



WEEK 3: The Church—it's not a popularity contest!

1. STEPHEN the Martyr (Acts 6:8—8:3)

- Probably a Hellenistic Jew (Greek name)
- Probably became a believer at or just after Pentecost
- One of the seven “deacons” (Acts 6:5)
- **What was he like?** (Acts 6:3, 5, 8)
 - “of good reputation,” “full of the Spirit,” “full of ... wisdom,” “a man full of faith,” “a man full of ... the Holy Spirit,” “full of grace,” “full of ... power”
 - “performing great wonders and signs among the people”
 - “[Jews] unable to cope with the wisdom and the Spirit with which he was speaking”
- **What did he do?**
 - Served others (Acts 6:1-3; cf. Mark 10:45a; John 13:4-5)
 - Had powerful public ministry (Acts 6:8)
 - Preached the message of Jesus (Acts 7:2-53)
 - Was put on trial, persecuted (Acts 6:9—7:1; 7:54-58)
 - Early death (Acts 7:59-8:3), final words (Luke 23:46/Acts 7:59, Luke 23:34/Acts 7:60)
- **In Summary...**
 - Stephen exemplified **CHRIST-LIKENESS!**
 - Like Stephen, we must strive to become like Christ in all ways.
 - Like Stephen, we must trust in God with humility, especially when we don't understand.

2. PHILIP the Evangelist (8:4-40)

- Hellenistic Jew
- Might have become a believer at or after Pentecost
- One of the Seven “deacons”
- **What was he like?**
 - “of good reputation,” “full of the Spirit,” “full of ... wisdom”
- **What did he do?**
 - Served widows in the Church (6:3-6)
 - Evangelized Samaritans in Samaria (8:4-25)
 - Evangelized an Ethiopian Eunuch on the road to Gaza (8:26-39)

- Traveled to and settled in Caesarea (8:40; 21:8-9, also 10-14)

– **In Summary...**

- Philip exemplified **READINESS TO OBEY!**
- Like Philip, we need to be just as responsive to the Holy Spirit when he “spurs” us along.
- Like Philip, we need to trust God for the results.

3. SAUL the Pharisee (9:1-30; cf. 22:3-16; 26:2-18)

- Jew of the tribe of Benjamin (Acts 22:3, Phil 3:5; etc.)
- Born in Tarsus of Cilicia (Acts 22:3; 21:39; etc.)
- Roman citizen (Acts 22:25-29)
- Brought up in Jerusalem (Acts 22:3; 26:4)
- Pharisee (Acts 26:5; etc.)
- Student of Gamaliel (Acts 22:3; cf. 5:34-39)
- Promising future as a Pharisee (Gal 1:13-14)

– **What was he like?**

- “lived as a Pharisee according to the strictest sect of our religion [Judaism]” (Acts 26:5)
- “zealous for God” (Acts 22:3)
- “extremely zealous for my ancestral traditions” (Gal 1:14)
- “as to zeal, a persecutor of the church” (Phil 3:6)
- “as to the righteousness which is in the Law, found blameless” (Phil 3:6)

– **What did he do?**

- Persecuted the Church by pursuing, imprisoning, torturing, and murdering Christians (Acts 7:58; 8:1-4; 9:1-2, 21; 22:4-5, 19-20; 26:9-11; cf. Gal 1:13-14, 23-24; 1 Tim 1:13)
- Conversion on the road to Damascus (circa A.D. 33; Acts 9:3-19; 22:6-11)
- In Wilderness of Arabia (Gal 1:17; perhaps between Acts 9:22 and 9:23)
- In Jerusalem (Acts 9:26-30; cf. Gal 1:18; helped by Barnabas, Acts 9:27)
- Sent to Tarsus of Cilicia (Acts 9:30; cf. Gal 1:21)
- At least fourteen years “off the grid” (A.D. 33-47; Gal 2:1)
- At least three missionary journeys (A.D. 47-67)
- Persecuted for Christ and His Church (Acts 9:20-29; cf. 2 Cor 11:23-33)
- Beheaded by Nero (circa A.D. 67; cf. 2 Tim 4:6)

– **In Summary...**

- Saul exemplified **BROKENNESS!** (see Phil 3:6-11)
- Like Saul, we sometimes must be humbled before we can truly serve God.

APPLICATION:

- *Who became effective servants and leaders in the Early Church?*
- *Who are we looking for to serve and lead in the Church today? Who are we overlooking?*
- God uses the humble and the humbled. Must be **Christ-like, ready to obey, and broken.**



WEEK 3: The Church—it's not a popularity contest!

When he came to Jerusalem, he was trying to associate with his disciples; but they were all afraid of him, not believing that he was a disciple. – Acts 9:26 NASB

Remember childhood kickball games? The cool kids always got to be the team captains. Then, everyone stood together in a line as the captains assessed the field and strategically decided who to pick for their teams. The first kids to get picked were always the super-athletic guys who seemed to have started puberty in the third grade. After all the athletic kids were evenly distributed, the captains turned to their social circle and began grabbing up friends and cohorts. If it was up to the kids, the choosing would end there, prematurely. However, according to the universal laws of kickball, all eligible candidates must be assigned to a team. So the last phase in picking became a sort of who's-less-likely-to-screw-up-our-imminent-victory approach. Bummer for the small, pale, sickly kid with two left feet! Thank God that's not how He runs His Church! He certainly gets to decide who to use and how to use them. Even so, assuming you were chosen by God, it wasn't because of your impressive qualities. So if you were the kid who always got picked first, take some advice: humble yourself! And if you were that puny kid that always got picked last, then take heart... God wants you on His team! And He didn't pick you to ride the bench as some sort of spiritual water boy. But don't worry! He's not expecting you to do something great. He wants to do something great in and through you. His intention is to use humble-hearted men to do great and mighty deeds in utter dependence on Him so that He gets the glory.

- WHAT DO THE SCRIPTURES SAY?
Acts 6:8—9:31
 - Stephen the Martyr (6:8-8:3)
 - Philip the Evangelist (8:4-40)
 - Saul the Persecutor (9:1-30)
 - *Summary* (9:31)

