

FLYING CLOSER TO THE FLAME

STUDY SIX

Draw Me Nearer . . . Nearer

Selected Scriptures

Since the Holy Spirit searches all things, He can give us insight that transcends human abilities and learning. It's the exciting part of walking with Him.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

IN the previous *Searching the Scriptures* study, we saw Paul flying closer to the flame when he relied *completely* “on the power of the Holy Spirit” in his ministry in Corinth (1 Corinthians 2:1–2). He modeled how the Spirit reveals to us God’s wisdom and guides us—sometimes in surprising ways—as we depend on Him.

From Paul, we turn our attention to Stephen. In the account of Stephen’s ministry and martyrdom in Acts 6–7, we see the dynamics of the Spirit at work in a uniquely powerful way.

Let’s follow Stephen’s footsteps to the bloodstained street where he made his final stand before he was cut down by a stone-throwing mob. Interestingly, Paul himself was present at the scene, when he went by the name Saul. Although young Saul didn’t realize it then, he had a front-row seat to see the fullness of the Spirit on display in Stephen . . . and the beginnings of a new era in God’s plan for His people.

**PREPARE YOUR HEART**

As you prepare for this *Searching the Scriptures* study, pause and ask the Lord to help you see His Spirit in ways you may have never seen Him before.



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TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

Stephen's name first appears in the New Testament in a list of men selected to manage food distribution to widows in the church. Stephen heads the list, and by his name, a special note states that he was "a man *full of faith and the Holy Spirit*" (Acts 6:5, emphasis added).

"Full of the Spirit" is the same as filled with the Spirit, and, as we've learned in our studies, it means to be fully dependent on and controlled by the Spirit who empowers us from within. All believers are *indwelt* by the Spirit, for our bodies are temples "of the Holy Spirit" (1 Corinthians 6:19). But not all believers yield themselves to the Spirit's control and, therefore, are not *empowered* by the Spirit like Stephen was. Let's see how Stephen presented the Spirit's fullness in his bold witness for Christ.



Observation: The Spirit's Dynamic in Stephen's Life

In the observation phase of *Searching the Scriptures*, we look for people, places, and events—each of which are key elements in the biblical narrative.

Stephen's Spirit-Filled Ministry—Acts 6:8–10

Stephen is the central figure in Acts 6:8–7:59. How was he described, and what was he doing, according to *Acts 6:8*?



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Who are the next characters in the account, according to [Acts 6:9](#)? Where were these Jewish men from? Locate these places on a [Bible map](#) or Bible atlas. What do you observe about Jerusalem's proximity to these regions?

What was it about Stephen in [6:10](#) that these men could not stand against?

The accusers did not have strength enough to stand against Stephen. Under the control of the Spirit, he was unintimidated by his critics. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



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Stephen’s Spirit-Filled Demeanor—Acts 6:11–7:1

The men were not just opposing Stephen but also God, just as they had opposed God when they put Jesus on trial. In the chart below, note the parallels between Stephen’s trial before the Jewish court and Jesus’ trial before the same court only months earlier.

Verse	Stephen	Verse	Jesus
<i>Acts 6:11</i>		<i>Matthew 26:59</i>	
<i>Acts 6:12</i>		<i>Matthew 26:57</i>	
<i>Acts 6:13–14</i>		<i>Mark 14:57–58</i>	
<i>Acts 7:1</i>		<i>Mark 14:60</i>	

Like His Savior, Stephen endured an unjust trial before a corrupt court. How did the Spirit present Himself through Stephen in *Acts 6:15*? What did Stephen’s outward appearance communicate about his inner being?

Bold as a lion, confident in God, under the full control of the Spirit, Stephen moved through the waters of resistance without getting off course. The Spirit’s filling was obvious.

—Pastor Chuck Swindoll



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Stephen's Spirit-Filled Message—Acts 7:2–53

In response to the false accusations, Stephen delivered an eloquent defense of Jesus as the promised Messiah and heralded a new era in God's plan in which the Holy Spirit indwelled believers. Read Stephen's sermon in [Acts 7:2–53](#) and fill in the blanks below.

In his sermon, Stephen traced God's faithfulness to Israel, beginning with God's covenant with _____ ([Acts 7:2–19](#)).

Through Moses, God brought the Israelites out of slavery in Egypt and promised a future deliverer, a _____ like Moses ([7:37](#)).

Despite God's blessing, the people rebelled by _____ ([7:39–40](#)).

Even so, God remained faithful, filling the tabernacle and then the temple with His presence ([7:46–47](#)). However, "temples made by human hands" cannot contain our God who rules over heaven and earth ([7:48–50](#)). The Spirit's coming at Pentecost represented an aspect of God's redemptive plan kept hidden in ages past but revealed through Christ. How did Stephen boldly conclude his sermon, according to [7:51–53](#)?

Stephen had unintimidated confidence as he came to the point in his sermon about the religious leaders' guilt in the death of Christ, and they couldn't stand it!

—Pastor Chuck Swindoll



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Stephen's Spirit-Filled Death—Acts 7:54–60

What events occurred in *Acts 7:54–60*? How did the religious leaders' actions prove Stephen's indictment against them was true and they were the guilty ones?

What qualities did Stephen display in his final moments? What did the Spirit allow Stephen to see because he was "full of the Holy Spirit" (*Acts 7:55*)?

How did Stephen's death parallel the death of Jesus (*Luke 23:34, 46*)?

Stephen was filled by the Holy Spirit, who gave him supernatural ability to deliver a message against men holding stones to kill him. And then, at the time of his stoning, Stephen was able to see the living God and pronounced words of praise and forgiveness. Is that part of the filling? I think so! —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



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Interpretation: The Spirit's Ministry at Death's Door

What truths about the filling of the Holy Spirit can we draw from Stephen's example? For starters, Stephen's calm and confident demeanor could only have come from the Spirit (Acts 6:10). What truth can you gather from this aspect of the Spirit's ministry in Stephen?

When Stephen was dying, God gave Spirit-filled Stephen a glimpse of his Savior who stood just on the other side of death's door. What truth do you glean from Stephen's example about the Spirit's tender ministry to believers nearing death?

Finally, we can't miss the parallels between Stephen and Jesus in their final hours. What truth do you see in Stephen's example regarding our likeness with Christ as part of the filling of the Spirit?



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Stephen's *confidence* through persecution, *insight* into Scriptures, *foresight* of heaven, and *intimacy* with Jesus were beautiful outcomes of flying closer to the flame. It's all possible because of our "anointing" with the Spirit that John wrote about in 1 John 2.



Correlation: The Anointing of the Spirit

What did John say about God's anointing in *1 John 2:20*? Note the ways the New Living Translation and the New American Standard Bible translate this verse.

How did John explain the anointing in *2:26–27*?

Anointing refers to the Father giving the Spirit to live within believers (1 John 2:27). Just as Old Testament priests were anointed once, so also were we anointed once by God when we placed our faith in Christ. The anointing of the Spirit provides an inner awareness of God's nearness to you and an inner compass that directs your path—a kind of spiritual knowledge Stephen possessed that the Jewish leaders lacked.



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Application: Don't Be Afraid to Draw Near

Stephen's example urges us to draw near to the Spirit and to rely on His strength in crisis. Pastor Chuck adds this encouragement:

Come nearer . . . don't be afraid to fly closer to the flame. It can revolutionize your prayer life, your daily witness, your own struggling, timid self-image, and for sure your confidence in God. It can give you strength and tranquility in the midst of sickness, even Stephen-like assurance in the face of death.¹

Have you been reluctant to draw near to the Holy Spirit, perhaps for fear of what He might do if you handed Him control? What fears may have kept you at a distance?

In the quote above, Pastor Chuck mentioned a list of ways the Spirit can minister to us. Which of these ways do you most long for?



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Right now, draw near to the Spirit in a prayer of dependence. Invite Him to be the strength you need today. Write your prayer here.

When we seek a lifestyle of flying closer to the flame, the Spirit may lead us in ways we don't expect and to places where we must stand alone against great opposition. But don't be afraid, for in the moment of testing, He will fill you with a sense of absolute confidence and unusual courage that comes to those who walk in the fullness of the Spirit.



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, remove from me the fear of releasing control to Your Spirit. Take me a step beyond my comfort zone on my journey of discovery about the Spirit to trust His wisdom and to depend on His power. Give me the quiet, calm confidence of Stephen before his enemies and even in the face of the ultimate enemy, death. Someday, I will see Your Son, Jesus, and feel His embrace welcoming me home. In His name, amen.

ENDNOTE

1. Charles R. Swindoll, *Flying Closer to the Flame* (Dallas: Word, 1993), 126.

