

Spiritual Leadership in the Book of Acts

by George Verwer

The sermon emphasizes the importance of spiritual leadership, prioritizing prayer and communion with God, and promoting unity and boldness among team members.

Duration: 52:24

Topics: "Spiritual Leadership"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the need for Christians to be more realistic and aware of the world's challenges. He suggests watching war films or newsreels about Vietnam or refugees to gain perspective. The speaker also highlights the determination of the world to achieve its goals, using the example of a man who purchased and transported London Bridge to the United States. The sermon concludes with the importance of leaders being motivators and instilling compassion and motivation in their teams, using the teachings of Jesus Christ as an example.

Transcript

We can call this session Leadership in the Book of Acts, and I'd like you to turn in your Bible to the Book of Acts. We've been speaking a lot, and we tend to in our day, there's nothing wrong with it, of people's personal problems. And one of the amazing things about the Book of Acts, in some ways, is how little it dwells on people's personal problems.

We never have any of the apostles psychoanalyzed in front of us, but rather we see them, even though I'm sure they're all men like you and I with battles and problems, we see them moving out into action for God. And I'm convinced that many of our problems will be left behind when we get involved in the spiritual warfare. And there's a danger in any conference like this that people become overly introspective and get the idea that the Christian life is mainly daily hunting for problems to bring to the Lord, when the Christian life is far more like an army moving down the beach to conquer, and there isn't too much time to get so involved in your problems when you're running down the beach.

This is what we see in the Book of Acts. In all this, of course, we need to maintain the balance, the balance between giving ourselves to our personal spiritual life and coming into maturity, and giving ourselves to others and to evangelists. And you will not find the answer to some of these things very quickly.

I never forget talking to Dr. Schaefer one day and having him explain to me how one of the great battles he constantly has is how much time to use for study and personal edification and how much time to use in ministering to others. And he brought out that there's no simple solution. And to so many of these areas, there's no simple solution.

And some of these things we will be battling all the days of our life. How much time to evangelize, how much time in the Word, how much time toward personal edification, how much time toward militant evangelism. But I believe that we should be driven back to the Word.

The tendency today, I believe, often is to go to too many other books. And these other books can be an inspiration, they can be a challenge, but our foundation for spiritual leadership must be the Word of God. It's not Joe Blow's book on the psychology of living or so-and-so's book on how to be happy though in O.M. or whatever else it may be.

But I think again and again we need to go back to the Bible. And I thought even though this will be very brief, it would be good for us to take a few glimpses at the Book of Acts with a cry in our heart that truly we may have some Book of Acts Christianity this summer. And I believe that lies in the realm of the possible.

We of course in Acts chapter 1 have the emphasis on the power of the Holy Spirit, Acts 1.8. But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you, and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem and in Judea and in Samaria and unto the uttermost part of the earth. Now there is less and less interest in our day, really, solid interest in world evangelism. And we in O.M., despite all of our other burdens to help people be good citizens and good fathers and balanced Christians, we must not lose the cutting edge of this movement which has been a thrust to evangelize the world.

And this is in obedience to the final wish and desire of the Lord Jesus before he went to be in the glory as we read in verse 10. And I love the exhortation where while they were looking into the heaven, Jesus said, ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? Too many Christians are gazing. Gazing even at Jesus.

Carried away with some wonderful cliché or even a wonderful teaching about Jesus. And yet they're gazing. They may be singing, they may be reading a book, they may be saying even some wonderful phrase like, isn't he wonderful, but they're still gazing.

And Jesus exhorted them to stop gazing and to get going. To wait for the Holy Spirit in their lives. And we know that he came.

We know that he dwells in each one of us. We know that he wants to fill each one of us. In the book of Ephesians it says, be filled with the Holy Spirit.

It didn't say, again, go and wait somewhere else and be filled with the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit had come and so there was the immediate command, be filled with the Spirit. Which meant that those people at that moment could have appropriated the reality that these people in the very first chapter had to wait for.

I've been amazed this year at the, certainly the lower number of people, much less people, who have shown any interest in going to the Muslim world, India or Asia. Unless they're all hiding, waiting for the end of the summer. And I believe that we must realize we're not going to challenge them out.

We're going to pray them out. And there needs to be a lot more serious praying on our part. To believe God for the men.

To fill all the various gaps. So many leaders want to expand. We've got some leaders in this work who really run it.

But I want to tell you, it's a lot easier to move out many, many times than it is to fill the gaps. Of last year's expansion. And we really must pray.

And this goes for all Christian work. Whatever Christian leader may be watching or listening to this tape. I'm sure you can realize the problem of believing God for the workers.

To fill the gaps. And then we find in verse 14, the leaders of the church, in fact everyone, in one accord in prayer, supplication. With the women in Mary, the mother of Jesus, and with his brethren.

I notice sometimes when there's a prayer meeting, the lack of leaders. And if you go to them, they'll always have a good excuse. It's true, the leaders many times are overworked.

They're many times up late planning strategy, working out this and doing that. And so when the prayer meeting comes, many times there's a good reason for not being there. But I can tell you, even with the best reason, if you find as a leader you're missing the prayer meetings, you're going to find that you're not going to get caught up through pushing papers or anything else.

Prayer must be the priority. And you must learn to chop other things if necessary. Anyone in leadership must learn how to lay aside good things in order to get the best.

You'll never find enough time unless you start taking that time. And that means laying aside some good things in order to get the best. The best is prayer and communion with God.

I believe that one of the most obvious attacks of Satan when people leave OS comes on their prayer life. And so few people are able to maintain a prayer life out in the normal life that they have when they're in OS. And I believe this is why many times they end up falling back.

What a terrific need there is for more prayer meetings, more prayer as it was in the book of Acts. In Acts chapter 2 we find the same or a similar situation. Verse 42 through 47, there's not time to read it all, but they continued in four areas.

The apostles' doctrine, fellowship, breaking of bread, which of course speaks of worship among other things, and in prayer. Will you make sure you have those four pillars of the church teaching on your team? Then of course great things were done by the apostles and all that believed were together and had all things common, sold their possessions and goods and part of them to all men as every man had need. It's amazing how many people want the signs and wonders of verse 43 without the personal love reality of 44 and 45.

And this is so often the case that we want the blessing without the responsibility. We want the breakthrough without the travail or the tears. And then it says in verse 46, and they continued daily with one accord in the temple and breaking of bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart.

If you want unity on your team in your assembly, then you're going to have to be willing to lay aside secondary issues and believe God for singleness of heart. Just think of that, singleness of heart. How difficult that is to get in these days.

I think of that very powerful verse in 1 Corinthians chapter 1, verse 10. Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing and that there be no division among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment. And as a leader, there will come times when you will have to open the word of God and share these verses and exhort your team and your friends to pull together.

And even in O.M. I can tell you some of the greatest disunity that Satan has attempted to bring and sometimes successfully has been between the leaders. I have been amazed, of course, all over the world to see how quickly Satan divides leaders. I've been amazed to see how few men of God, supposedly the men of God, have a really healthy and loving attitude toward other leaders.

You see, we as evangelicals from the very beginning are taught to be strong-minded because we want to hold fast to the faith and we have convictions. Most of us are people of strong conviction. That's why we're here.

And so we also, with these strong points, tend to develop the weak points of being full-headed, critical, and having a lack of discernment toward what God is doing in others. And it spreads like the plague. And one of the things we see in the book of Acts, because there were so many leaders here, that they were of one heart and one mind.

Now the devil attacked them as well. And they didn't have perfection. They had their difficulties, including the Apostle Paul and the rest.

But I believe that one of the pictures that we have in the book of Acts that we need on all of our teams is this unity. Now it's much harder to get on with your equal than it is to someone who you sense is either way under you, in terms of his spiritual life and his knowledge of the Word, or someone way over you. The real test is always with a man who is your equal.

And oh, have I seen this on O.M. Some leaders who get on fine with everybody under them, and they get on fine with the few who may be over them. But with those who are equal, they have tension and unrest and interesting reactions. The one who perhaps, at a particular meeting, sits next to him, and it's either he who's going to be asked to speak or testify, or him.

And there's where the tension comes in. Why was he asked? Why was I asked? And you should just know of some of the manifestations we've had of this, even at these conferences, when you have so many people who do have a word, but you only have so many meanings. We have an unusual situation in that we have many language groups.

But imagine if this was just one conference. How could you possibly give all the people who have a burden to share the opportunity? I certainly would want to pray much for anybody who had the responsibility or any group to make such a decision. And so, we see this great picture of these people united together, praising the Lord, one heart, singleness of mind, and, notice how it ends, and the Lord added to the church daily, such as should be saved.

You know, we get the extremes of this. We get the people who are all worried and uptight and just getting themselves into a knot, trying to get people saved. And then you have the other extreme, the indifferent fellow who, though he may witness, he's not really concerned that anyone ever gets saved, and he may even flippantly say, oh, well, the Lord takes care of the fruit.

Somewhere there must be a healthy balance. There must be a concern on our part to see men converted. There must be an effort to bring men to decision.

Jesus brought men to decision in one way or the other. And I believe that somehow we must find that balance. Well, we want to move on to get a picture of some of these other things here in the book of Acts.

One of them I cannot bypass is in Acts 3, where we have the man who was lame, and he asked for money, and Peter said, verse 6, chapter 3, silver and gold have I none, but such as I have, give I thee, in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk. I would like to, again, call your attention to how we would like the blessing of being able to say to people, rise up and walk, but there's not too many of us that have the testimony, silver and gold have I none. And I think of all the money that's thrown, even into so-called evangelically acceptable jewelry, most of which is gold and silver, there's certainly no one that has too much opportunity to give this testimony.

Of course, we always at this point say, oh, well, certainly we can't get literal about these things. The verses we like, we take literally, heaven. The verses we don't like, we spiritualize, or we say it's a parable, or it's a spiritual concept.

And, of course, when we do this, we literally knock, we literally knock the heart out of the Bible, which many people have done. And the Sermon on the Mount, many of the best passages of Scripture, we sort of tally off on the planograph for children. Then over in chapter 4, just on this subject of whether the heathen are lost or not, I think we should know and understand verse 12.

Neither is there salvation in any other, for there is none other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved. None other name given among men whereby we must be saved. This makes it clear that any man anywhere without Jesus Christ is lost, and there is no hope for him.

That one verse. And many other associated verses, like Jesus saying, I am the way, the truth, and the life. No man cometh to the Father but by me, seems to make the issue rather clear.

Then if we look at Acts 4, verse 31, we again find all these people gathered in a prayer meeting. When they had prayed, the place was shaken where they were assembled together, and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and they spake the word of God with boldness. And one thing that you must have as a leader is boldness.

Boldness. On the doors, in the streets, in the open air, there needs to be a fearlessness. Now it's amazing what children of fear we are.

I thought recently that it would be good before sending people to Turkey to give out tracts in an environment where they expect the police to pick them up at any minute, for them just to go and do what I was doing with my family a few days ago and give out tracts in the post boxes of these very ritzy apartments where you have to sort of play a little game just to get in the door because it's locked. You have to wait for someone to come, and as they open the door you sort of slip in behind them and head for the post boxes. And even though it may seem ridiculous, as you're putting the tracts in the post boxes,

there is a feeling that comes into your stomach that someone is going to say something.

And even though you know that, I mean, what can they do apart from ask you to leave the building? There is some tension that comes in, and you would prefer really not to do that. The same tension comes in other situations. And we must really, I think, take a fresh study of the Book of Acts and ask God as we read about these men who were so bold, so fearless.

You remember with Paul there were a group of men that said they weren't going to eat until he was dead. I don't know if I had a group of people write me a letter and say, we're not going to eat until you're dead. Boy, there would be reason for a little bit of tension.

But not sticking tracts in the post boxes. I found that in India I had great freedom distributing tracts in the third class section of the train. In the second class compartments, there was a slight uneasiness, and the first class compartments, I was scared.

Isn't that amazing? I hope none of you have such problems. But I know that the Book of Acts has been a great help to me. Sometimes it's good to do things that are even a little bit crazy, to break the fear barrier.

Once I decided, after watching Ray Lynch getting to feel guilty, that I was going to attempt to preach in London Underground. It was a frightening experience because after doing it a few times, one man lost his temper and said I either got off the train or he was going to call the conductor. Well, I haven't done it too much since then, actually.

And I've wrestled with this problem many, many times. But not long after that, the Lord was convicting me that I did have a fear of man. So I decided that just to break this fear barrier, I would sing in the London Underground.

And so in the center of London, in the tube station underneath, while everybody's waiting for the train, I mean, where can they go? I just started to sing. And actually I found that all to be a tremendous therapy in delivering me more and more from fear. Actually one dear lady, I think she was from the West Indies, she was really blessed.

She was one of these ladies working on the train. And she was really excited. She said something like, Praise the Lord.

So that encouraged me, of course. But I really believe that one of the problems in our witnessing is we don't have this fullness. We're afraid of man.

We're afraid even of what they may say. It's a very big thing on the door. Many people find working in the open air or in the streets, I mean, man-to-man, in India especially, much easier than going to the doors.

Why? Because the door builds up suspense. And it's just that suspense of wondering what they're going to say and the fact that you in a sense are on their ground that can build up and make it more difficult. So let us pray that God will give us this fullness to go into the streets, to go to the doors, to go into the apartments, even if there are the richest people in town, and to give out the word of God.

Now I don't believe that we should trespass on private property. And this is an area where sometimes you have to use your head. I don't believe we should go barging into public places and be disturbers of the peace.

And people get extreme on these things. There was one group that used to break into cinemas and half, not in the land, but another group, and half time in the cinema and start preaching and they'd have to be chased and the police would be called. Well this, I believe, is a disgrace to the Lord's name.

This does not help the Lord's work. And so we need to be careful. But there are plenty of places where you can witness without causing that kind of situation.

Just basically to even cover up what I said about British rails and all my time giving out literature on British rails, hardly ever has there been a disturbance. And if someone on the train says don't do it, I just comply. In fact, in most cases people are thrilled to receive something to read as they're oftentimes very bored.

So there needs to be the balance. We need to use our minds and not just go like a bull into the china shop. Very quickly, as our time is almost over, I want you to look at another picture at the end of chapter 5. The apostles were beaten and they were commanded not to speak in the name of Jesus.

And they departed from the presence of the council rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name. Isn't that a picture? Now you'd think they would have stopped or called some kind of special meeting or gone to some other place. But instead it says and daily and in the temple and every house they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ.

There was this passion to preach Christ. To press on and one of the things you must do as a leader is make sure that by his grace and the power of repentance you have this compassion and that you instill it in your team. You must constantly be using the word and every possible method to instill your team with motivation.

Perhaps the most practical thing I can say at the end of this session is that a leader must be a motivator. You must give them reason. You must show them the blessings that are going to come.

You must show them the examples from the word. You must show them the examples from history. You must show them reasons from the daily newspaper from history from the word from your life from other lives from poetry from anything you can get to keep that team rejoicing motivated and happy in the Lord.

In other words you must minister. You must minister not necessarily always by preaching or exhorting but through many methods sometimes just reading a poem like some of Amy Carmichael's poems or reading something from the press. Late last night just before going to bed I had the opportunity to read the newspapers.

It was one of the greatest challenges of the day. There's always something there that challenges. The thing that hit me last night is what the world will do to accomplish their purposes.

And I read about the man who purchased London Bridge for \$7 million and took it all over piece by piece to the United States and has constructed this bridge though he was somewhat disappointed because he thought he had the more attractive tower bridge and after he got the bridge up he built a channel in order to get water under the bridge. What the world will do to accomplish their purposes may when we go out in our teams we be willing to work hard and to do everything possible to build for God and to accomplish his purposes because who can compare the purpose and the reward in all that we do. The world and the world's leaders are making many of us look like we're walking backwards.

May we change our direction and be the kind of leaders that we read about in the book of Acts. Thou therefore endure hardness as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. No man that wreath and tangleth himself with the affairs of this life that he may please him who hath chosen him to be a soldier and if a man also strive for masteries yet he is not crowned except he strive lawfully.

Going over to verse fifteen. Study to show thyself approved unto God a workman that needeth not to be ashamed rightly dividing the word of truth but shun profane and vain babblings for they will increase into more ungodliness. Verse twenty-two.

Flee also youthful lusts but follow righteousness faith love peace with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart but foolish and unlearned questions avoid knowing that they do gender strife and the servant of the Lord Mrs. Key must not strive but be gentle unto all men apt to teach patient in meekness instructing he knows that oppose themselves if God for adventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth and they that may recover themselves out of the snare of the devil who are taken captive by him at his will. Keeping these verses in mind let me give you some of these tests of spiritual maturity. First the leader will be tested and you will be tested when you are misunderstood.

As a leader you will be misunderstood. You may be one of those brilliant leaders who gets perhaps a large number of people to understand you but there will be always some who misunderstand. In my fifteen years of working with leaders and trying to be a peacemaker among leaders and between leaders and team members I have seen the best leaders the best misunderstood and you are going to have to learn if you want to be a leader even of the smallest group to be misunderstood how to take that misunderstanding which can attempt to eat away at you inside and to really cast it on the Lord.

The key of course to this is living learning to live for the praise and the glory of God and not the praise of man. You must live not firstly for your team trying to build up your image trying to keep your reputation or even just trying to be a good job a good leader you must live for the Lord your first concern must be what he says and you must be ready for misunderstanding. You know I think that we oversimplify especially the evangelicals the problem of communication.

Communication even among married couples even in their first year of marriage when they are supposedly flamingly in love with each other is as complicated as anything could ever be much less between people who barely have any particular emotional warmth toward one another. And I don't think we should be surprised by the problems we have I think we should be utterly amazed that we don't have more problems and I especially say this in O.M. I especially say this for the ship.

I have some people that have such pity toward me some of my fellow leaders they just think that I'm in the most difficult situation in all the world on this ship with 126 people and all that's involved but the Lord has shown me on this ship that any problems we've had are nothing compared to what we could have and nothing compared to the blessings and so one of the things that will help you when you're misunderstood is to be positive not to let your whole attention focus on this one person who may be irritated with you but realize that probably for everyone that's irritated with you there are several who are quite happy do not be thrown off balance please get this by one or two who tend to be moaning and complaining but try to think about the whole team and realize that there is often

what has been called in the states recently the silent majority often times I've found this a leader upset concerned one or two criticizing misunderstanding and so he starts to build a new strategy or make decisions on the basis of their grumbling without finding out really what the rest of the team is feeling

watch out be alert not just to the man who has misunderstood you but to the silent majority when you find your whole team or even 80% of your team has misunderstood you you've probably done something that deserves it and there comes a time when you need to be willing to call in others to help you figure out what you've done wrong Billy Graham said something that really hit me and I therefore wrote it in my bible he said the greatest obstacle to our sanctification is our

unwillingness to see things as they are and particularly to see ourselves as we really are as a leader you must learn to see yourself as you really are that means not thinking too highly it means not thinking too lowly some leaders have a very low very low image of themselves and this causes confusion as well so please be prepared for misunderstandings do not be one of these people who the moment some misunderstanding comes in thinks the devil has got in the devil has got in I think some people become oversensitive to the devil personally I think we need to be more oversensitive to the lord he is present and his strength next to the devil's is immeasurable it's beyond anything and satan has no chance against the lord Jesus claim his power and his blood and his grace and press on with your

eyes upon him and beware of over flattering the devil or giving him too much publicity he is a lover of publicity the second test of maturity that will often come to the leader is when he is criticized criticism is a great test of spiritual maturity and a number of times in my life it has proven me to be a lot weaker than I thought learning to take criticism is very very important if you don't want to be criticized then I suggest you don't do anything if you do anything especially in the area of leadership you will be criticized the greatest generals of history have been criticized the most criticized evangelical I know today at least one of them is Billy Graham and yet I in my studies don't know anyone who's accomplishing as much in many ways as him and those who are banded together with

him so get ready for criticism now the leader learns how to accept criticism he studies it objectively that's very difficult the moment you are criticized you become subjective and one of the great problems in our thinking is we tend to think black or white somebody criticizes us immediately he's our enemy he actually may be your best friend but we tend to think black and white and because he said something against you he's just suddenly gone into the black and those who speak well of you and shower kind words to you they're over in the white but you know it isn't like that but I don't think there's one not one who goes through a year without speaking something against me so when I hear something why be surprised and if I hear something back from a leader that sounds like he is being

hateful that's too strong a word but is saying something against me well I just don't let that upset me because I know it's not a black and white situation and I believe the best and I think that we as Christian leaders must learn to receive criticism now I was reading some time ago something from Mr.

Tozer and it was so powerful on the subject of leaders being criticized that I wrote it in my bible and I'd like to read it to you because it really is powerful probably is as powerful as everything else I'll say today but let's read it I have some meter balance could you stop that churches and Christian organizations have shown a tendency to fall into the same error that destroyed Israel inability to receive admonition after a time of growth and successful labor comes the deadly psychology of self congratulation sets in success itself becomes the cause of later failure the leaders come to accept themselves as the very chosen of God their special objects of divine favor their success is proof enough that this is so they must therefore be right and anyone who tries to call them to account

is instantly written off as an unauthorized meddler who should be ashamed to dare to reprove his betters if anyone imagines that we are playing with words let him approach at random any religious leader and call attention to their weaknesses or the sins of their organization I want to tell you that goes as a knife into the innermost part of my soul because I've had experiences in attempting at times to walk straight with certain people about their lives or their organizations and the reactions have been very interesting worse than that I've discovered some of my own absolutely ridiculous reactions to people's criticisms of O.M. or of myself or of a close associate how we must desperately learn to take criticism how we must learn to be able to take that critical letter and think and praise

the Lord for it will do more for your soul than flattering it will do more for training you than someone patting you on the back and saying you gave a lovely testimony you'll learn more from your enemies probably than your friends and I believe that this is something that we must see if we're going to be the kind of men and the kind of women that God wants us to be your reaction to criticism this summer will be a test of your maturity I hope you will pass the test if you don't remember the second chance is always there and that's repentance in the cross many times I've failed the first test and George Brewer has proven himself to be as mature as a new blade of grass but the second one by his mercy I usually pass and that is I've learned by his grace to repent and to go to the people

concerned and to lay myself bare before them at the foot of the cross there'll be no leadership without repentance if you think you're going to glide through this summer without having to ever repent before your team then you are probably deceived or an extremely clever actor may God give us the victory on one level or the other in Christianity or in the Christian realm of leadership the ability to repent is a mark of maturity the immature Christian finds himself unable to clearly repent he's so uptight about what's been said he's so worried about his failure that he's unable to really go to the cross and this thing of self pity easily comes in watch out for Mr.

Self-Pity maybe you this summer will be overworked unappreciated over criticized misunderstood walked over and so instead of just casting it on the Lord and rejoicing in it you will take a bath with Mr. Self-Pity and you will become the martyr leader at the end of the summer we have a number of O.M. leaders when you meet them they seem to be martyrs they forget that their team members may have suffered even more regret Mr. Tozu says may be no more than a form of self-love a man who has a high regard for himself or has such a high regard for himself that any failure to live up to his own image of himself disappoints him deeply sin brings to such a man such a painful loss of face that it is not soon forgotten now this is a real problem that I have faced I have such a high

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