

Q+a Toronto Blessing

by George Verwer

George Verwer discusses the complexities and controversies surrounding the Toronto Blessing and the seeker-sensitive movement in churches today.

Duration: 30:20

Scripture: Psalm 14:2, Psalm 123:1, Matthew 28:19-20, Acts 2:44-45, Colossians 1:27, 1 Timothy 3:16, 1 Peter 2:2

Topics: "Toronto Blessing"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker, Benny, emphasizes the importance of being slow to speak negatively about any child of God. He encourages speaking out against extremism without mentioning specific names. Benny believes that the basics of the Christian faith, such as preaching the gospel and seeing people saved, are radical and should be the focus of believers. He also highlights the need for divine intervention in missions giving and the decline of British missionaries. Overall, Benny urges listeners to build on their faith and represent Jesus in their lives.

Transcript

Who would like to be asked the daring first question? Our dynamite Andre, isn't it Andre? Adrian from Albania. Does this happen only in the churches or in the streets too? I haven't heard of it happening in the streets. That sounds exciting.

It mainly seems to be happening in churches. And again, I think those of you who are trying to make this clear, that in most places it seems to be only happening in certain churches, but in Great Britain it especially has happened in at least a couple thousand churches to varying degrees. Let me just say this again.

In Great Britain, and it will happen in other countries, this is a big issue. It's a big issue, therefore we can't put it under the carpet. We can't say, we're not going to talk about this.

At the same time, for some people, when I talk to them, they say, this is no big deal. This has been going on in my church for 20 years. The fact is, my church still hasn't grown.

We have more problems than 16 drunken cockroaches on a ski trip. So, you know, I don't think... There's just such a wide range, such a wide range of viewpoints and opinions. Someone else.

At least you seem to be all set up for the laughing. Yeah, good and loud. That is a beautiful issue.

Many are asking that question. There are some beautiful answers. I'll repeat the question.

I mentioned that it is messy. Why, basically to sum up, correct me if I'm wrong, why does God choose to work this way, in such an awkward, messy way that's so hard to explain to some people? Is that more or less what you ask? Of course I am wrestling with this. And it's interesting that parallel with this in Britain and other countries is the movement, strong movement on being seeker-sensitive.

The Willow Creek emphasis on being seeker-sensitive. How in the world is this happening in churches going to be put together with being seeker-sensitive? I mean, it would be very hard to imagine this happening in a Willow Creek service. Kevin here is from Willow Creek.

Willow Creek church service is a very orderly affair, a very professional affair, isn't it? But it could be that some of these churches, I'm not saying this, but it could be that these things will happen in smaller meetings. Seeker-sensitive. It's good, you know, my generation knows some of these things.

One of the biggest phenomenas in the church growth movement is what is expressed by Willow Creek. Willow Creek is a church outside Chicago, started with a few dozen people. Phenomenal growth.

With many emphases, but one of them is seeker-sensitive. What does it mean? We are aiming our message, our work, our everything at the unsaved. And we're going to do everything possible not to unnecessarily offend unconverted people.

John MacArthur is so upset with it, he's written a whole book against it. Of course, that's John. He's good into that.

I don't think he did his homework 100% before he wrote that book. And I have been involved in seeker-sensitive meetings. There's a church in Grand Rapids.

They have a seeker-sensitive service on Saturday night. On Sunday, they're a very traditional church. On Saturday night, it's just wild.

And there are all the gays, there are the lesbians, there are the drunks, there are the unconverted. They like the Saturday night service. I got only, what, 17 minutes to speak.

I could dress the way I wanted. They had a good rock and roll band. And people are getting converted all over the place.

And this guy is a very conservative man. He used to be with Jerry Falwell. Before that, he was with Bob Jones.

I mean, you can't get more conservative than that. So he has changed. Now he's into George Burwer tapes.

So it's going to be interesting how these two parallels fit, because the British churches have flocked to the Willow Creek meetings. They have these Willow Creek meetings in Britain and all over the world now. They just flock to them.

Hundreds of British churches are taking things from the Willow Creek teaching and trying to implement it in their churches. Now how this is going to all fit together, I don't know. But back to the original question.

I think one of the keys is that when God works, our humanity is always there. The good, the bad. Otherwise, how can you explain 26,000 denominations? How can you explain that people are getting so wonderfully saved in Brazil in groups that have cuckoo doctrine? Why is God saving anybody in churches that don't have sound, solid doctrine? Well, when I get to heaven, I will ask Him.

But I was again reading this morning in Ephesians what God has saved us from. It's a pretty big mess. And I think when we're saved, we bring part of that mess with us.

I will tell you, if I don't see in the next six months, and I'm in the middle on the Toronto thing. I'm in the middle. But if I don't see in the next six months large numbers of people coming to Jesus as a result of these claims, then I tell you, I'm going to be very, I don't know, I don't know.

It will just prove to me that a lot of it is just human. It's just human. And most of the leaders, do you know what they're saying? It's not revival.

And people who are into that kind of revival, they've often been very critical of Billy Graham. Oh, Billy Graham's superficial. That's not the real revival.

That's just, so Billy has always been very careful not saying what he does is revival. He calls it evangelism. But I will tell you, as many people have come to Jesus through Billy Graham, then a lot of these revivals all put together.

So to me, it's not either or. You know, are we going to have the repeat of the Ralph's revival? Or are we going to have Billy Graham in and evangelists? To me, I don't like to put these things at odds with each other. It's not either or.

God uses both. And the word revival is a tricky word that actually means different things in different cultures, even within the English-speaking world. That's a tough one as well.

If you think you have a few intellectual problems here when we talk about things openly and honestly, you know, just try theological college for a couple of years. And when they spend the whole, you know, three weeks looking at predestination. You'll come out really screaming.

But believe me, God is God. God is bigger than all of it. He's bigger than all of it.

He's greater than all of it. Yeah. Good and loud if you can.

No, I think that's a real tricky thing. Repeat the question. Is there danger in all this when we don't feel happy about something that's happening? That we're sinning against the Holy Spirit and then, you know, the ultimate.

You mentioned the ultimate thing when you sin against the Holy Spirit. Yeah, you blaspheme against the Holy Spirit and then you can't be forgiven. Is that what you were referring to? I personally don't believe that believers can do that.

I mean, believers are sealed. The Spirit of God lives in them. They're going to heaven.

And I would be in the camp that believers are not going to sin to that degree against the Holy Spirit. I think the people who are very strong for these phenomena try to follow this. When the opposition gets them in a corner, you know what I mean? That's what they come out with.

That's their ultimate bomb. That you are grieving the Holy Spirit, brethren. You better be mighty careful of that.

Remember this morning what I said about intimidation? That's the ultimate intimidation. And if somebody tries that with you, you just growl. You believe, you know, I'm into animal noises.

You just growl. Because don't let people intimidate you simply because you are asking questions. And if we were not asking questions about this, that would be, I believe, a much more grievous thing.

The cults tell you, turn off your mind. The Witness Lee Extremist Local Church cult, out of California mainly, they taught, turn off your mind, turn off your mind. And other cults, turn off your mind.

Tonight's meeting is to turn on your mind. If later on God meets you in some little church, in your emotions, I think it would be a safer situation. Having been here tonight, thought through this issue, you can read, of course, much more.

But this really, I believe, grieves the Lord when we get in that ultimate situation and we start claiming that the opposition is from the devil. It's not that simple. Life is more complex.

And I think the human factor and psychological factors, we are psychological, emotional beings. Things are happening among us as human beings that men and women have been trying to understand for hundreds of years and they still can't do the whole area of psychosomatic illnesses. And I know some people quickly, they paint Satan over everything.

I don't think that is the exact picture, though in some of these things Satan, of course, can be involved. His best method is simply get us all discouraged. Get us all discouraged.

That's more effective than many other methods. Yes, those who are presenting and promoting this or talking about it, they have their verses. They have verses of, if you go through the Old Testament, I mean, people are getting zapped.

All kinds of things are happening. And in the New Testament. I mean, you know, you go in a church, there's Ananias and Sapphira.

Boom! He's dead. Cheerio. Boom! And Sapphira, she's gone.

Carry him out. You know, there are a few high-level emotional things going on in the New Testament. So, you know, I'm not saying that proves, you know, that this is all straight from God.

That's not what I'm saying. I'm just presenting that as that side of the argument. If we say there's nothing whatsoever biblical.

Now, the uncontrolled laughing, they certainly are having difficulty finding some scriptures on that one. And they admit that. But the tears, the falling down, they got quotes out of Jonathan Edwards, they got quotes out of Wesley, quotes out of... Those for and against this are quoting Westfield, Wesley, Jonathan Edwards.

Each one is taking different quotes from these different people and making them say what they want to say. I mean, this is controversy. We have to, especially as an interdenominational group, face the reality.

There is controversy in the church. That must not frighten us. But certainly at times it is discouraging.

Let me just say one of the first line-up persons with Lagos, seeing all the chaos in the churches in Indonesia, being a bit lonely, got drawn into the Witness League Group in Hong Kong. And by the time he got out of it, his marriage was finished. And it was one big sad tale.

So beware of, because of things you may see in the churches, wherever you go on this ship, somehow thinking there is some sweet, total, nice answer to all of this. Or beware, on the other hand, as in my case, of allowing your doubts to start to really pound you. Brothers and sisters, great faith is not in the absence of doubt.

Great faith is in the midst, often, of doubts. And that's partly what faith is all about. Yeah, well, I wish I had all the money spent on air tickets, I must confess.

Again, I think we have to face the reality of the world in which we live. It is very easy to be critical. I'm trying to be positive, though I find many of these things very, very difficult.

But it is not much in our world for a British person to go to Canada. Thousands go for a holiday. Germans go to the Costa Brava.

Finns go to Mallorca. Maybe not your parents. Maybe they were not able to afford that.

But we got to look at the world in general. And believe me, just for me to go to Dubai and now here to come to Cyprus for a weekend, that's not the way I functioned back in the 70s or the 80s. But I'm trying to be contextualized in the world in which I live.

And one of the ways God pushed me to come here, and this is obvious, you're not saying this is Christian tourism, I'm just using this as a comparison of the world we live in. As I was watching a travel thing on television, they now have packaged tours from Italy to Venice one day. One day.

You fly in the morning, you have six hours looking at Venice, the plane back in the afternoon and you're in Gatwick. And if these people for a little sightseeing can fly to Venice for one day, and the tickets are very cheap, then I thought, Lord, I'm willing to go to Cyprus for a weekend. And it ended up a bit of a long weekend.

So on that point, these people, I think we need to understand, we may not agree with them, but many of them are sincere people. They want God's blessing. They want revival.

And if they hear of revival breaking out in some part of the world, I can see where some people, I'm not saying I agree, but I'd be slow to condemn them because maybe they went there for a holiday or whatever and visited and saw what happened and then brought back the story to others. This is the way many good things have traveled across the world. Aren't we trying to be missions mobilizers? A whole bunch of us are going to Korea.

We hate to spend that money. And we're getting criticized as well because we're hoping something big is going to happen in Korea that is going to spread all over the world. And that's my prayer for this phenomena that's going on right now that somehow it will be channeled into evangelism, into missions, into things that are biblical and that we clearly see in the New Testament.

Yes, over here. Boy, we're getting a lot of questions. We don't hear much about Benny lately.

I don't know why. He's in certain circles. He has his own big church.

We've had Morris Sorello back in London this summer. He's into pretty heavy things. That's also mega controversial.

But I really can't say what the latest is on Benny Hinn except these things are definitely dividing God's people. And OM is one of the groups, more than any group in the world, that is attempting the impossible to keep people from these different churches. We have people from Brazil that have been blessed in the ministry of Benny Hinn.

He's very influential in Brazil and Argentina. What are we going to say? You can't come on our ship. You've been blessed by this Benny Hinn.

Don't you know his book had some wrong doctrine? I don't think that's God's approach to these complexities. Yeah, I had one of the privileges to be able to go to one of these meetings. With my background, I'm not used to this sort of stuff.

So I kind of went out of curiosity to watch, basically. When I came back, I was mega confused. But I think that through this day, God's brought different people to me.

But I have one question to you. One of the things that people have told me is that God wants to bless us as Christians because a lot of us feel like the end times are near. And I personally would agree with that.

But he wants this church to be purified and to be ready when he returns. And so I think emotional healing is something that is really big in today's society. I know in my life that it's something I need.

And automatically when something like this happens, if they're going to say this is going to bring emotional healing by the Holy Spirit coming in and really pulling this out, then automatically I'm curious and I want to see what it's about. So what do you think about this, George? I mean, what's the answer to this? I think, of course, this is normal for especially some people. We're hungry for God.

We're very conscious at times of our own failure. Also on this ship, we at times are in a fairly high-pressure environment in which we become vulnerable to emotional ups and downs, to loneliness, to struggles in the area of sexuality, which I really believe we need to be talking about more. And so we become at times vulnerable to the quick fix.

Now, I don't believe that's the way to go. That doesn't mean that God couldn't bless you in a meeting. We had people up here a couple of weeks ago being blessed, but it was in the context very clearly that when you go from here, you've got to be ready to deny self, take up the cross, and follow Jesus.

So I'm not against crisis experiences, but no one is going to have complete emotional healing through one experience. It has to be a process. That might be a key, but it will have to be a process.

I unfortunately have the problem of looking back over all these years. So many people have had so many crises. At the end of the day, they were still defeated people.

In fact, some of the leaders, some of the leaders have chucked the whole thing. So I don't believe that there's one quick fix. Even salvation is not sort of a quick fix, that after you're saved, you live happily ever after and everything is wonderful.

Salvation is redemption. You're saved. You're born again.

That's big. Christ is in you. The Holy Spirit is in you.

That is major. The potential is there for godly living, for holiness. But you have to grow.

Talk about babes in Christ. Talk about the milk of the Word. I hope that this challenge we've had tonight will drive us into the Scriptures.

Drive us into the Scriptures. And especially into the New Testament, because I think it's dangerous if people just grab things out of context, out of the Old Testament, because that's how the big church in Thailand, the guy grabbed teaching on concubines and took several concubines and split that big church. That's 20 years ago, not any big church you're thinking about right now.

So I would urge you to get into the epistles, get into the New Testament. And that, I think, generally you can't go wrong, more than all the other books, as much as I love books. This is not a book here, in that sense.

This is the Word of God. At the same time as you go to different churches, as you're exposed to different things, I believe there's scope for the Holy Spirit to at times do some unusual things. One of our concerns, because we've been in this a long time, when people start focusing on the emotional, we find the next step is they're focusing on the demonic.

And that, in the past, has led to real confusion in some teams, that have split the team, that have left many people confused and depressed. And in the last couple of years, since having a statement on this, and again going the middle road, we have seen some people help when something was really, obviously, clearly the enemy getting in there. But we've had a lot more down-to-earth spiritual and biblical balance in OM, and we've been able to move forward and see tremendous things happen.

So again, in all of this, I'm sure for some at least, some of you don't want to hear anything more about this, you've got other agendas and other things, but for many others it will be ongoing dialogue. And that's what life is about. And I go back to a country, Great Britain, with a lot of interesting things to face myself in the coming months.

Yeah, right here. We're going to end at 9.30 sharp. I'm from a church, and on this moment, when I first joined the ship, in the church itself it was really good, but by the youth group there was a bit of coldness, it was not really on fire.

But later on, I received some letters that normally it's growing, the spiritual is always a little bit growing with that, but now it was from one time straight up to the top, with all those things that you just mentioned. But now you can say that in my youth group there is a big radicality on this moment. It's a real fire.

So, I mean, that's really a blessing. Yeah. Did Benny Hinn ever apologize about the book Good Morning, Holy Spirit? And the second one is, is there any major argument within the leadership, you know, about this, such issue? About the... Oh yeah, well, it's a hot point.

Frank Fortunato has been up to Toronto, of course, Vineyard Church to check things out. He's a Pentecostal, his father is the founder of a Pentecostal denomination. Frank, I think, found it quite balanced, the way he thinks and what he saw there.

I mean, I think some people, some of you, it still hasn't dawned on you, we are totally interdenominational. Some of you think we're anti-charismatic, some of you think we're anti-evangelical, some of you just think we're crazy. We are interdenominational.

As leaders, we don't agree on all these different issues, but it has not hindered us from working together because our passion is to win lost men to Jesus Christ and to take the gospel to the unreached. And another beautiful thing to keep in mind, you're only going to be in OM for a year or two. Sure, some of you don't like some of the rules, don't like the middle road, don't like this, don't like that.

Look, it's all going to be over before you know it. So why don't you behave as maturely as you possibly can, cooperate with us as leaders as much as you can, and down the road there'll be many other experiences, many other opportunities. You might end up as Benny Hinn's apprentice and carry his suitcase.

I think Benny has apologized for some things in his book. Changes have been made in that book. Benny has sold that one mega expensive car that he was boasting about and bought something a little cheaper.

The score is in heaven. I want to be very slow to speak a negative word about any child of God anywhere. There's plenty of things that I don't like, I can assure you.

But I want to be careful. At the same time, we can speak out without mentioning people's names. Sometimes I do, and I try to say it in a balanced way.

But we can speak out still very strongly against extremism without necessarily mentioning names. We've got five minutes to go. We very strongly believe that the basics, the dynamic basics of the Christian faith that we can unite on in a group like this, they are radical.

They are hot. What we're doing in sailing into Djibouti next week makes some of that blessing in British churches where people are very comfortable, where they all go out afterward and have their nice meal, and where they all continue in their nice cars and their nice homes. Nobody's selling any possessions as it was in Acts 2. Contrarywise, we're building better buildings, and we're putting more money in the banks, and missions giving in Great Britain is just dropping, dropping, and dropping.

And British missionaries, the numbers are dropping, and it's going to get worse if we don't see divine intervention. So I think it's very important to understand that these basics, preaching the gospel, seeing people saved, sometimes seeing people healed, seeing people make Christ Lord as they do in these meetings, and as they do on shore, people completely turned around, seeing people start to give their money, all kinds of things we are seeing. They are the heart of the radicalness of the book of Acts.

And that's why for 35 years, people from many different backgrounds and denominations, you know, not only come on OM, but now many hundreds of them stay here, even for life. So I don't think we should think that a special blessing in a church where somebody laughs, and somebody cries, and somebody rolls on the floor, that is really radical. But in OM, we're sort of just going along, doing the same old thing.

I will tell you, it's not that way at all. And the new birth, the message of the resurrection, the fullness of the Holy Spirit, when we gave that invitation up here a couple of weeks ago, people came forward weeping, people came forward crying, people were filled with the Spirit, people went from there, some of them directly, to witness for Christ. At the same time, we have chosen a very hard road, the road of discipleship and commitment, dying to self, all this kind of thing we've talked about.

It's a hard road. And the Word teaches, seems to teach many, when they see the cost, they turn and they go back. So I believe, to some degree, some of these things in the church, they're good, they may be good, they're just the beginning.

They're just the beginning. And we've got to get beyond that. We've got to get beyond that, into radical, biblical discipleship, with all that that brings.

And believe me, being on a ship demands a few more rules than some land team up in the middle of Central Asia. We've got to face the limitation of 250 people living on a ship. But as you get on shore, you get in other aspects of OM, you'll find, as you're working with different kinds of churches, you'll find, believe me, my sister, a lot of wild things going on.

And, of course, some of them we have to close down. But some of them, they do cause no small stir. Well, we're going to end on that point.

Praise God for these questions, for the privilege of gathering in this way. If some of you want more information on this, you can write to me and I'll send you more. And let's believe that whatever we see the Spirit of God doing in our midst, that we will see it building our unity, not destroying our unity.

Let's pray. Brother Costas MacRees, what a privilege to have you here. I'm humbled you're sitting there listening to me go on and on.

Come up here and lead us in a Spirit-filled prayer. All these young people, some are leaving within the next few days, some in six months, some in a year. And we're praying God is going to bring many, many more people to the ship.

Amen. Just lead us in prayer. Loving Jesus, we thank You for Your mercy.

When You looked down from heaven and You saw us, and You pitied us, and You had love and compassion for us. When we lifted up our eyes in faith and put our trust in You, this was the most radical thing that ever happened or will ever happen again in our life, Lord Jesus. Help us to build on that, Lord Jesus.

And help us to allow You to form Your image in us. Help us to walk with You that when people see us, they can say, Jesus went by here. May we represent You, Lord Jesus, with our life and our walk.

Help us in our homes to be better husbands. Help us in our homes to be better kids. Help us in our churches to be faithful.

Help us, Lord Jesus, to carry out the command to go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. Jesus did not tell us too many other things. You gave us a simple commandment.

And if we don't obey on that, Lord Jesus, what's the use of all the rest? Help us to be faithful in that. Help us to go. Because our flesh doesn't want to go.

Because our whole nature doesn't want to go. We don't want to suffer. We want the good things of life.

We want comfort. We don't want suffering. We want self.

We don't want to give up self, Lord Jesus. We want to live for ourselves, Lord Jesus. We confess this tonight before You, Lord Jesus.

This is my flesh every day. I have to battle that. And I have to look to You, Lord Jesus, to ask You to help me to live for You.

To be like You. And some day to be able to say like Paul, Be like me as I'm like Jesus. Oh God, may our life point to Jesus.

Help us to be real disciples. Help us, Lord Jesus, to keep in the centrality of the message and of Your command. Help us not to turn right or left, but straight Your eyes and faithful to the end.

Not counting the cost. Not asking for anything. But just give everything to Your precious hands, Lord.

Bless us tonight and may this not be just a time of pleasure for ourselves, but even a time of suffering. A time of giving up. A time of denying oneself, Lord Jesus, with all the pain it might cause.

Thank You for the times in my life that I said, Jesus, I give You everything. Thank You, Jesus. May I repeat this utter experience time and again in the years to come until I meet You face to face and ask this in Your wonderful name.

Amen.

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