

(The Book of Acts) Session 07

by George Verwer

George Verwer's sermon encourages Christians to prioritize evangelism and grace while addressing the challenges of ministry and the importance of prayer and unity within the church.

Duration: 38:27

Scripture: Acts 6:2

Topics: "Acts"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of having a personal mission statement for oneself and one's family. He praises John for challenging the audience to create their own mission statements. The speaker also discusses the character of Stephen and his powerful sermon, which is highly criticized by liberals. He highlights the lesson from Acts 6:2-4, where the twelve disciples choose seven men to serve tables so that they can focus on the ministry of the Word of God. The speaker encourages those in ministry to learn from this example and not try to do everything themselves. He also mentions the presence of sin and failure throughout the Bible, using the example of David's adultery and murder. The speaker recommends reading Brennan Manning's book, 'Ragamuffin Gospel,' for a powerful understanding of grace.

Transcript

But notice there, still just a little bit in chapter 5, verse 28. Did we not strictly command you that you should not teach in this name? And behold, ye have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine, and intend to bring this man's blood upon us. Wow! These people were on the move.

Today, only a small remnant of Christians have a vision for mass evangelism. Today, the big emphasis is on holistic ministry, on building hospitals, on feeding people, on taking care of their physical needs. You have a huge movement that a lot of Christian money is going to, called Habitat, because Jimmy Carter is involved in it.

And I'm sure there's some wonderful Christian people involved in that, but to be honest, you know, that's not where I'm going to put my money. I don't have that much. And unsaved people will build houses.

We need to reach people with the gospel of Jesus, and this is one of the reasons I praise God for John DeVries, and endorse his great ministry in India. Oswald Smith, his book is there. If you haven't read Oswald J. Smith, maybe you just converted in the last week or two, but Oswald J. Smith is probably the

strongest voice for world missions that our nation has ever known.

He was one of my heroes, and I'll never forget when I was a student at Moody, meeting him in the elevator. Oswald Smith, you know, getting near this guy in the elevator, and when he preached at Moody Church that night, it was a great message, but no one responded except me. I was the only one.

He gave an altar call. I had already been to the altar already too many times in my life, but he gave the altar call, and I, you know, it was hard. My fiancé was sitting next to me.

You know, what would she think if I'm responding to this invitation? But I was weeping by then, and I ran forward. I'll never forget it. Moody Church.

Went back into this room. Nobody paid any attention. Because there was only one.

And so the choir came into that room, and I had to get out. I was still just shaking, so I remember going down to the basement of Moody Church and crying out to God concerning something that I felt had to take place in my life, and that was another one of the steps that led me to stay proactive about Mexico and about missions and about myself. I really wanted to say something this morning that's not totally tied into acts.

It comes partly from some tapes I'm listening to right now. But when you have strong ministry, like, say, last night, it's not easy to know how to respond. And I fear that some people, because their whole Christian faith is largely shame-based, that hearing a strong message will only produce more shame.

And that's the last thing that I want. I've been trying to talk about grace the whole time. But if you are basically a shame-based, shame-oriented person, which comes as a result of your background and legalism and other factors, it will not be easy to know how to respond to a strong word.

In fact, you may just put yourself down more. Well, that's the absolute opposite of what we're really aiming at during this week. We want you to be encouraged.

We want you to aim high. But we want you to understand it's a long pilgrimage. And just putting yourself down, Oh, why am I not praying more? Why am I not more excited about the Word of God? Why am I not more zealous? And especially what I said last night about if you're not at least somewhat excited, I tried to say it in a grace-awakened way, but probably for certain temperaments it didn't come out that way.

And so you've ended up shame-based, putting yourself down. And that isn't what this is about. We're trying to present these lofty goals from God's Word.

I didn't write this book, and I find some of it really difficult. But perhaps because of my background, I never became a person that was not sort of a free spirit. Even at Moody, where they tried to quench my spirit, it didn't work.

And I would quickly repent. And I went to the Dean of Men to apologize that I'd broken their social policy. When I went to Moody, I was still on this fast, no dating, no kissing fast, which has gone on for about two and a half years.

I was trying to get toward the end of that. And then I met Dreen. I went to rent a film, and she was in charge of Moody Science Films.

I met her, broke the fast immediately, and tried to date her. And dating her, which wasn't really a date, I broke the Moody social policy. And I went to the Dean of Men and confessed.

And he became my closest adult friend at Moody Bible Institute, Dean Broman. A few of you older people would remember such a famous person. But I discovered so easily that different people respond in such a different way because they've never got out of their feelings of inferiority or their feelings of shame or failure or sense that... I've had some people tell me they're not even sure God loves them.

You know, that's not my thing. I've never doubted that God loves me. I have a bigger problem.

I've doubted that He even exists at all. So, you know, we're all different. But I know because of Calvary, because of God's Word, if He exists, and I believe He does exist, though I have my struggles at times, I know He loves me.

That must be arrogant. No, that's grace. That I'm sure of His love and His acceptance, and even when I fail, do something stupid.

I got in trouble at Urbana because I told one of my failure stories. Right after Urbana, ten years ago, we lost our ship, Lagos II. There on the Beagle Channel.

I'm sure you've all been down to the Beagle Channel for a holiday. It's quite a ways to go. It's down here on the bottom of Latin America.

There's the Beagle Channel. And one terrible night, we lost our ship. Probably one of the worst nights of my life.

Same year, I also lost my mother. A woman phoned me from the United States when I got back to England. She sounded real excited.

And I thought, well, maybe she's going to give a big gift to World Missions. That's always my dream. I live perpetually dreaming people are going to give a big gift to World Missions.

It was actually just the opposite. She wanted to rebuke me for telling this story at Urbana, this true story. And she was more or less saying, God has judged you and taken His ship from you because you told this story at Urbana.

Can you imagine? This is the kind of mentality we have. You say, well, tell us the story. Well, the story, it's a powerful story for young people.

And when you're at Urbana, you can't try to preach for those in the 50s group. They're young people. They're 18, they're 19.

And I share my struggle with lust. And God has given me a very high level of victory. But it hasn't been all victory.

And one time I was walking through the woods in England on a prayer walk and a praise walk and there was a pornographic magazine in the tree. And bullet holes were through it. To be honest, it caught me by surprise.

I walked up to it because I saw all these holes in the magazine. And oh, how I'd love to be able to give you at this moment, and I'm saying this at Urbana, my victorious life testimony, how in the power of the Spirit I just zapped that magazine and it completely disappeared. But the truth is, imagine standing in front of 12,000 people telling this, is that that magazine on that day made a complete fool out of me.

And then I talk about grace and the blood of Christ. And that is what impacts young people today. Because a lot of them have the idea that Christian leaders, and especially missionaries, they really more or less have it all together.

But you see, that isn't true. And the Word of God says, confess your faults. And I'm not afraid.

At the right time, I know it takes discernment, and I do lack discernment at times, to confess my faults. So whatever we've said from the Book of Acts, we hope these things will be goals, will be aims. We hope that you'll take some baby steps before you attempt to jump off the mountain without a parachute.

But surely God is wanting us to take steps of faith. As we respond to the challenge of the Book of Acts. And surely we should be committed to filling our town with the message of Jesus Christ, just as they filled Jerusalem.

And to fill our nation, and to fill our world with the message of Christ through preaching and teaching and the Word of God in every possible way. Then Peter, verse 29, And the other apostles answered and said, We ought to obey God rather than man. Wow! These are serious people.

The God of our Father raised up Jesus, whom you slew and hanged on the tree. Him hath God exalted with His right hand to be a Prince and a Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins. And we are His witnesses.

There it is again. We are His witnesses of these things, and so is also the Holy Spirit, whom God hath given to them that obey Him. Amazing! We take it right down to when they were beaten in chapter 40, and then verse 42, And daily in the temple and in every house they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ.

And I believe that should be our motto. I want to be found teaching and preaching Jesus Christ every day. And actually I'm just as excited about talking to one person on the phone.

I've been on the phone for the last hour or two. Just as excited about talking to one person on the phone than preaching to a lot of people. And you may not have a preaching ministry, but you can have a telephone ministry, you can have a visitation ministry.

Do you realize in our country many of the elderly people in our nursing homes are never visited by anyone except a relative, and some don't even have any relatives? I've had this burden for over 35 years. How can it be that we can let dear people that were once vital part of our churches, some of them ministered to us, how can we leave these people just to be forgotten in these nursing homes across America? I'm not saying no one should be in a nursing home. My father, after seven years living with my sister, is in a wonderful Christian nursing home in New Jersey and being well taken care of.

But he gets quite a few visits, especially compared. One of the greatest problems in our society today is people are not dying. They are living on and on, many of them with almost no quality of life.

And I've been visiting these places for many years, so I'm speaking from experience. And if you walk down the hall where my dad lives, though he's 93 and his mind is starting to go, he is one of the more healthy ones in that section. He's at least walking.

He knows me. And he comes over to my sister's house for a meal. But many of the dear ladies, most of them are ladies in his section, they have almost no quality of life.

They're just waiting to die. And if you don't think euthanasia is going to be something big in our culture in the coming years, then you don't know what's going on. We know what's already happened in Oregon.

And Christians need to be a little informed. Dr. Schaefer was one of the first to speak out about the problem of euthanasia. And that's, of course, not my message this morning.

We need to move on to chapter 6. Chapter 6 is so challenging because it's all about problems. And if you're in a church, you've got problems. I heard the president of Cornerstone University speak on the radio this morning on the subject of disunity and change and churches that are splitting and people getting hurt.

That man said on the radio this morning in one minute what some people weren't able to say in an hour. Very relevant. I love radio ministry.

We're very privileged in this country to have so much radio ministry. I know it's almost out of control with the stations competing with one another. And some of you know I've been very involved with Moody Radio for almost 40-some years.

But here we've got some problems. We've got some divisions. In those days when the number of disciples was multiplied, and by the way, more people saved, the more problems.

I was selling books door to door way back in New Jersey as a baby Christian. I met this lady. She really made my day.

She bought a load of books. Never forget her. She knew, just looking at me, I was big on zeal and weak on wisdom.

She invited me in to give me a little word. She said, do you study the Proverbs? I don't remember exactly how she said it. But then she pointed out there was one proverb for every day of the month.

And she encouraged me to read a proverb every day. I've been doing that almost every day since I met that lady 40-some years ago. I'm proverbied out.

I've read the Proverbs backward and forward and upside down. I'm now getting a little weary of the Proverbs, so I'm still reading them. Forgive me, be gentle there.

So I'm now writing my own. Now, mine are not inspired. They're not going to be put in any extra book, you know, adding to the Bible.

But my favorite verb or proverb, which I've given you here at Maranatha before, it's gone all over the world, is where two or three of the Lord's people are gathered together. Sooner or later, they'll be a mess. How many of you older people have experienced that in your pilgrimage with Jesus? Be honest, raise your hand.

Many of you. Others are crying, figuring out what I'm talking about. Here we have two or three of God's people gathered together.

People are getting served, and soon they've got a mess. And if you study Genesis through Revelation, you're going to discover one mess after the other. The Bible is very blunt about sin, about failure.

David on the roof, pre-binocular days, yet lusting out of his shoes, commits adultery, and murders the woman's husband. You know, it's not really the best thing for a man of God. If that isn't a message of grace, when later on the Bible says, David is a man after his own heart, then I don't know what grace is about.

And if you want to read a great book on grace that has a little heresy in it, some of you look like the crispy types, and you'd like to read a book that's, you know, it's good, but has a little heresy, you read Brandon Menning's Ragamuffin Gospel. Because this converted Roman Catholic priest, who probably didn't graduate from Moody, has got one of the most incredible books on grace that I've ever read. Ragamuffin Gospel.

And it's powerful. It's his tapes that I'm listening to right now. And he is unusual.

You can't take it all, but you can take what fits. So they got a bit of a mess here. In those days, when the number of the disciples multiplied, there arose a murmuring.

You have any murmuring going on in your church? If I heard all the murmuring going on in OM, my own fellowship right now, I'd probably just pass out and die like Ananias. Murmuring of the Grecians, these were Greek Jews, were the Hebrews, Hebrew Jews, I was reading a lot about that in the commentary and don't understand it, because their widows were neglected in the daily distribution. I want to just read that here from my NIV.

It's just a little bit clearer, if you can just bear with me a minute. In those days, when the number of disciples was increasing, the Grecian Jews among them complained against the Hebrew Jews because their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of the food. Now, isn't that a little bit clearer? Come on, be honest, even you King James guys.

This is King James here, by the way, so you can't attack me. This is my protection when I come to Michigan. Verse 2, Then the twelve called the multitudes of the disciples unto them and said, It is not fitting that we should leave the word of God and serve tables.

Interesting. Let's read it here in this translation. So the twelve gathered all the disciples together and said, It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to wait on tables.

Brothers, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them and will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word. Isn't that powerful? What a tremendous lesson for those of us in ministry, especially in our day when sometimes we like to do everything.

And we, in servant ministry, we like to carry boxes. We like to wait tables. But if we're going to get the job done, some need to give the priority.

I'm not saying they can never serve or shine their shoe or wait the table, but their priority should be the preaching of the word and prayer. And I feel today many of our pastors are so caught up in administration, so caught up being number one servant in the church, including picking kids up for the Sunday school. I'm not saying you can never do that.

They do not have time for prayer. They manage most of them to get time in the word, but many pastors find it very hard to get time alone in prayer. We need to help our pastors in a compassionate, grace-awakened way to give themselves to prayer and the word and have deacons.

Some people believe that the teaching about deacons started here. Others, commentators, don't agree with that. But in either case, we see delegation, we see a sharing of the word, and we see more people being brought into the ministry.

And I was amazed to read in John Stott's commentary, an Anglican, where they have pretty strong teaching on clergy, that he felt this passage taught that everybody was in ministry. And he went on to say in his brilliant book, which, if you would really like to get a copy of that and can't find it in your bookstore, email me and I'll send you a copy from England. But he went on to say he believes the word full-time ministry should not just refer to missionaries and pastors, but should refer to people in the business world, in the agricultural world, in the teaching world.

If people are committed to Jesus, they put their work in the hands of Jesus, whatever work or business that is, they are in full-time ministry. I have heard that before, but never from John Stott. And it was powerful for me in a confirmation of what I've been trying to teach business people and lay people around the world.

Amazing. Let's just look at verse 3. Brothers, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the spirit of wisdom, of the Spirit, filled of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them.

We will give attention to prayer and the ministry of the Word. This proposal pleased the whole group. There's a little bit of democracy going on here.

We know different churches function in different ways. My conviction is that there are many different ways that churches can be governed. Now that's, of course, my inner denominational viewpoint.

You can have your denominational viewpoint because God is probably using your method of governing your church in your particular denomination or church. And you feel strongly about that. I say praise God.

But I believe if we're to fellowship with other Christians, we need to lay down the big shotgun we're carrying concerning how the church should be governed or how the church should function. One strong group that's been very influential in our movement in the early days doesn't have paid clergymen or paid full-time pastor to use the wrong term. And I've seen that movement all over the world.

I had someone just the other day in horror heard about such a thing. No full-time pastor. But that movement has spread all over the world.

When I arrived in Spain, they were a major force. But to shift from a church movement where you have a paid pastor, Bible teacher, back to that method, it seldom ever works. It just causes a lot of grief.

Now some of those fellowships have shifted into having a paid pastor. A lot of struggle. Some have been able to do it.

Some of them needed it. Today, there's no straight drinks left in the body of Christ, friends. It's all cocktails.

And the sooner you understand that, the better the possibility that you may survive to the end of the race. And so we find these men chosen for this sort of table-serving responsibility. Some people think of this as less important.

That is not the way God thinks of it. The member who seems less important, according to Corinthians, is often more important. And it's amazing the qualifications.

This proposal pleased the whole group. So, sort of a group decision. They chose Stephen, a man full of faith, and the Holy Spirit.

Also, Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicholas from Antioch, a convert to Judaism. The Bible also often gets into interesting details, doesn't it? Our God is concerned with details. And it's a mystery.

It's a great struggle to know how much to emphasize a particular detail. That's why, I guess, my favorite word is balance. Next to the name of Jesus and the word grace, my third word would be balance.

Balance of Scripture. Letting one great Bible truth bring another Bible truth into balance. And as you go from here, or even something you're thinking back on that you may have heard that contradicts something that I say, or in the coming months, even your own pastor says something that contradicts something that I say, that's normal.

And it may actually not be a contradiction. It may be just a different way of looking at a big truth. And so I really would appreciate your being careful as you go from here in quoting me.

There are tapes. If you would like to know what I said without ripping things out of context, you can get a series of tapes. I have got a series of tapes.

And may listen to some of this. Not easy to listen to yourself. And generally it leads to some kind of repentance and a lot of other mixed emotion.

This series is going to be produced in an album, in one of these albums that you can market by Domain Productions and go out all over the world. So about 100 times more people will hear this series than are here at Maranatha. I'm not only a bookworm.

I am accused of also being a tape, you know, into tapes. So you might want to make that a matter of prayer. They presented these men to the apostles who prayed and laid hands on them.

It's interesting that a lot of churches don't lay hands on people. Seems to me a very biblical practice. But I guess it's not a major issue.

But as we get to Acts 13, we're going to discover they laid hands on Paul and Barnabas and they sent them as two of the early missionaries. In fact, to me, the book of Acts gets more exciting as we go along. So we're hoping that you are going to stay for the rest of the week.

It could be a real downer if someone leaves a note with Ronald Bush. We feel the Bible teaching this week has been very radical and inferior and we're leaving. God bless you.

We would like our money back. How to make sure that George Verwer doesn't return to Maranatha. Perhaps before you do that we can have some prayer together and make a deal.

They prayed, they laid hands on them and they sent them off. So the word of God spread, the number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly and a large number of priests became obedient to the faith. They were pragmatic.

Do you know that word? They were pragmatic. I'm accused of being hyper-pragmatic. This is why some places they will have me as a mission speaker but not as a Bible teacher.

Because I'm expecting people to actually do something. I'm expecting people to respond to the word. Not just gather it in their head and in their notebook.

But I'll tell you, if you look down through history you will see that most Bible teachers who really accomplished great things were pragmatic people. They expected response. They had a vision.

They were doing something. They weren't just teaching the Bible. They had goals.

They had aims. Praise God for John's challenge to get your own family mission statement. I thought that was fantastic.

I think my wife and I need to get our heads together and see if we can come up with some kind of a mission statement. What a challenge to read these great verses. It's interesting, however, that one of the characters who's supposed to serve tables ends up being martyred.

A lot of my study this morning has been about Stephen. His sermon alone, highly criticized by liberals, mocked by liberals, is something worth studying because his speech takes up a good part of all of chapter 7. Stephen, verse 8, still in chapter 6, a man full of God's grace and power. Any of you remember that book, Jesus, A Man of Steel and Velvet? I lost my copy.

But that book was powerful. I think there's another book, Paul, A Man of Steel and Velvet. It's about balance.

And when I read this and then read some comments, that's what comes out here in verse 8. A man full of God's grace and power. Grace and power. Sensitivity and strength.

It's not one or the other. It's got to be both. Now, Stephen, a man full of God's grace and power, did great wonders and miraculous signs among the people.

Opposition arose, however, from members of the synagogue of the freedmen, as it was called, Jews of Cyrene and Alexander, as well as the province of Cilicia and Asia. These men began to argue with Stephen. Many of us don't like to get in arguments, but sometimes it's difficult.

I'm not into debating, but I praise God that Josh McDowell debated the number one Muslim debater in the world, who is now dead. And another amazing man also debated that man, Dada, who caused more harm to the Christian faith than any person I know of in South Africa and whose ministry then spread all over the world. Sometimes in the debates, it was mainly all Muslims.

Christians didn't even show up. You know, we don't like debates. We don't believe in that.

And here, one of our great Christian heroes is there. He's also perhaps done that. I'm not sure if he's got into debate with Dada, but he's certainly a great person to deal with these issues and praise God for that.

So we find Stephen, supposedly waiting tables, out preaching in the open air. We don't have time, but if you can read his speech there in Chapter 7, it will be well worth it. And as we get on to the end of Chapter 7, we find, as far as we know, the first martyr in the New Testament church, Stephen.

Verse 54. When they heard this, they were furious. This is their response to the message.

They gnashed their teeth at him. Imagine. There's a new film, by the way, on the life of Paul.

It's dynamite. A modern film on the life of Paul. Very interesting scene when Stephen is martyred.

Stephen full of the Holy Spirit. Again, this Holy Spirit keeps getting mentioned so much. Looked up to heaven.

Saw the glory of God. And Jesus standing at the right hand of God. Look, he said, I see heaven open.

The Son of Man standing at the right hand of God. Imagine saying this in front of the opposition. We're about to kill him.

You know, I think most people would have been trying to run at that time, to be honest. I would have been looking for an opportunity to run. I've only been stoned once.

It was in India, and it was just one small stone. Boy, I was so proud of that experience. I wanted to put that one in my prayer letter, you know, with a picture.

But I think God had a different plan for me. I later went back to that part of Andhra Pradesh and found out that my name had been talked about all over that area. And they thought I was a miracle worker.

Because this man who threw the stone and hit me, everybody talked about that, he died within the next year. And so the word was out that I was, you know, sort of a powerful person. And people came and they kissed my feet and they asked me to pray for them.

And it was a little bit embarrassing, some of the ministry I had in that part of India so many years ago. Stephen was martyred. At this, verse 57, they covered their ears, yelling at the top of their voices.

They rushed at him, dragged him out of the city and began to stone him. Meanwhile, the witnesses laid their clothes at the feet of a young man named Saul. Imagine Paul, the great Paul was there.

He must have been one of the leaders. Why did they lay his clothing at the feet of Paul? He must have been partly responsible. While they were stoning him, Stephen prayed.

He didn't run. He stood firm. Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.

Then he fell on his knees and cried out, Lord, do not hold this sin against them. Talk about forgiveness. Talk about grace.

Today in our society, so many even Christians are holding things against people. They're angry with people. They're unforgiving toward people.

We have people even holding things against their own wife, against their own husband. You know, one of the reasons I'm still here in the battle is I have a wife who forgives me and who loves me, though I've hurt her many times. I've done many stupid things.

I've never sensed that she's holding anything against me. That, you know, in a pinch, four months from now, she's going to pull that little dirt out of her pocket and throw it at me. It's not easy sometimes to forget when we've been deeply hurt.

Well, he was more than deeply hurt. He was murdered. And yet as he died, as he fell on his knees, he said, Lord, do not hold this sin against them.

Doesn't that remind you of Jesus when he was on the cross? He said, forgive them. They know not what they do. You and I can't work together with everybody.

Forget it. And don't be naive about who you can work with and who can become intimate friends with. That takes time.

When you start a relationship with a person, it has to be a little bit like dating. It has a little bit of flirting. Americans are known for rushing around the world with big money, hiring people to be their representative in a particular country without really knowing them, without getting in depth with them.

And it has been a nightmare in missionary work. You cannot make decisions about long-term relationships through one conversation and a cup of coffee. You may feel good about that person.

He may say some things that really, you know, really stir you. But you need a lot of wisdom when you're building long-term relationships. You can't work with everybody.

You can't have everybody remain permanently in your church. God gave me the gift, together with others, on getting people to leave Operation Mobilization, even though we're quite interdenominational. We are not everybody's to use an English expression cup of tea.

We're not everybody to use a German expression glass of beer. And we need to realize, we need to realize that it takes time to build long-term relationships. But we can forgive everyone.

I have a particular brother. I'm not going to touch him with a barge pole. This guy is bad news.

I'm not going to give you his name. That wouldn't be polite. But he's always offering to help me.

He's always offering to help me. And he's offering to raise money for me. And I say, well, thank you very much.

But I just, you know, let me pray about that for a while. I really shouldn't say that because I should just say no. You know, I got a coward streak.

Do any of you have a coward streak? If you're totally delivered of all cowardice, I'd love you to come and autograph my Bible. I have a section right here in the back. It says, hypocrite sign below.

A.W. Tozer once said, one of my favorite authors, I'm ashamed that I don't have some of his books. I almost always have Tozer books. If someone else placed this order, I can always blame it on someone else.

I'm very gifted in that area. That's another area I have to keep repenting about. But I'm sure that in the little bookstore, the little Maranatha bookstore, they should have some books by A.W. Tozer.

How many have been blessed through the writings of A.W. Tozer? Amazing. Probably the most influential author in the early years of Operation Mobilization. He said the greatest gift needed in the church today was discernment.

And so as we go forward in God's work, we want to somehow catch some of this boldness of Stephen, some of this reality of Stephen. We want to understand also there are many martyrs today. I read some emails in the last few days from different parts of the world.

Martyrs here, martyrs here. Peru, Colombia, Sudan. You name country after country, there are martyrs right as we sit here.

It's incredible and it's probably going to increase. That's a new testament in Christianity. That's not the name it claimed at Prosperityism that's being spread out of Tulsa by some kind of people who I believe are drunk on something.

And I don't think it's new wine. And I am so ashamed that our country is the leading country spreading the false prosperity teaching around the world that all who are spiritual will prosper. God does prosper some people.

That's His providential working in their lives and their many factors. But not all spiritual people are to prosper financially. They also say always everybody is to be healed.

Always. And everybody is to live. They can't figure out the age.

And people at 90 that want to die, they're praying over them that they'll be delivered and set free and healed. Weird things are happening in our country in this area. One church in Indiana has 80 people dead in their own personal church cemetery because they would refuse to seek any kind of medical help.

And then we wonder why a lot of thinking people in America want nothing to do with the Christian faith whatsoever. We need to get back to the Word of God. And we need to understand that suffering is a vital part of New Testament Christianity.

And there aren't so many simplistic, one-line, little overhead projector-type answers to deep, deep questions that have plagued the human race from the beginning of time. Let's go back to the book of Acts. And let's go back to biblical balance in our ministry and in all that we do.

And let's realize this isn't just something that happened 2,000 years ago. Wow, Stephen was martyred. Let's have a flannel graph for the kids.

Oh, maybe we can do a new video for the kids to watch this. No, this is for you. This is for me.

Not to waddle in a lot of false guilt. Not to get tied up in all kinds of wrong emotions about yourself and unable to function in society where you are because it may be relatively easy at this time. It can change.

You can't force that change. You need to live where you are. And if God has prospered you and you're in good health and you have a fairly decent house and a car, use it for the kingdom.

Beware of extremism on either end as you come into powerful biblical truth and attempt to respond by the grace of God. Let us pray. Lord, we thank You for the story of Stephen.

We thank You for the way the early church resolved this problem with people murmuring and backbiting because they didn't get enough food. And we thank You, Lord, for what we can learn from these great chapters. We commit to You now the remainder of this day and ask that great things may happen for Your glory here at Maranatha.

Through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

Audio: <https://sermonindex1.b-cdn.net/18/SID18155.mp3>

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