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I came across a website this week that listed the top 35 inventions that changed the world.<sup>1</sup> You can probably guess some of the items: communication systems, such as phones and internet; transportation systems such as trains, airplanes, and cars and the gasoline to make them run; lightbulb, electricity, and refrigeration to make our lives easier. These modern inventions we often take for granted, but I imagine you haven't even thought about some inventions that have been around a very long time.

Take, for example, the wheel. The oldest one discovered was from Mesopotamia dated around 3500 B.C. Just imagine how difficult it would be to get around today if no one had invented the wheel. How about the nail? Can you imagine building something without it? Bronze nails have been found in Egypt dating back to 3400 B.C.

One invention from the Chinese several thousand years ago may seem a bit primitive to use today compared to our modern GPS systems, but the compass made from naturally magnetized iron

ore made it easier to navigate the open seas on cloudy days. Before the compass, one would depend on landmarks or the position of the Sun and stars, but with the compass pointing to north one could travel in any weather.

Today we might say these inventions “rock,” an expression often used to indicate you really like something.

According to the Urban Dictionary, one can use the expression “rock the world” to mean that one is going to hang out with a good friend, but I don't think that's what the crowd had in mind when they decided to rock Stephen.<sup>2</sup> And I doubt that many in the church felt this event “rocked.”

The book of Acts tells about the beginning of the church, and we first hear about Stephen as a response to the problem with the food distribution system. In the early days of the church, food was distributed to those in need, sort of like what we do today with Meals on Wheels or the food pantry at Church Community Services.

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The disciples of Jesus were trying to do the best they could in distributing the food, but they were overwhelmed with teaching, leading prayer, and all the other things they had to balance. It was difficult to get everything done.

There were different groups of people within the church, such as those from the Hebrew culture and those from the Greek culture. Sometimes these groups would come into conflict, and those from the Greek culture began arguing with the Hebrews that they were not distributing the food evenly. “It’s not fair. Your people are getting more food than our people.”

You’ve probably had that happen—an argument with someone? A disagreement? It happens to all of us—at home, at work, at church, or at school, as was the case with three boys arguing on the school playground about whose dad made the most money.

The first boy said, “My Dad rocks—he scribbles a few words on a piece of paper, he calls it a poem, and they give him \$25.”

The second boy said, “That’s nothing. My Dad scribbles a few words on a piece of paper, he calls it a song, and they give him \$200.”

The third boy said, “I got you both beat. My Dad scribbles a few words on a piece of paper, he calls it a sermon, and it takes four deacons to collect all the money!”<sup>3</sup>

The early church had an argument about the fairness of food distribution, but rather than letting the problem get out of hand, the disciples suggested that volunteers be appointed to help hand out food. Getting more people involved meant that less people would get left out, so they chose seven men, one of them being Stephen. The ones selected were all very dedicated and well-respected leaders.

Stephen was a great success at what he did, and soon some people began to notice the amount of praise he received. One particular group, however, was not happy with him, and they began arguing with him. Stephen was so full of wisdom that they could not win any arguments, so the group created

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a plot against him. They made up lies about Stephen, getting people to say that he spoke false words against Moses and against God, getting the elders and other religious leaders upset. They brought Stephen before the religious council for a trial. False witnesses had been planted at the trial, who said things like, “He speaks against our holy temple and our laws.”

Some leaders were worried and wanted to find a way to quiet the issue. So the religious leaders asked Stephen, “Is this true—what you have said?”

- Stephen replied by reciting their history, beginning with Abraham and Sarah leaving their homeland to follow God’s invitation to move to a new land.
- He told about Joseph who had been sold into slavery by his brothers and became a ruler in Egypt, who then helped saved enough grain to feed people during a famine, and when his brothers came looking for food they were reunited with Joseph.

- Stephen then told how the Pharaoh oppressed the people and how Moses helped them escape, but then the people rebelled and complained when things got difficult in the wilderness.

As Stephen told these stories, things seemed to be going well for his defense. How could anyone argue that he was speaking against God when he could recite their history so well? He concluded, however, by suggesting that just as their ancestors had gone astray, so too had the current religious leaders. He called them stiff-necked and suggested they opposed God’s Spirit by killing Jesus, the One God had sent.

The leaders became enraged, but then Stephen looked up into the sky and said he saw Jesus standing at the right hand of God, the one they had killed.

That did it. They dragged Stephen into the street and began throwing rocks at him until he died. The last words he said were, “Jesus, receive my spirit. Do not hold this sin against them.”

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I don't think this story is a good example of how to handle conflict in our lives, especially in the church. I hope when we disagree with someone's words or interpretation of the Bible that we don't begin throwing rocks at one another.

There may even be times when I misunderstand something you tell me, which may result with you being upset with me, as was the case with a woman who handed her pastor a written prayer request since she was concerned about her husband who had joined the navy. The pastor should have read the note like this:

“George Bowen having gone to sea, his wife desires the prayers of the congregation for his safety.”

Instead the pastor read, “George Bowen, having gone to see his wife, desires the prayers of the congregation for his safety.”<sup>4</sup>

Sometimes we may misunderstand one another, but as a community of faith, I suggest two inventions that God created to work through our disagreements: our two ears. They are as valuable as the invention of the compass. Our ears and a compass may seem tiny and we may take them for granted, but they really rock as they point us in the right way.

Christ continues to rock the world as he points the way toward God's love, inviting us to rock the world by befriending those who walk along cloudy pathways, who may be seeking hope in the midst of gloom. By seeing how we handle our conflicts and struggles by listening to one another, we shine a light of hope. Rather than throwing rocks, may we rock the world with God's loving presence.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://interestingengineering.com/35-inventions-that-changed-the-world/>

<sup>2</sup> [www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=Rock%20the%20world](http://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=Rock%20the%20world)

<sup>3</sup> Adapted from [www.swapmeetdave.com/Humor/Religious.htm](http://www.swapmeetdave.com/Humor/Religious.htm)

<sup>4</sup> Adapted from *1002 Humorous Illustrations*, Michael Hodgin, #147.