

Spiritual Leadership

by Glenn Meldrum

A spiritual leader must be full of faith and the Holy Ghost, and have loyalty and obedience to God, in order to be a good influence on their followers and to build the kingdom of God.

Duration: 42:17

Scripture: Matthew 6:33, Acts 4:24, Acts 5:3, Acts 6:3-4, Acts 8:1, Acts 8:26-40

Topics: "Spiritual Leadership"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of being a spiritual leader worth duplicating. He encourages believers to be unashamed to say to others, 'Follow me, as I follow Christ.' The goal is to be a role model in how we live, walk, pray, talk, and conduct our daily business. The speaker also highlights the need for leaders to accept responsibility, both for their commitments and for receiving praise and criticism in a humble and appropriate manner. The sermon emphasizes the importance of prayer and the ministry of the word, drawing inspiration from the example of the early Church and the character of Stephen.

Transcript

You'll never be a leader that God will want you to be if you won't accept responsibility. And that would be responsibility for the commitment and counting the costs, but it's also responsibility when you do right, to learn how to rightly receive praise from people and they pat you on the back and they say good job and you can humbly say thank you. Or when you do wrong and you're approved for it, that you learn how to rightly receive that as well, which is really hard.

We will never be immune to criticism until we are immune to praise. We become so sensitive over criticism because there's still so much self in us, there's still so much pride. When we are finally not distraught by criticism, we will ultimately be finding ourselves not affected by praise either.

But anyway, in Acts 6, beginning in the third verse, Brothers, choose seven men from among you who are known, and that's such an important thing, known, to be full of the spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them and we'll give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word. Now, what is going on here is the church is growing, it's growing in such a tremendous way that what's happening is the responsibility on the apostles was growing greater and greater and it was growing to such a great extent that they were neglecting what their real call was, which is brought out here, that they would give their attention to prayer.

Another version brings in fasting and the ministry of the word. They were neglecting that to try and take care of all these physical needs. So what was it that they were going to require of the first deacons? And in this situation, the deacons were not on some board, but what the first deacons were, they were men that were called to take care of the tables.

And what they referred to as the tables, they were supposed to take care of the widows. It was a food pantry of their day, in essence. What was the criteria? Somebody who had business sense.

Their criteria, it begins with, it says that they were full of the spirit and wisdom. And as you'll see again and again in this chapter, it'll say full of faith and full of the Holy Ghost. And it comes out again and again in that chapter, trying to establish the character of the man, the person of the man that was so important.

You know, I don't care what your responsibility is here. What you need more than anything is to be a man or a woman full of faith and full of the Holy Ghost. I mean, that is the most important thing that is needed.

But from that comes the responsibility. And what is the responsibility? In essence, you are coming into a ministry as interns and prayerfully that you'll be on staff. The greatest responsibility is not whether you're doing some physical thing.

The greatest responsibility is to be the man or woman of God that you need to be. Because when you are that, you will accomplish what God has called you to accomplish. Apart from that, you may do a natural work, but the spiritual dimension will not be there.

The only way that you can accomplish the natural, the way God would want you, is that you're the spiritual person that God has really called you to be. But I want to establish something that is so important here, is that you cannot give what you do not possess. And you've got to understand that as if you are a carnal person, that's all you can give.

If you're worldly in thought, if you're self-centered, self-absorbed, that's all you got to give. If you are a spiritual man or a spiritual woman, that's what you have to give. You can only give what you possess.

And let me touch on this just in a couple of ways, that you can either give to others, to students that will be under you, and to the people you'll labor with. You can only give to them what you possess. So if you are full of faith, guess what you're going to give? You're going to give faith.

But if you're full of unbelief, guess what you're going to give? That's all that's going to come from you. So what you are is what you're going to give. If you're full of doubt, that's all that's going to come from you.

If you're full of faith, that's what will come from you. And if you're full of complaining, you're just going to give complaints to everybody. You're going to complain about this.

You're going to complain about that. You're going to complain about leadership. You're going to complain about what they're telling you to do.

You're just going to complain. Because if that's what's in you, that's all you got to give. And if you're a person that's of thankfulness, that'll come out of you as well.

What you are, you will give. And I cannot overemphasize this, because this is so thoroughly important. You will only give what you are.

So as if you are not spiritually minded, if you're not a spiritual person, you will not give spiritual life and spiritual truth. To give life to others, you must have that life radiating, flowing through you. Faithfulness and loyalty or rebellion.

You'll either be a faithful person and a loyal person, and giving that, being that part of your very character and who you are, or you will give rebellion. And you know what I'm talking about with this. You've got a bad attitude, rebellion just flows.

Rebellion is a disease. It's like a leprosy that's contagious and can spread. You get a bad attitude and you give a bad attitude to another person, another person, another person, it can just spread.

But as if you're a person that is faithful and loyal, even if contention is coming up or bad attitudes, it can be stopped by the very character that you are to say, look, I'm not going to listen to garbage. I'm not going to listen to gossip. I'm not going to partake.

I'm not going to spread rebellion, because it is a character issue. So we'll either spread unity or we'll spread strife. It's going to be what I am on the inside.

And what is so strange, and you've got to understand, that what I am on the inside, I try to justify. If it's wrong, I'll try to justify it. So if I got this bad attitude, guess what? I'm going to try and justify my bad attitude.

Now, we've all done that. You know what I'm talking about. We've all done that.

And so we know what it is that we got this bad attitude and we want people to agree with our bad attitude, that our bad attitude is right. But if that's what it is in me, it's still a wrong character trace. How can I be spiritual and give anything of life to people if I'm a carnal person in these areas? I can either give acceptance or criticalness.

Now, some of us in this room, we grew up with tremendous criticalness under our parents. And it may be in other situations that there is tremendous criticalness coming upon you, and that can develop in us a critical attitude. And Christ is wanting to deliver us from that because there again, if I'm a critical person, guess what I'm going to do? That's all I'm going to give to people.

I'm going to be critical of people. I'm going to be critical of this. I'm going to be critical of leadership.

I'll be critical of everything that's going on. Or I will be a person that because I learn how to rightly accept people, rightly love them, I will give acceptance in the right way to individuals. Love or indifference, love or bitterness.

What is in me, a bitter person, it comes out. What they are, that's all they can give. So a bitter person, bitterness is going to come out of them.

A person of indifference. Some people say the opposite of love is hate. Others say the opposite of love is indifference.

And I think both are true. Apathy is like I don't care or nothing. That's a passion.

Well, if you don't have a passion for Christ and a passion for his kingdom and a passion for his fame, then you will not, you'll advance something else. If you have a passion for him and his kingdom, then you will

be advancing that. You'll be sharing it.

It'll just become what's flowing from you to other individuals. Zeal or lukewarmness. If you're zealous for God, it will be seen.

It will be known. Part of this is character traits that will have to be changed in our lives. Well, let's just take a silly example.

Like you have a boy that goes and gets a job at McDonald's. And he can do that job with indifference. And the boss tells him to go out there and clean the dining room.

And so he goes out there with an attitude and a broom and just... walking around and doing it all half-heartedly. Indifference, you know. So you're asked in essence, here, do something.

You just kind of go, just barely try and get by. Just do your time type of thing. Or you can do it with zeal.

Just says, thank you, God, that I can serve you. And you just put your heart into it. You do the absolute best you can to the fullest extent that you can.

What you are is what you will give. You understand what I'm saying? Especially when you're in a staff position. Not just an intern.

When you're in a staff position, you have students looking at you. They're going to see, is that what Christianity is? Is that what Christianity is? Because I believe it's zealous. I don't believe it's half-hearted.

That is to be everything in us that we are to do what we do unto God. You know, whether it's mowing a lawn or whether it's counseling a person or whatever it is. That we are to do it with zeal because all that's in us is what we're going to be able to give.

And we should make sure, especially from a leadership standpoint, that what we have to give is worth giving. That is very important. Think of it in this way.

Is what you are worth reproducing? Paul asked that question or didn't ask that question. He made that statement. He says, follow me because I follow Christ.

Paul was worth duplicating. So because he was worth duplicating, he was unashamed to go to others and say, follow me. That is a goal of what we should be.

To be that same type of person worth duplicating. That we would be unashamed to go to new converts or guys in the program and say, you want to see what a real Christian is? You watch me. You look at me.

You see how I live. You see how I walk. You see how I pray.

You see how I talk. You see how I do my business through the day. And you copy me.

And I guarantee that you will be a successful Christian. That's the goal. I mean, that's what it means to be a spiritual leader.

More than anything, this is the prize of what it is to be a spiritual leader. From there can come all the how-tos, the mechanics of things. But it first has to be who we are.

We're going to either be a person full of the Holy Ghost or full of self. So we're going to be one or the other. If I have my choice, I want to be full of the Holy Ghost.

Another point that I want to look at, and this is going to be so important, is what you are with others is all that you are with God. You cannot get away from this. Your relationship to others is directly contingent upon your relationship to God.

So if you have a rebellious attitude towards others, ultimately there is a rebellious issue between you and God. If you are not loving others, it's because you are not loving God. And let's just look briefly at a couple of verses.

John is probably the one who deals with this strongest in his epistle in 1 John. In 1 John, the fourth chapter, 1 John 4, verses 7 and 8, it says, Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God.

Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. The logical conclusion of that is that if I'm not loving others, it's because I'm not loving God like I should. That is the logical conclusion of what he is saying there.

And then in the third chapter of 1 John, in the 16th verse, he says, This is how we know what love is. Jesus Christ laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers. Because he laid it down for us, and because we have placed our faith in him, and because we are loving him, we should take that example and make it our life, that now we are laying our life down for him.

I try to make that a principle of my own life. When I find myself not loving as what I should other people, or acting correctly towards other people, I have to go back to the foot of the cross first and deal with me. And then I can go to the person, if I've wronged them, and say, forgive me, or whatever.

But first I need to say forgive me to him, because it's ultimately against him. That's what David brought out in Psalms 51, Against you, you only have I sinned. That was not a statement of denial of him hurting other people.

It was a statement of him understanding where the true crime was. The ultimate crime was that it was breaking the law of God and breaking the heart of God. And so he was dealing with that, first and foremost, before he could deal with anything else.

You can only give to others according to what your relationship is with Christ. So there again, why was Stephen the man of God that he was? Because he was full of faith and full of the Holy Ghost. From that, his entire life, his entire ministry flowed to touch other people.

Another dimension is of loyalty and obedience. My loyalty to others and my obedience to others is there again directly linked to my loyalty and obedience to God. If I'm rebellious to others, it's because there's rebellion in me against God.

And whenever I deal with my rebellion with him, it will start to take care of my rebellion with others, or disloyalty. And these are things I'm saying that are part of human nature. But I think that they are, and I don't want to say unique, but I would say that they are very strongly revealed in the American culture.

The idea of loyalty today in our extreme individualism is almost a cuss word. Now, of course, if you go in the military, the concept of loyalty comes into play in a very strong way. How could a military even function if there wasn't loyalty? But, you know, you leave the military and there's this whole concept of our extreme individualism that it's all about me.

Rather than understanding that loyalty is such a tremendous part of what God has called us to be. In 1 John, again, in the fifth chapter, in the third verse, it says, this is love for God to obey his commands and his commands are not burdensome. We must understand that obedience and loyalty is that his commands are not burdensome.

If they are burdensome, it's not the problem of his commands. It's the problem of me. You know, I heard this one statement.

You cannot break the Ten Commandments. The Ten Commandments will break you. They are etched in stone.

You cannot break those things down. Your life will be broken to pieces as a result of going against them. But loyalty and obedience is that first relationship with God and how we deal with that.

Romans 13, 1 says, Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God. Now, this is a very loaded verse, and I don't want to get into the loaded dimensions of Hitler's and Mussolini's and Stalin's.

OK, what you can look at is God has established a leadership here. And so he's established that. And when you come under the leadership, you are expected by God to rightly obey.

Now, think of this. If you are rebellious against your leaders, how is it that you're going to be able to expect others under you to obey you? You know what I'm saying with this? I mean, we don't want people rebelling against us when we're in leadership. But yet if we get this thing inside of us, then we're going to start rebelling and being disloyal and so on to others.

But if we want it ourselves, we have to learn how to do it correctly. It must, you know, it must be a lifestyle principle. And to be a good leader does not mean that we're this self-made, arrogant individual.

It means that we learn how to rightly serve. Because what was Christ as our example of the perfect leader? He was the perfect servant, the perfect servant. He had no identity crisis with being a servant.

He had no identity crisis with taking off his outer garments and clothing himself as a slave, in essence, and washing the feet of his disciples. And guess whose feet he also washed? Judas's. The perfect servant.

And that's what he calls us to. The best leaders are always, first and foremost, the best servants. They learn that right loyalty.

They learn that right submission. Turn with me to 2 Samuel. This is an interesting little section here.

2 Samuel in the 23rd chapter. And what this is, this is a listing of David's mighty men. When you look at it on a natural basis, for a king to be a prosperous king and to be an influential king and a powerful king, he can't stand alone.

He has to have others under him that are faithful, that are loyal, that love this king. And they serve him aggressively. So it is never a one-man type of thing.

It took a kingdom, in essence, that would follow him. And so these are words of David of praising his mighty men and those who served with him and the zeal that they served. Let's look at the 8th verse.

It says, these are the names of David's mighty men. And, you know, we'll just skip their names. He says, one of them was a chief of the three.

He raised his spear against 800 men whom he killed in one encounter. A feat that, on a natural basis, is mind-boggling. You know, he had to be some wild man.

Turn to the 14th verse. It says, at that time, David was in the stronghold in the Philistine garrison at Bethlehem. David longed for water and says, Oh, that someone would get me a drink of water from the well near the gate of Bethlehem.

So the three mighty men broke through the Philistine lines, drew water from the well near the gate of Bethlehem, and carried it back to David. But he refused to drink it. Instead, he poured it out before the Lord.

Far be it from me, O Lord, to do this, he said. Is it not the blood of men who went at the risk of their lives? And David would not drink it. David was not doing a disgraceful thing.

What he was ultimately doing is, here was these men who loved him so much that their loyalty to him would lay their life down. And so they would break through the ranks of the Philistines to get him a drink. What a compliment of those that were leaders.

They were leaders, but under a leader. And how to do that. And I pastored for 16 years before God called me as an evangelist.

And I know what it is to have somebody under me that's a nightmare. Somebody that's full of contention and strife and attitudes, and all that's in them is the filth that's coming out of them. And I know what it is also to have my mighty men that have been under me, that have just been treasures.

And they are loyal, and they are just faithful. And you ask them to do something, and it's not a maybe, it's not a whining, it's not complaining. You know it's going to be done.

Not like they're just going to try and cop out and get out of it and try to take an easy way out. That you know if you were asked something of them, they would say, if they said yes, you know it's going to be done. That is such a quality.

And just being very honest, I've seen this again and again where people just try to get by. Just try to do the very minimum. And you have that choice.

I mean, you can just do the very minimum that's here, or you can pour your heart into it. It's one or the other. You can do a nine to five as if you were just doing some secular work, or you can understand the reality of what's really going on, no matter what that is, whether you are physically doing a spiritual thing, or physically just doing some natural thing, that you are called to a ministry and the building of the kingdom of God.

It's more than just doing your time. That is pouring your life into it. And yes, we need times of rest and relaxation, but there is such a difference when the faithfulness of a person, the loyalty of a person, and you know ultimately there again that goes between me and God.

If I'm not loyal with God, I'm not going to be loyal with others. If I'm not faithful with God, I'm not going to be faithful with others. Now let's look at Stephen a little bit more.

Let's turn back to Acts, the sixth chapter. Sixth chapter and the fifth verse. Here's his testimony.

This proposal pleased the whole group, and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Ghost, also Philip and these other men. You know, he chose these men because they were full of faith and full of the Holy Ghost. Let me just ask this.

Are they choosing you in a leadership position because you are full of faith, full of the Holy Ghost? I challenge you to let that be the reason why they're really choosing you. Now I believe that they are calling you into an internship because they see the potential, and they desire you to be used. Let it be that whether you're in that process, because we're all in that process of trying to get fuller of the Holy Ghost and becoming more, you know, the person of God he's called us to be.

But let it be that in time at least they can say, we need you here because we need a man or woman full of faith, full of the Holy Ghost. You are what we need. You follow what I'm saying? Not just of what they're trying to develop in you and what God will eventually use wherever you are in the kingdom of God laboring.

What does it mean to be a man full of faith, full of the Holy Ghost? We have to understand this is not a subjective thing. There was the objective, that which was verifiable in his life. His life being full of faith for the Holy Ghost was a lifestyle, was a demonstration.

So it wasn't just inside his own head. It was demonstrated in his life. And so he was a man of action.

He was full of faith. And so look at this, the ninth verse. Opposition arose.

A man full of faith and full of the Holy Ghost, guess what happens? Opposition arose. Now I want to say this, this is not opposition in the church. We have to understand, he being full of faith for the Holy Ghost does not cause division in the church like this unless the church is not right with God.

It was opposition arose from the world because the Spirit of God being so full in him was a reproof against those who were not walking. So his very life, his very words, you know, everything about him reproved the religious people, reproved the non-believers, convicted them of their sin. This is what the Spirit of God does in us.

You know, I remember a story and it's come from a few different lives that I've heard of. One from Charles Finney in his own way and another from Smith Wigglesworth. And this happened multiple times with Smith Wigglesworth.

Smith Wigglesworth was one of the first men filled with the baptism of the Holy Ghost over in England. It was like 1907. Powerful man of God, saw 14 people raised from the dead and miracles and the signs and wonders tremendous that went on with the man.

But, you know, one day he's on a train and he's sitting on this train and he pulls out his little pocket New Testament, reading his New Testament. And the train stops and he gets off to take a rest stop. And he just says when he went out there and walked around, he just had a wonderful time in prayer.

He says, I came back on that train just full of the Holy Ghost. And he gets on that train and when he stands there and gets ready to go sit down, there was two Anglican priests in the back and one of them runs down the aisle and falls on his knees before Wigglesworth and says, Sir, you have convicted me of sin. And he begins weeping.

And then another person and another person. And soon the whole train car is full of people just weeping and sobbing over their sins. And Wigglesworth began just preaching to them.

It was that he was full of the Holy Ghost. That conviction came. So in this sense, opposition arose, not in the sense of them fighting against him, but in that situation of bringing repentance.

The evil, their fallen, their sinfulness was confronted by the Holy Ghost in them. And that produced, in this case, repentance. But in other cases, it can produce hatred.

The most perfect loving individual that has ever graced this planet was Jesus Christ himself, God incarnate in flesh and blood. The same Spirit of God that dwelt in Christ, that brought prostitutes weeping at his feet, brought Pharisees raging at him. The same Holy Ghost, the same Holy Ghost.

And so we have to understand that there is proof of us being full of faith and full of the Holy Ghost. There's proof of it in our lives. Another point is in the eighth verse.

It says, Stephen, full of faith and power, did great wonders and miracles among the people. I believe that when we are full of faith, guess what faith does? Faith produces something. Faith is not just a subjective thing.

It is subjective in the one sense that inside of me, I believe. But the proof of faith should be made manifest in a lifestyle, but also in miracles following us and answered prayers in God doing things. And I believe God wants to do signs and wonders.

I believe the book of Acts is for us today, that it wasn't just of a historical account. It's what God wants to do. It is what biblical Christianity is to be right now.

You know, there are those who try to say that the book of Acts, you know, was done away with, with the death of the apostles. It's not true. History is too full of the book of Acts.

I mean, the book of Acts is going on right now in other parts of the world. And so because we haven't seen it with our own eyes, like in the book of Acts, doesn't mean it's not happening, because I guarantee you it is. You have to understand something that's implied with all this, is that he lived a surrendered life.

He was a man abandoned to his God. He didn't go halfway. He didn't go 95%.

He was a man fully, completely abandoned in his life. He would not have those fruits and the results that are in these two chapters unless he was that type of man. A precious man named A.W. Tozer said, The true follower of Christ will not ask, If I embrace this truth, what will it cost me? Rather, he will say, This is truth.

God, help me to walk in it. Let come what may. That's what it comes down to be.

That faith just says, This is what you told me to do. I will do it because this is obedience. This is what your word says.

Dear God, let me live that out. Stephen was a man who had the wisdom of God. He was full of wisdom.

So like we looked at in the third verses, Therefore, brethren, seek out from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom. But the wisdom that we need most of all is the wisdom of God. If we are full of the Holy Ghost, we're going to be full of wisdom.

We're going to have his wisdom. How can we be full of the Holy Ghost and not have the wisdom of the Holy Ghost? The one is going to be tied into the other. There's going to be no separating the two.

In the 6th chapter and the 10th verse, it says, But they, referring to the members of the local synagogue, could not stand against the wisdom or the spirit by whom Stephen spoke. So here was the proof of his wisdom made manifest. Now, you know, you're not in that same situation, at least not now in your life.

But God wants wisdom working through you. And the only way the wisdom of God can truly be working through you is that you are full of the Holy Ghost. And to be full of that would mean that you are able to speak in wisdom according to the need, according to the situation.

And that situation might be in a counseling, that you're sitting there and wisdom's coming from you, dealing with the sin in this man and the problems in his life or wisdom in a ministry needs as people are sitting around and trying to figure out how do we solve this problem. He wants wisdom there to be instituted within our lives, whether it's dealing with our own issues or the needs of others or ministry needs or whatever. He wants us to be able to do that, to be able to speak by the Holy Ghost.

And in the 7th chapter, in the 54th verse, here's this persecution coming to a head. It says, when they heard these things, they were cut to the heart and they gnashed at him with their teeth. I think that's such an interesting statement because the idea of gnashing with them at their teeth doesn't mean they went and started biting on them.

With the idea of gnashing, and this is the whole concept that Jesus refers to as well, gnashing of them is a concept of hatred, is a concept of anger, and it's like... And so you have to think of this. Their hatred of God was manifested in hatred towards Stephen. When you look at it from the aspect of those that are cast into hell and they'll be weeping and gnashing of teeth means that they'll be weeping over their pain, but the gnashing of teeth speaks of a hatred of God, an eternal hatred, rage at God with a gnash of their teeth, a hatred of Him for all eternity.

And that's the concept that is presented here. And so the conviction, the spirit of God in Stephen brought such conviction upon these people that they were enraged at him, but they weren't enraged at him, in essence, as what Jesus says, if they hated me, they'll hate you. And so their hatred of Stephen was ultimately because of who dwelt in him.

But I'll tell you what. I want to have a life that doesn't leave people in a place of neutral or indifference. I want a life that's either going to bring them to a place that they're drawing near to Christ as a result or they're hating me as a result, but it does not leave them neutral to it.

You follow what I'm saying? I believe that's what the spirit of God will really do. If we're really full of the Holy Ghost, that it will do that. It'll be wonderfully attractive to those that are walking with Jesus.

It'll be very disturbing to those who aren't walking as what they should, and it can be absolutely reprehensible to those who are not Christian. But, you know, that's what the spirit of God does. So let's look a little further at the idea of him being a man full of the Holy Ghost.

What does that mean? First off, and I'll touch on it a little bit more as we get into it, as we look in a couple of minutes at him being a man of prayer, but first and foremost, to be a man full of the Holy Ghost, he had to be a man of deep relationship with Christ. You cannot be a spiritual man and not be in spiritual disciplines. You want to be a spiritual man? You have to live a spiritual life, and that spiritual life always begins on our knees in an intimate relationship with Christ.

I'm going to give you an example of my life, not trying to boast or anything else. Just use me as an example. But I was saved in a genuine revival.

I was in the drug culture, a small-time dealer, and God saved me out of that lifestyle. I was saved in the midst of a genuine revival that took place. It's a powerful thing.

I don't want to go through the whole story. After I was saved, about nine months, I moved into a live-in ministry, and so I lived with 26 guys in this live-in ministry, and it was just a riot. It was a lot of fun.

Just all these guys radically saved from drugs and all the garbage with it and everything else. And so it just became this church that was really aggressive in evangelism and trying to reach the lost, and the power of God was in that place. Just tremendous.

But somehow, and I can't even tell you how it happened, I cannot tell you a sermon or a teaching or anything that did it, and it was something that God did with me. We would have 7 o'clock in the morning. We'd have our morning Bible study, and when we'd be done, all the guys would go over to the house where we lived and make breakfast, and I would go to the chapel, and I'd pray.

Our responsibilities would kick in, and we'd have to take care of our responsibility. At 5 o'clock, all the guys would go over to the house and start cooking dinner, and I'd go over to the chapel, and I'd start seeking God. And then when all the guys were starting to go to bed at 10, 11 o'clock at night, I would go back over to the chapel, and I'd be in there just walking back and forth in the front of the chapel just praying, and I grew as a young man to love His presence.

Just loved His presence. Loved nearness with Him. And I did not ever look to be a pastor.

It was never my desire. It wasn't an ambition. It's just, I don't know why, but He took me in that life, and then as a result, I believe, of that relationship with Him, He called me into the ministry.

My wife and I went and pioneered a church then in the streets of Detroit and pastored there for almost 12 years, and I won't go through my whole ministry experience with that, but intimacy with God is the foundation of being a man or woman full of faith, full of the Holy Ghost. You will not rise above your prayer life. You will not rise above the relationship you have personally with Him.

Do you hear what I'm saying? You want to be a man or woman of God, you cannot downplay what I'm saying. You must grab hold of this, because why He was a man full of faith, full of the Holy Ghost, was

because He was a man of intimacy. He walked in holiness.

E.M. Bounds made a statement I think is interesting. He was too busy to praise, too busy to live a holy life. Why do so many fall? Because they don't have a deep, powerful relationship on their knees.

The only ability I have to walk before Him in holiness is not self-determination, not ability, not experience, is that place of intimacy and brokenness before Him, that I find Him the answer to all that I need. That is so important. It must define your life.

Right now, you guys have your time, that you have to be with God, and I don't know how the ministry is set up or anything else. If I'm not mistaken, you have to have a time of devotion in the morning on your own. But you know, you can do your time, or you can grow to love His presence.

Do you understand what I'm saying? You can just go through the motion, because that's what you got to do, and you can get some nice little stuff, and you get together here. It can be wonderful times and that there, but it does not take that time where you are just in love with Him and pursuing Him. It doesn't mean every time it's going to be this emotional high or anything else, but we do what we do, because we've grown in love with Him.

We know what love is, and we know, and we have to be delivered of this as Americans because of the media. But love is not a feeling. Love is a choice.

Love is our will, purposing to follow Him. And feeling will be there at times and not be there, but love is a choice. Acts 7, in the 55th verse, it says, But Stephen, full of the Holy Ghost, I mean, like I said, this comes up again and again in those two chapters, looked up to heaven and saw the glory of God and Jesus standing at the right hand of God.

Look, he said, I see heaven opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God. And the reason I wanted to bring that out is I believe that God revealed Himself in this situation, not because Stephen was just being persecuted, but I believe He revealed Himself to Stephen because Stephen has already seen Him, already seen Him, was walking in that relationship of intimacy, a love relationship. God used the man because where the man was, spiritually.

Here's a wonderful verse in Psalms, and I'll just read this to you. Psalm 73, in the 25th verse. And David is saying, Whom have I in heaven but you? Well, that's an easy one.

That's easy to say. How about the second half? And earth has nothing I desire besides you. Can we say that? Here's David, king, wealthy man, I mean, powerful man.

And then he says, You're the only thing I desire. You're all I desire. That is a phenomenal statement from that position.

Is He really all that I desire? Is He really all that I want? Or do I want Jesus end? Do you hear what I'm saying? When in America we got Jesus end. Jesus and money, Jesus and this, Jesus and that. You know, I'll be happy when.

And to bring that idea of when means I'll be happy when I've got this thing out there. How many people have even left leadership positions at Pure Life because they said, I have a right to be happy. I'm not happy here.

Well, the problem was they're not happy here because they didn't have a relationship with Christ like what they should. Because Paul says he learned how to be content in all things, whether he was rich or poor. It was not his circumstances that brought about the joy and the fulfillment in his life.

It was his relationship with Christ, not the roof over his head or his possessions or his income. It was his relationship. If I look for anything else to make me happy other than Christ himself, then that has become an idol to me.

Doesn't mean that I can't use other things for pleasure, for right pleasure and so on. That has its right place. You know, he created us to enjoy certain things, but that is, they are just temporal.

My real joy should be in him. In Psalm 16:11 it says, in his presence is fullness of joy. Where's true joy? It's in his presence.

It's not in the busyness of life and so on. How will you handle the stress of ministry? How will you handle the stress of ministry? Will you handle the stress of ministry just by being with your brothers? That's not going to do it. The only way you'll really handle the stress of ministry is the depth of that relationship you have with him.

That when you are hurting, that you run to his feet. When you feel the lust of the flesh coming against you, you run to his feet. When you feel the pressures or whatever it is, you run to his feet.

When you just, when everything's going wonderful, you run to his feet. That you know that place is the most wonderful place, the place you find the greatest fulfillment in your entire life. So that he is all that you need.

That he is enough. That he is enough. Part of this is the focus of his eyes.

He had his eyes on him. You know what happens when we take our eyes off him? We start saying, I'll be happy when this, when I got that. Every time we do that, that is a human condition.

That's why Colossians 3 verses 1 and 2 is so important where it tells us to set our minds on things above and set our hearts on things above. It is the purposeful act to grab hold of our mind and take it off this world and take it off of self and purposely put it above. And you know what that is.

Temptation comes in, whether it's lust, whether it's pride, whatever name we want to put on it. It tries to grab hold of our mind and grab hold of our heart and take it off of him and take it on ourselves or something else. And we have to seize our mind in that sense, grab hold of it and forcibly put it upon him.

And one of the greatest ways of doing that is through prayer and through praise. Prayer and worship. Adoration.

Just, you know, you got your mind starting to go where it shouldn't be, grab hold of it and start worshiping him, start worshiping him. Let me move to that. He was a man of prayer and this is all implied, but I'm going to give some good evidence because of the environment that Stephen was in, the heritage of Stephen.

Let me just run through a few verses. In Acts 1-4, it says they all joined together constantly in prayer along with the woman and Mary, the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers. The early church, right from the ascension of Christ, was sent into the upper room and they gave themselves to prayer.

Now, we don't know where Stephen came into the picture, whether he was a convert of Christ himself while Christ was walking this planet or of the day of Pentecost or what. We don't know. But what we do know is what he was put into was an environment of prayer.

That was the environment of the church. That was the very condition of the church. In the 2nd chapter, in the 42nd verse, it says the early church devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread, and to prayer.

They devoted themselves. It became their lifestyle, not something they just did occasionally. This was the environment that Stephen dwelt in.

In the 4th chapter, in the 24th verse, it says, when they heard this, they raised their voices in prayer to God. Sovereign Lord, they said, you made the heaven and the earth, the sea and everything in them. Here they are in crisis.

And what are they doing? They are in prayer. In the 6th chapter, in the 4th verse, and we'll give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the Word. It was the apostles saying this.

What we need to do is give ourselves more to prayer and the ministry of the Word, not less to it. That is what Stephen had as the example. And so I believe by the sheer example that he was raised in of the character and quality of that early church that it was a praying church.

Not a church that prayed once in a while, but it was a church that lived a lifestyle of prayer because of that Stephen was a man full of faith, full of the Holy Ghost, because he learned that life principle. I'm trying to really hit this home because if you aren't a person of prayer, you will never be a person full of faith and full of the Holy Ghost. A man named John P. Oaks says, men do not keep on asking for that which they cannot get along without.

They do not continue searching for treasures that to them have no value. They do not keep knocking at doors that close off dark, empty rooms. So it stands to reason that we will not become insistent in prayer until we have discovered those objects of prayer that we will not let go of.

We will only become consumed in prayer when we cannot live without Him. Do you hear what I'm saying? We're not going to pursue Him with everything if we feel we can live without Him. We'll pursue Him a little bit, make Him a dimension of our life, but when I finally come to the point where it says I cannot and I do not want to live without Him, I want such closeness, such nearness with Him, I guarantee you the byproduct will be you'll be a man or woman of prayer.

Guarantee it. Because what seizes your heart is what you will pursue, is what you will chase after. And so let me just close with some of his fruit.

We looked briefly at the aspect that signs and wonders followed him. He was a man of prayer, he was a man of faith, he was a man full of the Holy Ghost, so the proof of that was made manifest in his life. We looked at it also, just briefly touched on it, but you see it in the very concept of those two chapters.

His conviction came upon the unsaved through him. God used him to touch the lost. And it doesn't bring out the purpose of this, of those two chapters, is not to bring out all the conversions that happened.

It is to manifest the first martyr of the church. But we have to just imply there that there had to be a tremendous amount of converts as well. You know, you look at Philip, one of the other deacons.

What happens with Philip? He's in one place, revivals taking, I mean, revivals breaking out. And so, you know, the Spirit of God takes Philip from the midst of this revival and says, go out into the desert. And he comes along the Ethiopian eunuch and ministers to him and witnesses to him and he gets saved and then baptizes him in the water.

And when he's done baptizing, he disappears. He's translated to another city and there he begins to preach again. Here is Philip, one of the deacons, full of faith, full of the Holy Ghost.

And those signs are taking place. I believe the same thing was happening with Stephen. And so, there was conviction which brought salvation.

But in this place, it brings out the persecution that broke out as well. In Acts, the 8th chapter, in the first verse, it says this little statement. In the beginning, it says, And Saul was consenting unto his death.

This is a very important thing. Luke put this in for an express purpose to try and show that the life of Stephen was of such power that it was part of the converting process of Paul. It wasn't just God smiting him with his glory and revealing himself on the Damascus road.

It was all that was leading up to it. And Stephen was an integral part of that. And can you imagine the words of Stephen, the conviction upon Paul himself, and seeing Stephen's face glow as an angel? Can you imagine the impact it would have upon Paul? And so, we can look at everything that Paul produced ultimately is a byproduct of Stephen.

Partial byproduct of Stephen. Of a man full of faith, full of holy ghost. We do not know the end results of what it will accomplish if we live that kind of life.

We do not know the full extent of it. The final thing, I'll close with this, is such an obvious one. This life was of such importance to God that he made sure two of the chapters of the book of Acts are filled with his life.

He was not an apostle. He was just one of the average church folk that his life was of such value that the Lord made sure that two chapters of Scripture was filled with this account. Let me just give this final quote and then we'll pray.

It says, When God decides that he is going to move, he does not look for those who are wise enough or educated enough. He looks for those who are yielded and humble enough to risk following him. God does not need your wisdom and abilities or talents.

He's ultimately looking for your abandonment, that he can grab hold of you and fill you with the spirit of God and pour his life into you.

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