

George Verwer at Spring Commencement

by George Verwer

Dr. George Verwer inspires graduates to pursue a life of mission, love, and proactive faith in service to God and others.

Duration: 20:28

Scripture: Galatians 2:20

Topics: "Missions Work", "Christian Service"

Description

This sermon honors Dr. George Verwer for his lifelong dedication to missions, emphasizing his impact on mobilizing Christians globally. It highlights his commitment to seeking God's kingdom first, gratitude, grace, dealing with failure, embracing love, suffering, and being proactive in serving the Lord despite challenges.

Transcript

Last night we had the pleasure of awarding an honorary Doctor of Divinity degree to a dedicated follower of Christ, Christian brother and friend of Biola University, Dr. George Verwer. I'd also like to welcome some of his friends that are here today as well. I've asked Dr. Doug Penoyer, Dean of the Cook School of Intercultural Studies, to help introduce our commencement speaker this morning.

Dr. Penoyer. Dr. George Verwer, along with his wife, Drina, has devoted his entire life to missions. He has lived with a global passion that has inspired, multiplied tens of thousands of young people, students, pastors, national leaders, missionaries, and churches to discover, in the words of the preeminent theologian, Dr. John Stott, the living God is a missionary God.

From his early days as a student at Moody Bible Institute and in the same graduating class with our own Doug Hayward, and later as founder of Operation Mobilization OM, George Verwer has challenged, preached, taught, pleaded, prayed, agitated, cajoled, and mobilized the church for action. He was a visionary pioneer of the short-term missions movement and has sent millions of ordinary Christians worldwide into short- and long-term mission service. This year, from America alone, 2.4 million Christians will go on short-term mission trips.

Under Dr. Verwer's revolutionary leadership, Operation Mobilization has proclaimed Christ by word and deed in over 110 countries. Since its founding in 1957, tens of thousands of short- and long-term workers have served with OM, and with a current international core of 5,400 workers, it is one of the largest

mission agencies in the world. Through George's leadership, OM advanced a revolution of love, fostering innovative ministries through careers in medicine, literature, media, art, relief and development, business leadership development, church planting, the use of ocean-going ships, and practical demonstrations of love around the world.

George's bold obedience to Christ has left a legacy at OM that is characterized by the desire to go to the least unreached areas of the world pioneering entries in order to connect with the world's least evangelized people groups. Dr. George Verwer is a man committed to the power of the word of God and of the written word. As founder of Send the Light Publications and OM Literature, George Verwer is responsible for a massive worldwide literature ministry that has provided free and inexpensive gospel literature to hundreds of thousands of people and inspired Christians to love the Lord with their mind and heart.

Over his many years of missions work, writing, traveling, speaking to crowds around the globe, George has never lost his love for the individual in the midst of the crowd. He has been a true friend. Thousands of people have received letters, emails, phone calls of personal encouragement from George Verwer.

Dr. George Verwer has modeled missional spirituality, a life lived for others, and a spirituality of the road. In daring to walk the path of transparency, weakness, boldness, and humility, George Verwer has given hope to a broken generation that even hurting people can be redeemed and be fruitful in ministry. In doing so, he has allowed the treasure of Christ to shine forth in an earthen vessel.

Wherever he goes, and he goes many places, he has the nations on his heart and in his prayers. Wearing his trademark map of the world jacket and his huge inflatable globe, Dr. Verwer has lifted the church's eyes to see the world as God sees it, and emboldened us to plead with the Lord of the harvest to thrust out laborers into his harvest field. What kind of laborers? Not the perfect ones, but the willing ones, consecrated lives willing to go anywhere, do anything, pay any price for the glory of God.

For all of these qualities and more, in this 25th anniversary year of the founding of what is now the Clyde and Annabelle Cook School of Intercultural Studies, Dr. George Verwer stands as a model for this generation, for this graduating class of 2009 of a man who has mobilized a generation and served the purposes of God in his generation, a humble servant whose passion for Christ and for his global cause have impacted the world for our Lord Jesus Christ. And now would you please welcome our commencement speaker, Dr. George Verwer. Thank you.

I've had about 20,000 meetings since my conversion and this is certainly in the top 10, and I have come to love this university and hope I can send a few hundred students your way in the years to come. We have so many Biola graduates in OM, we can't even keep track of them, that's for sure. But I especially thank God for the day on this campus I met Bill and Terry Drake, who's had such a great influence in our ministry and developed a tremendous global ministry himself.

I got very linked with many of you during the missions conference, and I know some of you are still recovering and trying to figure out still why I poured all that water over me, but you learn at college that some things you just do. I did it again last week in a Spanish church, but in the right time when I was speaking about the impure water problem and I poured a little less water, the impact was huge and they took an offering of 5,000 pounds, dollars. It was Miami, a Spanish service.

I just thank God for each one of you. I want to thank those of you who have emailed me, those of you who have come onto my Facebook, you have to go in my Spanish name now, my English name is full, and it's cost me many thousands of dollars. Those of you who have responded to my various invitations, may all cynics who didn't believe that would happen repent at this time.

I especially count it a privilege to be back in my own country. I've lived overseas 48 years, I haven't even been able to get on that furlough yet, but it's special to be here on Memorial Day weekend. And every time I return to America, I travel here about seven times a year.

I am more thankful for this country where my grandfather and father came as immigrants from the Netherlands, and where I came to know Jesus Christ because we're a nation that allows such freedom and religion. And I think all of us would do well to remember on this weekend, those that lay down their lives for our country, and those that are laying down their lives right now in Iraq, Afghanistan, and other places. God put, amen.

Actually, God put Afghanistan on my heart when I was a student at Moody 51 years ago, and I'd ask you to pray for that still one of the most unreached nations in the world. God has put on my heart to give all of you graduates seven words. That means about two minutes or less per word, so you may want to fasten your holy ghost safety belt.

If you somehow can remember these words a year from now and email me, you'll get seven fantastic books worth about a hundred dollars sent anywhere in the world, in any one of several hundred languages. And we hope all of you will learn a couple of more languages in the years to come. The first word, of course, is all centered around the scripture reading we just had, and especially this great verse, the 33rd verse of chapter 6 of Matthew.

But these, Matthew 6, 33. But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be provided for you. I guess I was about 17 or 18.

I'd just come to Christ through reading a gospel of John sent to me by a wild praying elderly woman and a meeting with Billy Graham in Madison Square Garden, a one-night stand where 20,000 people were involved. And shortly after that, through reading his book, Peace with God, and other godly influences, especially through radio like Dr. Donald Gray Barnhouse and others, I made this commitment to seek first the kingdom of God. A huge thing for me is I had a passion for money.

I already owned three little businesses. My bigger passion was for girls. I had already gone, I guess, on my 32nd girlfriend.

And for me to pray that prayer was a pretty heavy thing. With it, I prayed, and it seems I know extreme. I want one thing in life, God.

I want to know how to pray. I believe that Billy Graham was a man of prayer. I believe that his ministry could only be explained through prayer, and I wanted to be a person of prayer.

And by God's grace, every day since that prayer, I've continued to learn something of prayer. My first word is the word goal, and my challenge from the scriptures is to make God your number one goal. Always beware when you make that commitment of various forms of super spirituality, even subtle forms of legalism, which I managed to get into.

And I pay tribute to so many people who helped bring common sense and balance into my life, especially missionaries with the Wycliffe Bible translators. I also wanted to mention the name of Dr. Ralph Winter, who this Saturday night went to be with Jesus. Probably one of the most influential missiologists in the world today, who helped me with all my different visions stay more focused on the more unreached people of the world.

And I want to urge you in the next few days to spend some time considering your goals for the future. Don't be a drifter. Don't become one more sort of even jellyfish floating with the tide.

Determine that you will be focused. Determine that you will have specific goals and aims, even if some of them seem small. For every character like me that's had a lot of big visions, a lot of big dreams, seen some of them come to pass, there has to be an army of people with smaller goals, smaller visions, who work behind the scenes.

And I honor every member of the body of Christ, and all of you who are here today who love the Lord Jesus. Let's remember God has not just called us to evangelize the world, which of course is my passion, but he's called us to build the kingdom wherever we are. And those of you in business and politics and education and agricultural and the arts and sports, you are also a vital part of what God is doing.

My second word is the word thanks. I believe this is a time of thanksgiving. I thank God for this university.

I thank God for the Christian college and the Bible college movement. I've actually written a booklet about this. All over the world, I've spoken in Christian colleges and Bible colleges for some 52 years.

It is one of the greatest movements of the Holy Spirit in the world today. And we honor those of you who are involved. We give thanks for those of you who have run the race and are now graduating.

God bless you. May your heart be filled with thanksgiving. I don't know if any of you are a bit like I was.

Lots of struggles, lots of doubts, potential cynicism. Many of you know some of my stories and some of the stupidity that I engaged in. Some of you may remember when I was in Pakistan and I was crying out to God to become a more positive person and to deal with my negative streak.

I didn't want to become the Darth Vader of the evangelical world. And then I had to speak at this important meeting and an OM leader said, could you be careful known for offending people? The Bishop was going to be there. He begged me to be more careful in my message.

Okay. Then someone else came and asked if I could dress properly. Not known for my good dress.

This was pre global jacket days. And so there I was standing in the cathedral. The Bishop was in front of me.

I had a suit and tie on. I looked like an undertaker and I was really trying hard. And as I spoke, a pigeon flew over me and dropped its load on my sleeve in front of the Bishop.

Typical, huh? Negative thinkers. But God was doing a new thing in me. And I looked at the crowd and I said, praise God, the elephants don't fly around here.

My third word is the word grace. It's been a long pilgrimage for me, a very focused choleric temper temperament, natural backslider to somehow understand not only grace, the grace expressed when God

sent his son to die on the cross for me, that was easier for me to comprehend though I'm still learning. But the grace awakening that Charles Swindoll talks about in his brilliant book by that title.

Also books like Calvary Road and the writings of Eugenia Price. And I just thank God for people that have been so patient and so loving toward me in the midst of some of my folly, struggling with anger, a good part of my life, but somehow getting a control of it when I was only 19 years of age and God sent me to Mexico and taught me about personal revival and taught me how to deal with the self-life. And if you're graduating and haven't yet learned how to deal with the self-life, display your diploma.

You are going to have lots of headaches in the future. Remember those words of Galatians 2.20, I am crucified with Christ. Nevertheless, I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth within me.

May that be your motto as graduates moving out into this challenging world in which we all live. And then the fourth word is the word failure. Praise God, you did not fail, you are graduating.

But in the future, you may have some failures. And I hope you'll remember failure can be the back door to success. Don't be afraid to fail.

Don't be intimidated when you do fail. When I first went to Europe, my vision was Muslim world, communist world, closed countries, but that's not really what God had on his mind. And he used my failure, smuggling Bibles into the Soviet Union, caught by the KGB, accused of being an American spy.

The whole thing ended in disaster, confiscating my Russian typewriter and everything we had hidden in the car. I went for a day of prayer, but broken before God. And that's when the Lord gave me the name Operation Mobilization.

That's when God gave me the vision to get involved in Britain and Germany and Sweden, where the church was relatively strong. By the next summer, 200 people joined OM. By the next summer, 2,000 people joined OM.

And since then 140,000 people, including many Biola students, have served with Operation Mobilization. Don't be afraid to fail. Don't be intimidated by failure.

And then my sixth word, one, two, three, four, my fifth word. I need to go back to kindergarten is the word love. And I commend to you those words of 1st Corinthians 13, which for me is the most important passage in my Bible, because especially before my conversion, I had this anger streak.

My grandfather was an atheist. My other grandfather was a drunk and I was starting on the road of addiction to pornography at 16 years of age. When Jesus saved me and this revolution of love, I've written a book by that title, would love to send it to you as a gift with six other books or 20 free books, if you're a big reader.

And I'm still working on that revolution. I thank God for a wife. And some of you know the story of how God gave me that amazing woman and for the way she has stood with me.

And next year, we celebrate our 50th wedding anniversary. If a character like me, if a character like me can be faithful and loyal and committed totally to one woman for my entire life, then I believe no one has an excuse for the moral impurity that so is and so invading our society. And would ask you to make one of your goals, total moral purity throughout your entire life.

And then my fifth word is the word, my sixth word. Ah, you're so loving and patient. You should have been here last night.

But my sixth word is the word suffering. And I want to just encourage you in these closing moments, as hard as it may be to, to embrace suffering. There will be suffering on the road ahead.

Where do you read that Jesus promised an easy road. And as we look out across the world today, how can we forget DA for how can we forget HIV AIDS? How can we forget what women are going through? Many of you received my free book on that subject, true grit by Debbie Meroff and how I would long to give away another a hundred thousand copies of that book, which became my book of the year and my book of the decade. Yes, we have to learn to embrace suffering.

Some of you may have found your time at Biola difficult. Maybe you leave even in certain ways with mixed emotion and a heavy heart. Maybe you also are a bit disillusioned with the church of Jesus Christ, maybe your own local church.

I would encourage you to understand more how God works. God works through messy situations. God works through complication.

God works through wars through heartaches. And I pray that you may have a more big hearted, a more grace awakened, a more discerning understanding of the way God works in the world today and therefore become a more positive, outgoing, constantly thanking God kind of person. And my seventh word is the word proactive.

I know I read a book that this word is now out of date, but forgive me, I'm a little older than the average. By the way, how many of you are grandparents? I entered into that very quickly and I'm still shaking. How many grandparents? God bless you.

Aren't they wonderful, your grandchildren? I have five. Tony Campolo said grandchildren is God's prize to you for not killing off your own kids. But I want to just close by saying whatever heartbreaks come your way, and we've had many, we've had people murdered, we lost one of our ships, we've had struggles and difficulties that there's not, of course, time to talk about.

And with all my heart I believe God wants us, whatever comes our way, to stay proactive, be steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, for your labor is not in vain in the Lord. God bless you. Hallelujah.

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