

TEXT: Acts 7:55,56

THEME: STEPHEN TEACHES US...

1. To Be Full
2. To Sleep

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." (Acts 7:55,56) NIV84

Dear Christian Friends:

This time of year, we may find ourselves at a confirmation or graduation party. At such parties, my favorite thing is to eye up the dessert table first, since we don't have desserts at my house. One dessert soon leads to two, then three, and so on. I end up leaving many a party with these words on my tongue or represented by my waistline—"I'm full!"

STEPHEN TEACHES US TO BE FULL

Today Stephen teaches us what it means to be spiritually full. Our text says Stephen was "**full of the Holy Spirit.**" This means Stephen was specially suited by the Spirit to help with the work of the church. In Acts, chapter 6, the disciples were told, "**Brothers, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom**" (v3). They were to be servants chosen for special service. Stephen and company were recognized as spiritual and practical men known to have a good supply of sanctified common sense. These men stood in contrast to the Sanhedrin who filled themselves with pride in their own good works and not the good word that pointed people to Christ.

What do we fill ourselves up with? The world likes to urge on us the sweets of sinful pride. The devil likes to fill our egos with what we have accomplished and to forget totally about God's hand in blessing us. This was one of his first temptations to Eve and he still gets it to work today. Sadly, this "**I can be like God**" thinking gives us a spiritual bellyache. It also makes us overweight with the guilt of our sin.

For us to be spiritually full, it's necessary that we fill ourselves up with the Holy Spirit. After all, he is in us. After encouraging the Corinthians not to be full of sexual immorality, Paul encouraged them: "**Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body**" (1 Co 6:19).

We are God's precious children. We become filled with his Spirit when we hear and learn his Word. This sweet message of sins forgiven is 100% calorie free and gives us the best weight loss of all time—complete forgiveness of sins and the loss of heavy guilt. This is one message with which we can never get full enough.

STEPHEN TEACHES US TO SLEEP

Diet and exercise seem to be the secret to permanent weight control. However, another factor is how much sleep you get. The amount of sleep you need depends on various factors. One of these factors is age. Infants need 9-10 hours of sleep plus 3 or more hours of naps. The same is said for toddlers. School-aged children and teenagers need a total of 10 to 11 hours. And for many adults, 7-8 hours of beauty rest is just what the doctor ordered.

After a good night's rest or even a quick power nap, we can feel refreshed and rejuvenated. Suddenly the stresses and problems that were once bothering us do not seem so bad.

I have always loved how the story of Stephen ends. **While they were stoning him, Stephen prayed, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." When he had said this, he fell asleep" (Acts 7:59,60).** Dr. Luke, who saw his fair share of disease and death, could have ended this story with a much more detailed medical description of what really happened to Stephen. Instead, this doctor calls death what it really is—sleep. Jesus also referred to death as a sleep in Mark 5:39 at the home of Jairus when he said, **"Why all this commotion and wailing? The child is not dead but asleep."** The people hearing Jesus say that laughed at him. But it was Jesus who had the last laugh when he raised Jairus' daughter from the dead, and then later proved that death was but a sleep when he himself rose from the dead on Easter morning.

Death is never a happy time. There are many tears. It is okay to cry; after all, Jesus himself wept at the funeral of his friend Lazarus. However, what makes our mourning different from nonbelievers' is that we are not saying good-bye to our Christian loved ones, but in fact acknowledge that we will see them again. They too are not dead, but asleep.

Just as a quick nap or a good night of rest refreshes our bodies, the same will be true when we close our eyes and breathe out our last breath. We will be awakened and refreshed by the Son-light of him who conquered death. With Jesus, death is never the end but instead is simply a new beginning of eternal life with him. So sleep securely, knowing heaven is your home. Amen.

PRAYER OF THE CHURCH

Dear heavenly Father, on this day we pause with our country to think of our own mother and the mothers among us. For bandaged knees and kissed-away tears, for books read and songs sung, for the smells of home and meals made with care, for hugs and listening and unconditional love...thank you, Lord, for our mother and the mothers among us. We ask you to take care of the woman who cared for us. Give her health and happiness, but most of all, give her faith in you so that one day we can enjoy together the blessed joys of heaven. If you have already called her home to you, let us remember her lovingly, rejoice at her victory with you, and not mourn for her as those do who have no hope.

Dear Father in heaven, we ask you to go with Rachel Fawcett's mother tomorrow as she undergoes knee replacement surgery, with Cindy Schlosser tomorrow as she has a heart cath, and with Bonnie Spaulding as she undergoes hip replacement surgery this Thursday. Guide the surgeons' hands so that their work may be done skillfully and quickly. As the Great Physician grant that these sisters in faith may put all their trust in you and that they have no fear. Receive them as your forgiven children and bring them safely through their procedures and surgeries. In the name and for the sake of Jesus Christ, our Savior we ask all this. Amen.