



LIFE GROUP CURRICULUM

WHATEVER IT TAKES
for the gospel

COTTONWOOD CREEK CHURCH

Lesson 4: Whatever It Takes To Be Faithful

Main Passage: Acts 6:8–7:60

Focus Verses: Acts 6:8–9a

Now Stephen, a man full of God's grace and power, performed great wonders and signs among the people.⁹ Opposition arose, however...

Big Idea: We will always face opposition to the world as believers in Jesus.

In Acts 6–7, Acts records the story of the earliest recorded Christian martyr, Stephen. His testimony is a reminder that we are called to remain faithful to God no matter the circumstances that come our way. This is hard, but if we want to be the kind of people who have a whatever it takes mentality, then we must explore our call to faithfulness.

What Does It Mean To Be Faithful?

Know the OPPOSITION

Acts 6:8, *Now Stephen, a man full of God's grace and power, performed great wonders and signs among the people. ⁹ Opposition arose, however, from members of the Synagogue of the Freedmen (as it was called)—Jews of Cyrene and Alexandria as well as the provinces of Cilicia and Asia—who began to argue with Stephen.... ¹¹ Then they secretly persuaded some men to say, "We have heard Stephen speak blasphemous words against Moses and against God." ¹² So they stirred up the people and the elders and the teachers of the law. They seized Stephen and brought him before the Sanhedrin. ¹³ They produced false witnesses, who testified, "This fellow never stops speaking against this holy place and against the law. ¹⁴ For we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and change the customs Moses handed down to us." ¹⁵ All who were sitting in the Sanhedrin looked intently at Stephen, and they saw that his face was like the face of an angel.*

In this passage we are introduced to Stephen and quickly we see there were people who opposed him in a variety of ways: they persuaded others against him; they lied about his teachings; they incited opposition; they produced false witnesses; and they misrepresented and twisted his words. Yet Stephen stood his ground and did not waiver.

There is no doubt we live in a world that is growing increasingly hostile to the Gospel. The world will bring a variety of lies against us, but don't be surprised by this opposition. Jesus says "Everyone will hate you because of me" (Luke 21:17). If you want to stay faithful, you must realize that the enemy is looking to oppose you.

Discussion Questions:

- What forms of opposition do we face today?
- Do you ever find yourself being concerned that you are not experiencing enough persecution in your life? Why or why not?

- What is the difference between being “filled and controlled by the Spirit” or acting on your own?

Believe God Is GREATER

Acts 6:10, *But they could not stand up against the wisdom the Spirit gave him as he spoke.*

The world will always have their lies and their false testimonies, but we will always have our God who is Truth and who is greater than all of the opposition. The enemy can’t stand up against the work of the Spirit in and through us. In part, this verse is a call to work and operate in the Spirit and cultivate a relationship with God through His Spirit. Additionally, the verse is affirming the power of the Spirit from Acts 1, that as we go God is faithful to back us up.

Many people say, “I can’t share my faith because I don’t have all the answers.” The truth is that no one has all the answers to everything other than God Himself! But God promises to empower you and give you wisdom that can stand up against the world.

Discussion Questions:

- How do the promises of Scripture help to prepare, comfort and encourage us in the midst of persecution?
- How does this verse help to encourage Christians who may be hesitant about speaking up because they are afraid of being asked questions that they will be unable to answer?

Hold To the TRUTH

Acts 7:51, *“You stiff-necked people! Your hearts and ears are still uncircumcised. You are just like your ancestors: You always resist the Holy Spirit! ⁵² Was there ever a prophet your ancestors did not persecute? They even killed those who predicted the coming of the Righteous One. And now you have betrayed and murdered him— ⁵³ you who have received the law that was given through angels but have not obeyed it.”*

Though this section seems harsh, the surrounding context offers one of the greatest single messages concerning the continuity and truthfulness of all the Scriptures. In his message, Stephen lovingly and unswervingly presents that they need Jesus to be saved. Without Jesus, they are stiff-necked (see Exodus 32) and stuck in their sin.

The Christian truth will stand in contrast to the world’s truth and people will reject it because they are stuck in their sin. But we are called to hold to the Truth of the Gospel and live it out in love.

Discussion Questions:

- How do we hold on to the Truth in a “truth is relative” culture?
- Can you share an example of when someone has spoken (or failed to speak!) the “truth in love” (Ephesians 4:15)? What did you learn from the experience?

Embrace SUFFERING

Acts 7:54, *When the members of the Sanhedrin heard this, they were furious and gnashed their teeth at him.⁵⁵ 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.⁵⁶ “Look,” he said, “I see heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.”⁵⁷ At this they covered their ears and, yelling at the top of their voices, they all rushed at him,⁵⁸ dragged him out of the city and began to stone him. Meanwhile, the witnesses laid their coats at the feet of a young man named Saul.⁵⁹ While they were stoning him, Stephen prayed, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.”*

As Stephen faithfully held to the truth in the face of opposition, it cost him his earthly life. But he understood that his call to die was greater than compromising or turning from his Jesus. All over the Gospels Jesus tells His disciples to count the cost of discipleship. We should embrace those moments of opposition and “praise God for being counted worthy to suffer for the sake of the Gospel.” Embracing suffering doesn’t mean we walk naively or that it won’t hurt. But it does mean that we see our call to follow Jesus is greater than anything that we may lose in the process. Embrace what you may lose in the Gospel for you have gained everything in Jesus.

Discussion Questions:

- How did Stephen’s focus on the Lord enable him to maintain his witness, even to the point of death?
- How do you think you would fare if faced with similar circumstances? Why?

Walk in LOVE AND GRACE

Acts 7:60, *Then he fell on his knees and cried out, “Lord, do not hold this sin against them.” When he had said this, he fell asleep.*

Stephen is facing those who are throwing large rocks with every intent to kill him, and he prays that the Lord would forgive them. Stephen models the grace He was given. As we face the opposition, we are called to model Jesus’ love and forgiveness as we walk in love and grace. Every apostle suffered for their faith, and the Church was built on their faithfulness. Jesus is better than worldly sorrow. We are called to do whatever it takes to remain faithful, no matter the cost.

Discussion Questions:

- What does it look like to have Stephen’s attitude in the midst of suffering and persecution?
- What does a “Whatever It Takes” attitude look like in our faithfulness, even in the midst of persecution?

Lesson 4 Additional Commentary (Acts 6:8–7:1; 7:51–8:1a)⁴

Stephen's Arrest and Trial (6:8–7:1)

The narrative about Stephen constitutes a major turning point in Acts. It ends a series of three trials before the Sanhedrin. The first ended in a warning (4:21), the second in a flogging (5:40), and Stephen's in his death. The Stephen episode is the culmination in the witness to the Jews of Jerusalem, which has been the major subject of Acts 2–5. To this point a growing opposition toward the Christians from the Jewish leaders had been thwarted by the favor of the people toward the young movement. Then the picture changed. The people joined in the resistance to Stephen. With the death of Stephen and the dispersal of his fellow Hellenists, the focus would no longer be on Jerusalem but on Samaria and all of Palestine and, finally, with Paul on the further reaches of the Roman Empire. Stephen is thus a key figure in the narrative of the wider Christian mission, and the lengthy treatment of his martyrdom is no coincidence. The account begins with his arrest and trial (6:8–7:1). There follows a lengthy speech of Stephen (7:2–53), which, though set in the context of his defense before the Sanhedrin, was more a critique of his contemporary fellow Jews than a defense. As a result, he was stoned to death by his enraged audience (7:54–8:1a). Stephen thus set the scene for Philip's work in Samaria.

(1) Stephen's Debate with the Hellenist Synagogue (6:8–10)

6:8–10 Luke began by telling us that Stephen was “full of God's grace and power.” We have been well prepared for this. As one of the seven he met the qualification of being filled with the Spirit and wisdom (v. 3) and was personally described as full of faith and the Holy Spirit (v. 5). Faith, wisdom, grace, power, and above all the presence of the Spirit were the personal qualities that equipped him for the ultimate witness he would soon bear. The Spirit and power are closely linked and led him to perform signs and wonders among the people. He was the first other than the apostles to be described as working miracles. He quite naturally witnessed in the synagogue of his fellow Greek-speaking Jews. Luke named it the Synagogue of the Freedmen, which indicates that many of its members formerly may have been slaves or were the descendants of former slaves. Its membership included Jews from the north African and Asian Diaspora. There is ample literary and inscriptional evidence for Cyrenian Jews settling in Jerusalem, and the rabbinic writings mention an Alexandrian synagogue in Jerusalem. Paul himself was a Cilician Jew who had come to live in Jerusalem, and it was Asian Jews who later would accuse him of having violated the temple (Acts 21:27f.). In fact, Paul himself may have attended this synagogue, and it may be there where he debated his fellow Greek-speaking Jews after becoming a Christian (Acts 9:29). In any event, they were unable to refute Stephen. He was too filled with the Spirit and wisdom (cf. v. 3).

(2) The Frame-Up (6:11–12)

6:11–12 Unable to resist Stephen's persuasive power and his logic, the Hellenist Jews resorted to underhanded methods. They “hatched a frame-up.” The Greek word (*hypoballō*) is really stronger than the NIV's “secretly persuaded,” usually implying that one “puts someone else up”

⁴ John B. Polhill, *Acts*, vol. 26, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992), 205–210.

something, giving them the words to say. In this case the words were to the effect that Stephen had spoken blasphemy against Moses and against God. This charge reappeared in slightly different terms when Stephen was taken before the Sanhedrin. This time the opposition was more formidable. The scandalous charges were spread all over town—Stephen, the blasphemer. This time the populace was moved against Stephen, the first time in Acts they came into active opposition against the Christians. Likewise, the elders of Jerusalem and the scribes became alarmed. The former represented the Sadducees, the latter the Pharisees. Both had their representatives on the Sanhedrin. The stage was set. Stephen was arrested and taken to the Sanhedrin.

It may come as something of a surprise that the Diaspora Jews were so incensed at Stephen. As Hellenistic Jews, would they not have been more tolerant, more receptive of his new ideas, less nationalistic? No, the evidence is that exactly the opposite was the case. The Jews who came from the Diaspora were usually highly nationalistic Jews, having left their homes in the dispersion to migrate to the holy city, the temple city. They were highly zealous for both law and temple. B. Reicke, with considerable justification, labels them “Zionists.” They would not at all have been open to Stephen’s prophetic critique of their religion and worship. They were wrong in their charge of blasphemy, but blind zealotism is incapable of taking even the most constructive critique.

(3) The Trial (6:13–7:1)

6:13–14 Before the Sanhedrin the plotters presented the charges against Stephen. He is described as speaking “against this holy place” and “against the law.” These are really the same as the original charges of blasphemy against Moses and against God made in v. 11. Moses was identified in their minds with the receipt of the law at Sinai and its transmission in the Pentateuch. To speak against Moses was thus to attack the law itself. “This holy place” was the temple, which was considered by contemporary Jews as the dwelling place of God, containing his very presence in the holy of holies. To attack the temple was seen as a direct affront to God himself. The charges are given a third time in v. 14, this time in a more polemical form: Stephen was accused of saying that Jesus would destroy the temple and change the customs handed down by Moses. This time the charges were more threatening, not just blasphemy but destruction of the temple, alteration of the law. In the background to v. 14 stands the charge of blasphemy directed against Jesus at his own trial when he was accused of threatening to destroy the temple (Mark 14:57–58). Luke did not include that tradition in the narrative of Jesus’ trial in his Gospel, but its inclusion here is highly significant. It put Jesus back on trial once again. Stephen had only been faithful in his witness to the teaching of Jesus. To reject the testimony of Stephen was ultimately to reject Jesus. That is what his trial was all about. The violent rejection of Stephen represented a rejection of Jesus the Messiah. Ultimately it was not Stephen but the Sanhedrin on trial that day.

6:15–7:1 All attention then turned to Stephen to see how he would respond to the charges. What they saw was a visage transfigured, a face like that of an angel. It is a picture of the martyr inspired by the heavenly vision, filled with the Spirit and empowered for fearless testimony before his accusers. As presiding officer in the Sanhedrin, the high priest followed the proper protocol and allowed the accused to respond to the charges—“Are these charges true?” “How do you plead, guilty or innocent?” (author’s translation).

The Rejection of the Messiah (7:51–53)

7:51–53 The final portion of Stephen’s speech could be described in classical rhetorical terms as the “peroration,” where the speaker applies the lessons learned from the previous material in his speech in a direct, frequently emotional appeal to his hearers to act. The aim was to secure their awareness of their own culpability in these matters and motivate them to take remedial action. It is an ancient form of argumentation found in both Greek rhetoric and Hebrew prophecy. The function of the peroration of Stephen’s speech was not simply to malign his Jewish audience. In Christian terms his ultimate goal was their remedial action, their repentance.

The polemical nature of these verses is immediately evident in Stephen’s switch from first to second person. Before now, Stephen had included himself in his references to the Jews. It was always “our fathers” (cf. vv. 19, 38, 39, 44). Now it was “your fathers.” It was no longer a question of Jewish history with which Stephen identified but a direct personal appeal to his hearers. Using the language of the prophets, he accused them of being “stiff-necked . . . , with uncircumcised hearts and ears,” always resisting the Holy Spirit (v. 51). His entire historical sketch has illustrated this point, the consistent pattern on Israel’s part of rejecting its leaders. Stephen, who was “filled with the Spirit” (6:3, 5), had already experienced their resistance (6:10). He would experience it in this instance as well (7:55–58). He reminded them of how they had always resisted and even killed their prophets—the very ones who in the Spirit spoke the words of the Lord. More significantly these very prophets were the ones who predicted the coming of the Messiah (cf. 3:18, 24). Stephen referred to the Messiah as the “Righteous One,” a term already employed by Peter in his temple sermon (3:14). Indeed, the linkages between the two sermons are even closer still, for Peter likewise accused his Jewish hearers of having betrayed and murdered the Righteous One (3:14–15).

The whole purpose of Stephen’s speech now becomes clear. His historical survey had illustrated Israel’s constant rejection of God’s chosen leaders. Moses, Joseph, the prophets are all types of and pointers to Christ; and Stephen pointed out to his hearers that they had already rejected and killed him. Is this a final condemnation? One is reminded of Peter’s temple sermon with all its resemblances to this portion of Stephen’s speech. For Peter it was not a final condemnation, but the door remained open to repent and receive the Christ at his second coming (3:19–21). Stephen already had shown how deliverance came for Israel on their second encounters with Joseph and Moses. Was there not an implicit second chance offered to his hearers here? Was Stephen making an appeal for them to take the needed remedial steps to their apostasy and repent?

Summary. It has often been stated that Stephen’s speech does not address the charge that had been leveled against him, that of blasphemy against the temple and the law. Already we have seen that Stephen gave considerable attention to the temple charge. In effect, he turned back that charge on his accusers. They were the guilty parties in turning the temple into an object for human manipulation and distorting its true purpose of prayer and worship. He did virtually the same with the charge of blasphemy against the law. In his speech he never once criticized the law. He gave only positive treatment of its provisions, such as circumcision (v. 8), and described it as “living words” (v. 38). No, it was not he but his Jewish accusers who were the real lawbreakers (v. 53). They were the apostates and idolaters who had constantly transgressed the first Commandments.

Overall one gets the impression that Stephen realized his defense was a lost cause from the start. He would never secure his acquittal without compromising his convictions. He determined to use the situation as one last opportunity to share those convictions, one last chance to appeal to his Jewish contemporaries to abandon their pattern of rejection and accept the Messiah God had sent them. This is why Luke made constant reference to his being filled with the Spirit (cf. Luke

21:12–15). It took courage and inspiration to do what he did. Ultimately his speech was not a defense at all but a witness.

4. Stephen's Martyrdom (7:54–8:1a)

7:54–55 Whether Stephen intended to give a direct appeal for his hearers to repent we will never know, for they abruptly broke him off. They were absolutely livid at Stephen's placing them on trial. Luke described their rage in terms of their being "cut to the heart" (*dieprionto*, cf. 5:33) and "grinding their teeth" (cf. Ps 35:16). Stephen's response to their rage certainly did nothing to assuage it. Looking into heaven, he had the beatific vision; he beheld the glory of the heavenly throne room and Jesus standing at God's right hand (v. 55).

7:56 Having first given this vision in narrative form, Luke underlined its importance by repeating it in direct discourse, as Stephen shared the experience with the infuriated Sanhedrin: "I see heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God." Jesus had spoken similar words at his own appearance before the Sanhedrin (Luke 22:69), and what had been a prediction on his part became a reality for Stephen. Jesus is indeed now risen and exalted to his position of authority at God's right hand. The vision confirmed Stephen's testimony. His messianic claims for Jesus were verified in his vision of the exalted Son of Man. Significantly, Stephen referred to him as "the Son of Man," not simply as "Jesus," as in the narrative of v. 55. This is the only instance in the New Testament where the term is spoken by another than Jesus himself. Even more striking is the reference to his standing. Generally the reference is to his being seated at God's right hand, as in Luke 22:69. Scholarly opinion differs about the significance of the uncharacteristic standing position in Stephen's speech. Some see no significance other than a variation in expression. Others see it as a reference to Christ having risen from his seat to welcome the martyr Stephen.

The view with the most far-reaching implications, however, is that Stephen's vision links up with the original Son of Man vision in Dan 7:13–14, where the Son of Man is depicted as standing before the Ancient of Days. The primary role of the Danielic Son of Man was that of judgment, and the New Testament consistently depicts Christ in this role of eschatological judge (cf. Matt 25:31–46). The standing position may thus depict the exalted Christ in his role of judge. If so, Stephen's vision not only confirmed his testimony, but it showed Christ rising to render judgment on his accusers. They, not he, were the guilty parties. In Dan 7:14 the Son of Man was given dominion over "all peoples, nations, and men of every language." If this is a further implication of Stephen's Son of Man vision, it ties in well with his understanding of God as not being bound to one nation or people. It is a vision of the boundless reign of Christ, which was soon to begin with the Samaritan mission of Stephen's fellow Hellenist Philip.

7:57–59 One can understand the furious response in the Sanhedrin at Stephen's testimony to his vision (v. 57). If he indeed had such a vision, they stood condemned. There was only one conclusion they could draw. Stephen was lying, claiming to have a vision of God. It was blasphemy! They put their fingers in their ears to shut out his words lest God come and consume them for listening to such blasphemy (v. 57). Screaming, they descended violently on him, threw him outside the city gates, and began to stone him. There was a certain irony in their action. Out of concern for the sanctity of the city, they performed their unholy deed outside its bounds. It has often been debated whether Stephen was "lynched" or condemned by formal verdict of the Sanhedrin, for which stoning was one of the chief manners of execution. In favor of the latter is the fact that Stephen was on trial before the Sanhedrin and was killed by stoning. Luke's account, however, gives more the picture of mob action. There is also the question of whether the Sanhedrin

had the legal right to carry out capital sentences during the Roman period. The evidence seems to indicate that they did not (cf. John 18:31). Also the picture of Stephen's stoning does not fit what is known of Jewish execution by stoning. According to the Mishna, *Sanhedrin* 6:1–6, stoning took place outside the city and the actual stoning was done by those who had witnessed against the condemned person.

These details fit the present scene, but they are about all that does. In formal stonings victims were stripped and pushed over a cliff ten- to twelve-feet high. They were then rolled over on their chests, and the first witness pushed a boulder (as large a stone as he could manage) from the cliff above. In the unlikely event the victim survived this first smashing, the second witness was to roll a second boulder from above. The picture of Stephen's stoning is radically different. He was not stripped. The witnesses stripped, evidently to give them greater freedom for throwing. It is doubtful Stephen could have knelt or uttered prayers after being pounded by a huge boulder from ten feet above. The picture in Acts is of an angry mob pelting Stephen with stones. His death was not instantaneous as was the case with Jewish executions. Whether the Sanhedrin participated in Stephen's "lynching" is another question. A later incident when Paul faced the Sanhedrin shows that body was not beyond forsaking decorum when sufficiently aroused (23:10).

7:59–60 Stephen died as only one who was "full of the Holy Spirit" could (v. 55). He seems to have consciously followed the pattern of his Master as he faced his own death. His last words, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit," echoed those Jesus prayed from the cross. This was the same basic commitment of his life to his Lord that Jesus made to the Father in his own dying moments (Luke 23:46). There is a certain trusting innocence in these dying words of Stephen and of Jesus. The words are an ancient Jewish prayer, based on Ps 31:5, which children were taught to pray at bedtime. "Lord, do not hold this sin against them" reminds us of Jesus' prayer for the forgiveness of those who crucified him (Luke 23:34). And so Stephen "fell asleep," perhaps in fulfillment of his prayer in v. 59. The early Christians often used the concept of "sleep" for death, a confession of their assurance of resurrection. No one ever died with greater assurance than Stephen. He fell asleep with the vision of his risen Lord at God's right hand still fresh on his mind.

8:1a So ends the witness of Stephen. But there was another there that day whose story was just beginning. Luke introduced Saul for the first time at the stoning of Stephen. He was the young man who watched over the garments of the witnesses as they stoned Stephen (v. 58). There is no indication that Paul himself actually lifted a stone, but he was in total agreement with the action (8:1). Paul likely had a deeper involvement with the whole incident than appears in these brief references. He was himself a Greek-speaking Jew, a Cilician, who perhaps had argued with Stephen in the Hellenist synagogue in Jerusalem (6:9f.) We would like to know if he heard the speech. If he did, it would be eloquent testimony that Stephen's words did not fall only on deaf ears; for ultimately no one carried out more fully the implications of Stephen's words than did Paul. The incident of Stephen's martyrdom in any event surely had a profound effect as Paul himself later attested (Acts 22:20).

Lesson 4 -Whatever It Takes To Be Faithful – Missionary Story

John and Betty Stam

(John: January 18, 1907 – December 8, 1934)

(Betty: February 22, 1906 – December 8, 1934)

When you look at the lives of John and Betty Stam one cannot help but believe that they were born to a life of faithful service to the Lord. John was the seventh child of a Christian couple in Paterson, New Jersey, who had a heart for missions. They founded the Star of Hope Mission where large evangelistic meetings were held and the Gospel faithfully proclaimed to all who came to listen. Many young people including John Stam who served in ministry at the mission went on to serve God both in the United States as well as in countries around the globe.

Betty was born in Albion, Michigan, to a couple preparing to go to China as missionaries. When she was six months old, she and her parents sailed to China for her parents to begin their work of evangelism and Bible Teaching. Betty grew up in China and returned to the U.S. to attend college.

Both young people were from similar yet different backgrounds and grew to become committed Christians, seeking God's will for their lives no matter the cost. Each of them committed their lives to serving God in China independent of the other. They met at Moody Bible Institute in Chicago when they attended prayer meetings on campus specifically to pray for the work of the China Inland Mission (CIM). This was the beginning of a lengthy friendship that ultimately blossomed into a deep love for one another.

Betty was approved as a missionary by the China Inland Mission and departed for China in the fall of 1931. John was not approved by the CIM until July 1, 1932 and sailed for China September 24, 1932. He arrived in Shanghai, China on October 12 ready to begin his ministry. Little did he know that Betty was also in Shanghai and soon they would be reunited. John and Betty were married on October 25, 1933, at the mission compound in Tsinan where Betty's parents served. After a two-week honeymoon in Tsingtao, Betty's childhood home, they traveled up the Yangtze river to Wuhu and then to Suancheng where they would base their missionary work.

The great opposition they knew they would face in China as Gospel missionaries was an accepted fact for each of them; yet they also believed that God was greater than any opposition they might face. During the years prior to their arrival in the country, there was great political unrest as the Chinese Civil War was moving across the country. The Chinese Communist movement was known to kill Christians and especially foreign Christian missionaries. As single missionaries they had both faced great danger from bandits, rebel soldiers, and Communist soldiers. John wrote to his parents, "And so we can praise God that for us everything is well. If we should go on before, it is only the quicker to enjoy the bliss of the Savior's presence, then soon to be released from the fight against sin and Satan. Meanwhile, we can continue to praise Him from whom all blessings flow."

They eagerly settled into their home in Suancheng, and were quickly immersed in the ministry, holding Bible studies, leading children's meetings and doing one-on-one evangelism and discipleship training. In addition, they each continued their language studies to be more proficient in the language. By January of 1934, they were traveling into the countryside to do evangelism and meet with faithful bands of believers while maintaining the work at Suancheng.

In July of 1934, they were asked to return to Wuhu to look over the duties of the CIM's local secretary at the CIM office so that the secretary and his wife could take a much needed two-month rest. While the office duties were not what John enjoyed doing, he was glad to be in Wuhu because Betty was pregnant and there was a good hospital to care for her when she delivered their child. Helen Priscilla Stam was

born on September 11, 1934. John and Betty were ecstatic to have this little one join their family and to be returning to their work of evangelism and church building.

They were planning to go to an area in southern Anhwei, instead of returning to Suancheng. Even though rumors continued of increasing unrest and trouble in this area, the district magistrate of that area assured John and a fellow missionary that there was no danger of Communists in the area. He went on to tell them that they could move to the area immediately and that he would guarantee their safety. It was with that assurance from the district magistrate that the CIM officials gave permission for the Stams and the other missionary family to move to southern Anhwei.

The Stam family set out for their new home in Southern Anhwei on November 22, 1934, and held their first Church service on Sunday, November 25th. On that Sunday, the service was attended by the missionaries, their household servants, a carrier they hired, two unbelievers from the community and one young girl from the immediate neighborhood. The next Sunday it was only the missionaries and their household servants who attended the service. Things were changing quickly in the area and not for good.

On December 6, 1934, 2,000 Communist soldiers (known as Red soldiers) attacked and quickly overpowered the city. Within hours there were 6,000 Red soldiers in their area. The city was overtaken, three city officials were killed, the town was ransacked with the soldiers looting and taking food, money and anything of value. The soldiers went on to kill 14 of the city's leaders, and captured John, Betty and little Helen. The soldiers talked openly in front of John and Betty of killing the baby. However, an anonymous onlooker objected to them killing the baby. Instead, the soldiers killed the onlooker.

The Stams and other captives were forced to march 12 miles over mountain roads by their captors to the city of Miaosheo with John carrying the baby on his back. Part of the way, Betty was allowed to ride a horse that the soldiers confiscated. Once they reached Miaosheo, the Stams were left in the oversight of the local postmaster who turned out to be sympathetic to them. John was able to write a quick note to the CIM officials in Shanghai informing them that he and his family had been taken captive by the Communist soldiers. He asked the postmaster to make sure his letter was delivered. That evening, the Stams were taken to a deserted home for the night where John was tied to a pole standing up. Betty was left without restraints so that she could care for the baby. The soldiers guarded the house to ensure that the Stams did not escape.

Early the next morning, the soldiers seized John and Betty leaving baby Helen behind. Just before the soldiers came into the house early in the morning, Betty had wrapped the sleeping baby tightly in a blanket, hiding two \$5.00 bills in the baby's clothing and prayed that Helen would be protected. Within hours, first John and then Betty met the enemy's sword and found themselves immediately in God's presence.

Chinese believers who fled to the mountains to hide from the soldiers slowly returned to the town of Miaosheo, which by now was deserted by the Communist soldiers who had moved on to other towns. A Chinese evangelist named Lo learned of the death of the Stams and together with a handful of believers rescued the bodies. An elderly woman told Evangelist Lo that there had also been a foreign baby with them and led him to the house where the Stams had spent the night. Evangelist Lo entered the home and heard baby Helen crying. He rescued her and, together with a believer named Mrs. Wang, her son and three others, held a burial service for John and Betty Stam. The local citizens gathered to watch this burial and then Evangelist Lo preached a Gospel message to them.

Because rumors were flying that the Communist army was going to return to Miaosheo, Evangelist Lo and his wife took the baby and fled to Shanghai. Along the way they found local village women to nurse

the baby until they could deliver her to one of the CIM missionaries in Shanghai. The baby was ultimately reunited with Betty's parents.

There were many memorial services to honor John and Betty Stam's lives and ministry, including services at Moody Bible Institute in Chicago, and at Wilson College (Betty's alma mater) in Chambersburg, Pennsylvania. Following the memorial service at Moody more than 700 students from Moody and another 200 from Wheaton College committed their lives to missionary service.

It can be said of John and Betty Stam that they were faithful, they knew the opposition, they held to the truth of God, they embraced suffering and even in death they walked in love and grace.

**John and Betty Stam did whatever it took to be faithful,
even giving their lives to spread the Gospel message around the world.**