

Note: this week's devotional is not day-based, but activity-based. So, tackle what you feel called to tackle and we'll be kicking off a new series next Sunday!

Explaining the Truth about Jesus

In the message, we touched on the need to be able to explain the truth about Jesus. This is crucial for your own formation as the person Christ is forming you to be each day. It is also crucial for your witness to Christ's love in the corner of the world you inhabit: your household, family, friends, neighbors, co-workers, classmates, etc. It doesn't need to be a sales pitch and you aren't responsible for convincing or converting people – that is the Holy Spirit's job – but you need to be able to use your God-given abilities to explain the truth about Jesus.

The number one thing you can do is practice. Practice for real. You are encouraged to visualize what you would say and practice in your head, but there is no substitute for actually doing it. You can visualize your golf swing all day and visualizing is tremendously powerful. But you'll improve a lot faster by actually swinging a club. Who can you practice with – in-person, over the phone? Identify how you will practice.

Pretend someone has asked you, "What do you believe about Jesus?" No one might ever ask you in so many words, but it is a great question. Work on developing an answer that will make sense to them. Write it down. Read it to yourself. How much mumbo jumbo is in there? Strive to make it clearer and clearer.

Test what you say against 1 Peter 3:15-16: ¹⁵ ...but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect, ¹⁶ having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame. Is what you are saying gentle, respectful, and leaves you with a good conscience?

Pray for opportunities to explain Jesus. The Holy Spirit will use every risk you take to support you and form you into being more like Jesus. What God could do at Cooks Creek if we all took care to be able to explain the truth of Jesus!

One of the overarching impressions one gets from how Luke writes Acts 6:8-8:3 is how much Stephen's last days parallel the last days of Jesus. Stephen is also depicted as full of grace and power who has inspired words. Stephen has great stature and standing in the community. Jesus was sacrificed for our salvation. Stephen is the first martyr of the Church.

Spend some time studying the events and scriptures in this list developed by biblical scholar Ben Witherington on the parallels of the last days of Jesus and Stephen:

1. Trial before high priest/Sanhedrin: Mark 14:53, Acts 6:12 and 7:1
2. False witness: Mark 14:56-57, Matthew 26:60-61, Acts 6:13
3. Testimony concerning the destruction of the temple: Mark 14:58, Matthew 26:61, Acts 6:14
4. Temple "made with hands": Mark 14:58, Acts 7:48
5. Son of Man saying: Mark 14:62, Acts 7:56
6. Charge of blasphemy: Mark 14:64, Matthew 26:65, Acts 6:11
7. High priest's question: Mark 14:61, Matthew 26:63, Acts 7:1
8. Committal of spirit: Luke 23:46, Acts 7:59
9. Cry out with a loud voice: Mark 15:34, Matthew 27:46, Mark 15:37, Acts 7:60
10. Intercession for enemies: Luke 23:34, Acts 7:60

How does the life and witness of Stephen inform and inspire you?