

Opener

What would your ideal house or home be like? Where would it be situated?

Worship

We are going to meditate together upon the fact that we have a heavenly home. Slowly read the following passages, allowing plenty of time for reflection between them:

John 14:1-4

Philippians 3:20-21

1 Peter 1:3-5

Revelation 21:1-27

Take a few minutes to praise God for what He has prepared for us...

Bible Study

Read Acts 6:8 – 6:15 and discuss together:

- What, specifically, were the charges that were levelled at Stephen?

Read Acts 7:1 – 53 and make a list of the major points of Stephen's speech

- Why do you think he picked these specific incidents from Israel's history to talk about?
- In what ways does his speech answer the accusations he faced?
- What are the accusations that Stephen makes towards the Jewish religious leaders?
- It has been suggested that God somehow changed his colours between the Old and New Testaments – that his character and dealings with men appear gentler and more loving in the New Testament. What light does this passage throw onto the continuity, or otherwise, between the Old Testament story and that of the New?
- One of the lessons that the Sanhedrin needed to learn was that God's presence and activity were not restricted to the temple. Do we ever fall into the same trap of assuming that God is inactive outside his church? Where else do you see God at work?

Read Acts 7:54 – 8:1

- What parallels do you see between the death of Stephen and the death of Jesus?
- The example of Stephen is both awe-inspiring and a little discomfiting. Who wouldn't hope that, were we ever called upon to suffer for the Lord, we would face our tormentors with the same courage and faith as did he, and yet I suspect that most of us fear that we might not. Was Stephen an unusually courageous man? Or did God do something remarkable to prepare him for what he would have to face? Discuss the relationship between our faith and God's grace when it comes to performing heroic deeds for God. You may find the following passages helpful: Hebrews 11:24-26; 1 Peter 5:9-10; 2 Corinthians 12:7-9; Jude 24

Reflection and Prayer

In this part of the world, at this point in time, most of us do not face the threat of persecution in the terms we have been considering here. Even so, there are still many ways, large and small, in which we may be called upon to suffer for Christ. In twos or threes, share what it means to you to "pick up your cross daily", and then pray for each other.

Are you aware of other individuals or groups who are suffering for their faith, at home or overseas? If so, take some time to pray for them.