

Read: Acts 6:1-9, 7:2a, 51-60

Things Aren't Always as They Seem

Acts 7:55-56

But Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, looked up to heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. "Look," he said, "I see heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God."

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

The runner was taking her sweet time. She wasn't winning the race. She was right in the middle of the pack. But the rest of the runners didn't know that she was saving her energy for the end of the race. With one lap to go, she used that energy to blast past all the other runners and win easily. To those who didn't know her style of running, it appeared that she was losing for most of the race. It seemed like she didn't stand a chance of winning. But she knew what she was doing. The whole time, she really was winning. Things are not always as they seem.

Stephen wasn't afraid to share the gospel. That made some people so mad that they wanted him dead. Angry people dragged Stephen out into the streets where they picked up stones to throw at him and kill him. It looked like Stephen was losing. But things are not always as they seem.

Even while Stephen was facing his final minutes on earth, he knew that he had already won. Why? Because "the Son of Man [is] standing at the right hand of God." Jesus, the Good Shepherd, had given his life for Stephen and Stephen, trusting in Jesus as his Savior, had the victory of heaven waiting for him. No matter what people did to him, he was victorious. He had life in heaven because Jesus already won for him!

Sometimes we may not feel very victorious. Maybe it seems like we are losing one race after another. Maybe we give into temptation and take our eyes off our Savior. Maybe the challenges of life make us feel like we're losing and we'll never catch up. But things are not always as they seem. No matter what happens on this side of heaven, no matter what challenges we face, no matter how much guilt we carry, Jesus, our Good Shepherd, has still won the victory for us. Through faith in him, heaven is still our home. Let us hold onto our Good Shepherd to the very end, until the day that we are standing side by side with him in the mansions of heaven.

The questions below are to help families discuss this devotion. The questions are divided by age group as suggestions, but anyone could reflect on any of the questions as they desire.

Questions for Younger Children

- Why did the people want Stephen to die?
- How could Stephen be sure that he would be in heaven? How can you be sure that you'll be in heaven?

Questions for Elementary Age Children

- What are you looking forward to most about heaven?
- How is Stephen a wonderful example of faith for us?

Questions for Middle School and Above

- Name one challenge and one blessing of staying faithful to God.
- Stephen was the first Christian martyr. The word martyr means “witness” but usually refers to someone who was killed for their faith. How was Stephen a faithful martyr or witness even when he died?

Closing Prayer:

Heavenly Father, keep us faithful to you no matter what. Give us the faith to cling to you in the good times and the bad, confident that we will be in heaven with you forever. Amen.

Hymn: CW 342:2 – I Am Jesus’ Little Lamb

Day by day, at home, away,
Jesus is my staff and stay.
When I hunger, Jesus feeds me,
Into pleasant pastures leads me;
When I thirst, he bids me go
Where the quiet waters flow.