we would stand up for Him before people then He promised He would stand up for us before His Father. And here is Stephen- standing up for Jesus with courage and grace and he is just about to be killed and what does he look up and see? Stephen sees that as he's been standing up for Jesus before this kangaroo court on earth, Jesus has been standing up for Stephen in the only court that ultimately and truly matters. And it gives Stephen everything he needs to face whatever kangaroo verdict the earthly court hands down because he knows that whatever they say about him, they're wrong.

And so Stephen can look upon even his killers and apply the three signs he had dedicated his life to- everybody's welcome, nobody's perfect and anything's possible. He asks God to forgive them and he dies with the same kind of grace and power that he had been living his life with. How would you handle the same kind of moment? How would I? Something to think about I guess- how will you handle your death. But of FAR greater importance is this question: how will you handle your life? How will you handle your today? Because no matter how much energy you and I put into planning out how we will respond on the day Jesus calls us home none of that will matter much if we haven't spent our todays planning out how we will respond to how people treat us and how we will ultimately treat them.

You want God's power in your life? Then start reflecting the glory of Jesus. How? By living life the way He lived it. You won't be perfect at it at first. Heck, you'll never become perfect at it. But like the apostle Paul tells us in 2 Corinthians Jesus' glory will grow in you more and more as you practice patterning your life after His more and more as your life goes along. So remember: Everybody's Welcome, Nobody's Perfect & Anything's Possible. It's true for you and also for every human you will come across today.