

Front-Line Folly

by George Verwer

Front-line folly refers to the foolish and ineffective ways in which some missionaries approach their work, often due to a lack of discipline, organization, and prayer.

Duration: 32:50

Scripture: Matthew 6:33, 2 Corinthians 2:11, Ephesians 5:16, Ephesians 6:11, 1 Peter 5:6-8

Topics: "Missionary Work", "Christian Stewardship"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker discusses the folly of missionaries who play around with language study instead of taking it seriously. He shares his observations from visiting OM teams for 27 years and highlights the importance of producing results when living on a limited budget. The speaker also mentions a message he shared with leaders from the Muslim world, titled 'Front Line Folly,' which he couldn't easily share with the public or new recruits. Overall, the sermon emphasizes the need for missionaries to be dedicated and focused on their mission.

Transcript

Let's turn to 1 Peter. I have two messages tonight, that's better than three. Some of you that want to get home early, I have been trying to watch the clock.

The first message, which I have on the notes here, I've never given at any OM conference. I only shared this with the leaders of Frontiers, when Greg Livingston gave me that one opportunity to speak to all of his leaders. These were men all back, mainly from the Muslim world, mainly all leaders, and I shared with them some intimacies that I had picked up working with Operation Mobilization.

It was called Indirect Communication, so I thought I'll never be able to give this to OM, because OMers are my illustrations in this message. The title of the message is Front Line Folly, or Folly on the Front Lines. Have you ever heard that title before? That's pretty new, isn't it? 1 Peter 5.7. In some ways I'd love Submit yourselves unto the elders.

May all of you submit to one another and be clothed with humility. What a beautiful challenge. That's one of the greatest needs in my life.

I know I shouldn't just pray for humility, I've got to humble myself. Be clothed with humility, for God resists at the proud and gives grace to the humble. Humble yourselves therefore unto the mighty hand of God,

that he may exalt you in due time.

As I share some of this, I hope you will be willing, in the Spirit of God conviction, when I speak to myself, to humble yourself. I really wrestled with whether I should speak over the new recruits or should speak here. I have a great love to speak to the new recruits, and last night we went through the seven major emphases of OM.

Some of you have read the leaflet. I felt this was the place I should be tonight, because this particular message we can't really share easily when the public is here, and can't even share it very easily with your new recruits present. This is very much for those of you who have been out on the front line.

It goes on to say, casting all your cares upon him, for he cares for you. Don't you love that? You'll need that for tonight. Be sober and be vigilant, because your enemy, the devil, like a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour.

We're also told in Corinthians not to be ignorant of Satan's devices, and we all know something of what Ephesians 6 says, which is a standard passage of scripture in OM, that I'm not going to take time to read completely. But let's be reminded, it's good to be reminded, of these strong words. We wrestle not against flesh and blood, verse 12, but against principalities, against the powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.

Verse 11 preceding it, just as strong, put on the whole armor of God, you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. Satan, as a roaring lion, seeketh whom he may devour. Front line folly, what do we mean by that? Fooling around, playing around in front line evangelism.

Some of you realize that missionary sending churches, serious churches, really do treat some of you as heroes. Have you ever had the hero treatment back in your home church? Now I know for some of you that doesn't happen. When you get back to your home church, all you get is, who are you? Or what are you doing here? But some of you have good churches and they love you and they believe in missions.

They probably rate you quite high, especially if you're out in the Muslim world. That is becoming very, very significant because more and more the church is acknowledging that the Muslim world represents the largest single entity of unreached people. But even if you're out on the front lines planting churches in Belgium or France or in Austria or in Spain or Italy or certainly India, people think of you as being on the front line.

I sometimes emphasize that. I had a little motivational paper I used to put out years ago called Front Line. Others have used that terminology.

One leader emphasized that there is a sense in which we're all in the front line, spiritually speaking. If you're committed to world evangelism, if you're committed to the Lord Jesus, whether you're in Bromley or Bangkok, you're on the front line. So that helps in the appropriation of this message.

But I think it's important to understand that you don't develop spirituality by making geographical changes. You don't develop spirituality by making geographical changes. And it is possible, and it has happened in O.M., that we have sent people out to front line situations, Turkey, Sudan, India, Bangladesh, Pakistan, communist world.

And when they were there, they engaged or they get tricked by the enemy into what I call front line folly. Sometimes in missionary work we're always challenging people, aren't we? We're teaching people. We're presenting the vision.

One of the purposes of this week is for us to be challenged. One of the reasons I'm always listening to new speakers, almost every week, is so that I can get challenged. And I just think it is good to be open and honest about some of the failure that takes place right out on the cutting edge of world mission.

And you know that we can have a name out there on the mission field. We can have a name that we're alive. We may be considered heroes by our churches.

We may be turning out nice prayer letters. But if we examine our hearts carefully before God, we will have to acknowledge that some of what we are doing or not doing is folly. It's foolishness.

It's playing around at serious things. And it's good for us sometimes to be rebuked. I appreciate the Lord's rebuke.

I appreciate my wife's rebuke most of the time. What do I mean? Let me just share. I don't know how I'm going to fit two messages in tonight.

I'm getting a little nervous about that because this has got ten points. Now let me share the areas where in visiting OM teams, by the way, I've been visiting OM teams regularly for 27 years, more than I used to, even more than now. And I just gleaned this message from just being with OM teams.

I used to visit Turkey every single year. I still visit Pakistan almost every year. Missed a year.

Visited India almost every single year, counting if you count Kathmandu when they come up to be with me or the ship, almost an average of once a year for 25 years. So I have got the foundation for this message from the Word of God, but I've got the meat for the message from watching. I'm a watcher.

From listening. I want to be a better listener. I spend a lot of my time listening.

And these are my observations. Front line folly. Area number one.

I call it playing, playing at language study. Playing at language study. Now if you get a trace of cynicism, forgive me.

But you know when you see it year after year, it breaks your heart. People who are called missionaries by their home churches, huh? And who are financing us. They are financing us.

And to live on \$20,000 a year, as some OM couples do, means that you need to produce. It's as simple as that. A.W. Tozer said any secular business that needed so much raw material to get so little finished product as the Church of Jesus Christ would go bankrupt in six months.

Not an unpleasant quotation, isn't it? And I have observed that in OM so easily, we just play at language study. We spend more time using our own language, fellowshiping with our co-workers in the name of survival or fellowship, or in the midst of romance or whatever else is going on. And we don't go the extra mile to break through and get to grips with that language.

And it is slowing the process of world evangelism down. Now remember I said the first group I shared this with was not OM. So I have no axe to grind against you.

I know some of you have been intensely studying language. I know that people right now in Pakistan, like Don Maxwell and Craig Shugart, John Brown was with them, were intensely studying languages. I also know that no matter how hard you're studying, you can always study more.

Well, you know, that's not what I'm talking about. But believe me, if OM is to fulfill some of the goals that we have set before us, we need a greater, stronger emphasis on language. And that's going to take work.

Tremendous discipline. How can you consider being a missionary without strong discipline? Read some of these old-time missionaries whose books fill our shelves. I don't believe that's all mythology.

I don't believe what I read about Amy Carmichael last night, which I've read before, is mythology. These people were disciplined. They were committed.

Read about that Bishop French and his experiences in Pakistan. Read about Henry Martin. Read about William Carey.

Disciplined mind. Disciplined body. No playing around.

That doesn't mean they didn't have a sense of humor. Doesn't mean they never spoke English or had some fun. I'm not talking about that.

My brothers and sisters, you are only going to get in life what you go at with all your heart. Now, it's always interesting in OM when a rather undisciplined person, and we have a fair number, suddenly in the middle of the first year or the second year, which I prefer, falls in love. That's the scene that I would love to write a book about because that is where the greatest folly of all takes place.

When people throw everything to the wind in one sweep and make their one major goal in life to get that man or to get that woman, whatever the cost. And I will tell you that has cost OM considerable agony in some cases. But generally, they get what they want.

And I can tell you quite a number of them, you can be sure are not on the mission field today. And I can tell you some of them have already been through the divorce court, and I don't consider that a joke. And I pray that you will bring that part of your emotion and that part of your mind under the crucifying power of Jesus Christ, and you will make sure that you move in his guidance, and that it's with wisdom and counsel and understanding.

Don't want to get further into that. I may get to it later, but I just want to make that compelling. Couldn't it be tremendous if people could have that kind of passion for language? I'm going to get that language.

I've fallen in love with Urdu. I've fallen in love with Arabic. I've fallen in love with Persian or French.

I'm going to get that language. I breathe it. I think it.

I'm a fanatic. I'm going to get that language. I'm going to marry Urdu, and we're going to be happy the rest of our life.

You know the problem when an organization or a fellowship gets big is that often too much is being done for us, and you will discover that one of the reasons pioneers in missions were often disciplined men is because what they did determined their entire destiny. Let's not play at language study. I know there are different strategies.

If it is the clear policy of your field that language study only involves one hour a day during your first year because of many factors, all right, when that hour comes, give it everything you've got. Probably the leader wouldn't mind if in your free time, however little you may have, or other times like when you're brushing your teeth, when you're taking a bath, all those different little trivial things you've got to do every day. You were listening to some of that language on tape.

I don't think he would be against you switching some of your Bible study over eventually to that language. Without a little sanctified imagination to go the extra mile, sometimes the OM program can be more hindrance than help. Second area of folly.

Folly in the area of handling time. The Word of God says in the same book Ephesians, redeem the time for the days are evil. I have never ceased to be amazed at how weak many people are in the use of time.

Now we're all different, and I'm more balanced on this, I hope, than I used to be because otherwise I'd produce a lot of neurotics. We're all different, and we know that we've got to learn to be ourselves. We're not wanting you to be unreal.

If you're a more sort of relaxed type of person who just really likes to put your feet up 10 or 20 minutes here and there, different parts of the day, and sort of relax, no one is condemning that. But the Word of God says, whatever you do, do it heartily as unto the Lord. A great man of God in the United States said, the greatest sin of this generation is wasting time.

And I would challenge you to try to be more faithful in using that time. Now maybe some of you women, it takes quite some time to get ready in the morning. I have never comprehended how this works, and I'm not about to condemn women for all the time they take to look so wonderful and beautiful and feel so relaxed and mega motivated and everything else.

But maybe you can memorize some scripture while you're looking in the mirror. Maybe you can listen to some tapes while you're doing something else. There are ways to redeem the time that you can learn and it will become like second nature.

It won't be unreal. It won't be copying somebody. Think of the gift of the walkman.

Incredible. My wife and I had some tremendous walks during our holiday along the Cornish coast. And to redeem the time, I had the Word of God in one ear, and my wife was sharing with me in the other ear, and I tell you, we had a great time together.

Some of you look a little skeptical. I shared that at the field leaders meeting and somebody got up and said, the miracle of George and Dreena's holiday in Cornwall is that when he was listening to the cassette, she didn't push him off the cliff. And I thought I better bring that into balance, that I was only doing that part of the time and a good part of the time.

I didn't have that on at all, and we were just talking and being together. But anyway, I thank the Lord for walkmans. I think the rumor is out that you can actually get a free walkman from me, if you really use it in

this great challenge of redeeming the time.

And listen, this is orientation as well as other things. It's going to take a lot of time just to survive, especially out in Pakistan, Turkey, Sudan, some of those countries. In fact, I often just thank God for being in England because of the kind of work I have to do.

I have minimum amount of time for survival. A high percentage of my day can be completely thrown into the work that burns on my heart. But I have lived in Bombay, I have lived in Mexico with no helpers and no secretaries, going to the market, buying the food, going to the post office, posting the letter.

I have an antithesis for lines and cues that probably need psychoanalysis. It does take time to survive. So you've got to learn, if you're going to get time for winning people to Christ, and I know people on the front line, we're going to get to that in a minute, who ultimately spent little time talking to anybody about Jesus.

And I know people on the front line, we're going to get to that in a minute, who ultimately spent little time talking to anybody about Jesus. Survival makes those demands. And if you're sort of a slow, pokey, lackadaisical type that likes to go through days, forget it.

You're not going to make it. Number three, the third area of front line folly, is the failure to organize. Do you think organizing is just for managers, administrators? Do you think it's only people like somebody who's going to be the director on the Dulas that reads the book *Ordering Your Private World*? No.

Organizing is for everybody. We used to give lectures on organizing yourself to everybody. And we don't always have the time to do that.

But it's amazing to meet people on the front lines who are supposed to be, you know, these are the people who are going to penetrate the world for Christ, plant churches. And they haven't got their act together. They're disorganized.

And often the men are ahead of the women. I remember William McDonald visiting the OM headquarters in Tehran and writing me a letter about it. And he said the place where those men lived was beyond description.

Not just a mess, often the boys' dorms in OM, but the smell. Socks that have been out for days until the little green fungus carry them off down the stairs. And somehow we don't think this is really relevant to true missionary work.

Is it right that you have such an intensive quiet time in the morning when everyone else has to pay the price of your negligence of the basics of life, like cleanliness, neatness, brushing your teeth, or whatever other thing you are struggling with? I have battled this all my life. I'm still a learner. I'm still reading the books.

I'm still repenting. But if I hadn't learned, especially when I lived in Bombay and Nepal and on the ship, how to somehow get some degree of order and organization, I could have never done what I had to do. The fourth area, the fourth front line folly, is what I call playing, playing at.

Little prayer here, little prayer there, little prayer, little prayer. Never get down to real prayer. How can people consider? I notice the growth of the work in greater Europe.

I'm going to say something strong about greater Europe so everybody can get ready. But I want to tell you, if that kind of work, with all of those risks, and with the powers of darkness that just control that part of the world, we know it's true in other parts, if your prayer life and your prayer fellowship is not what it should be, I don't know how you can risk even crossing those borders. And as you know, I've crossed them a few times.

I believe the work for the Muslim world and the work for the communist world have something greatly in common. Only by continued intercessory prayer until it hurts, until it hurts, are we going to break through those two huge obstacles to world evangelism. And of course in the nights of prayer we will find it hard.

Of course a little tiny team in the middle of somewhere is going to find it hard. We cannot play at prayer. It must be a serious commitment where we can exhort one another.

And notice here we have the leadership prayer meeting. If you didn't know that you were invited to that prayer meeting, despite announcements, you know, you're without excuse. So listen, in OM it's good to push doors and see if somebody is expecting more of you than you're giving.

Don't always wait for the number one leader to come and knock on your door since he may be dealing with a hundred doors. Most leaders love people to take the initiative and say, look, do you expect me to be at that leader's and responsible person's prayer meeting? I tell you, if we had more of that, though of course at times there might be problems, everything brings some problems, great things would happen. But you know, if you knew that we have that prayer meeting, it's the only time that as leaders, basically, we come together quarter to seven every night to 730.

It's a strategic time. If you knew about it, but you don't come there, could it be an indication that you also do play a little bit when it comes to prayer? It's not a priority. You have people to talk to.

Fellowship is a priority. Do you have problems to sort out? Do you think the leaders who came there didn't have problems to sort out? Do you think Peter Maiden got any problems to sort out? We do what we really want to do. If we really want to pray, we will get hours in prayer.

Most days I get at least a couple hours in some kind of prayer, maybe private, maybe group. We can't play at prayer. We can't fake it.

We've got to repent. We've got to seek God's face. We've got to get that book Operation World off the shelf, get the cobwebs off it, get the prayer cards up, get the maps of the world, get those prayer letters that are filling up that file and get off for half days of prayer, whole days of prayer, private prayer, group prayer, prayer in twos, prayer in tens, prayer with the church, prayer around the church, under the church, prayer.

You got the point? Let's not play at prayer. And I'll just say this. I think often OM is doing incredibly well in this area compared to some other groups and people that I mingle with.

I am shocked, I am amazed at the lack of prayer in many places. And yet I fear to ever think that we are some great example because we have so much to learn. I hope you'll read this year Wesley Duell's book, Touch the World Through Prayer.

And if you can't get a copy, please ask for one. Number five, the fifth area of frontline folly, is what I call missing opportunities for personal witness. Missing opportunities for personal witness.

Again, I remember in the Muslim world, a lot of my thinking comes from Muslim countries, talking to men, good men, men who I love, and discovering that their life was getting so caught up with other things that they just acknowledged, open to me, they just continually missed opportunities to share Jesus Christ. A word of testimony, a word of love. You know I'm not the kind of person that says we all have to do it the same way.

I believe indirect evangelism is one of the greatest ways. And also I know that at times I've had to hang my head in shame that I have missed God-given opportunities to share my faith in a personal way and to really have a practical, listen, a practical passion for soul. What folly, if after all we do, all the money we spend, do you know how much this operation is costing? Do you know the prices of carrying on OM, the costs of going up, inflation and other things, 10% or more probably every year? We can't get away with what we got away with some years ago, just loading more jobs on the same person.

We've seen people coming apart from working 15 hours a day. We're trying to get balance. We're reading Gordon McDonald's books.

And if you take a man who's doing six jobs and give another person three of his jobs, that's another person that needs full support, there's 10 or 20 thousand dollars that's going to cost. We lack understanding in OM of what things cost, especially hidden costs. And I especially would plea with you to have a little more mercy toward leaders who are doing two or three jobs, because if some of these men and women are doing two or three jobs, they have to spend more money.

They have to spend more money than the man who's just doing one job. You know, I didn't want to go to Iowa in August or the end of July, but these people wanted me there, they prayed about it, and so they insisted that I fly right after Keswick all the way to the middle of Iowa. They gave me a thousand two hundred dollars to cover my flight, eight hundred dollars more as an honorarium for three or four little messages.

Funny economics, but that's the way some people think. And they are very, very happy because there were big results in those meetings, and people repenting, and people recommitting their lives, and leaders rededicated. You know, I don't understand it, I don't even believe necessarily in that philosophy.

I went mainly because we are desperate, we are desperate in the United States to get new doors, new people, new prayer partners, new folk who are going to reach into their pockets and give money for God. And you know one farmer woke me up the last morning, he was banging on the door, he owns one of the biggest farms in that part of Iowa. He got wiped out.

Two million dollars in one hailstorm. But I can tell you he's not interested in farms anymore, although I hope he stays there for a while. He was just so gripped, so gripped by books, and so gripped by the message that he just, you know, was ready to take his whole family and everything, his farm, and just do something perhaps rather foolish.

If we as leaders are going to take extra meetings, if we're going to go the extra mile, if we're going to try to cover people in the midst of enemy attacks, at times it will cost more money. And there's nothing at times that can hit a leader below the belt than the kind of judgmentalism that comes in sometimes in the O.M. when people are caught spending something that someone doesn't feel is good. Taking a plane when he could have taken a rowboat.

Praise the Lord, I don't think there's so much of it now, but we went through great periods of folly in that regard. Moving on to number six, the folly of insensitivity. Here again I have difficulty understanding some of the things, but one of the things that helps me, really helps me, is I've made so many mistakes myself.

Hallelujah, those mistakes can be such stepping stones. Brothers and sisters, we must be careful what we say around the people who live in that country. They are owners of that country, that's their country.

Belgians in Belgium, Turkish people in Turkey. We must be incredibly sensitive about what we say. You don't come into England and go blabbing on about baseball.

English people are not interested in baseball. There may be a few weirdos that are interested in it, but English people are interested in cricket. Not all of them, so don't make that mistake either.

And when you cross the Welsh border, that is a whole special occasion, and you might want to try rugby there. Something else. And we need to beware of the folly of insensitive negative statements about the people of the country where we are serving.

If you don't like something, that may be your privilege, but when you mouth it and make it public, it often is more hurtful than you know, because most people love their countries. This is also true internationally. And the insensitive statements that come out against one another's country are not helpful.

South Africans especially suffer in OM. Americans have to continually be reminded that their president is a warmonger. The British have to continually be reminded that they were once the great colonial overlords.

And the insensitive jokes have hurt a lot of people, and some of those people are no longer with us because they said, I just can't live with this anymore. Am I some kind of monster? I'm supposed to be indwelt by the Holy Spirit, but I'm being treated like some kind of dead fish. Insensitivity toward culture, insensitivity toward the people we're living with.

Now at the same time, all of us must be mature enough to receive insults. It's going to happen. First of all, most people never hear a message like this, or a lot.

Secondly, even when we do, it doesn't mean it happens in our life overnight, does it? We all say things, and after we say it, we try to grab it back. I'm certainly in that camp. But praise the Lord, we can make a renewed emphasis to deal with the folly of insensitive statements about other people, their nation, their culture, their language.

And we don't have to lose our sense of humor. And meanwhile, if someone does say something insensitive about you and about your country, learn how to let love cover, because I tell you, this is a long road. It's a long road for most of us.

I am still a poor, struggling foreign missionary, despite all my desires to be in England, and identify with England, and we've accepted probably we're immigrants and going to live there the rest of our life. But I'm learning so much about England, and when I go to Scotland, I have other things to learn, and when I go to Wales, other things to learn, and when I go to Ulster. That is all there is of this recording.

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/george-verwer/front-line-folly/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net