

A Man Called Stephen

by Jim Cymbala

The church needs to be run by the Holy Spirit, not by smart people or talented people.

Duration: 34:04

Scripture: Acts 6:1

Topics: "Early Church"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker expresses their excitement about a powerful move of God happening in their church. They believe that their church has the potential to influence the entire country. The speaker emphasizes the importance of pastors dedicating themselves to studying and preaching the Word of God, as well as prayer. They contrast this with the focus on efficiency and excellence that many pastors prioritize. The speaker also highlights the role of the Holy Spirit in bringing about transformation and mentions the example of Nikki Cruz, a former gang leader turned evangelist. The sermon concludes by emphasizing the growth and prosperity of the early church, which was attributed to the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Transcript

Prayer only really happens when you feel need. Prayer is a response to felt need. People don't feel they need anything.

They're never gonna really pray. So I hope my words will encourage you. They asked me for a title.

I'm not good on titles. I called it A Man Named Steven because I want to tell you about a man named Steven, but it could be called Who's in Charge? And it's found in the book of Acts, and it's a story about the first deacons. If you want to call them deacons, a lot of biblical writers call them the seven because there were seven of them, but because of their duties they were given, they were called deacons.

And while Steven and some other names are gonna come before us, I want you to notice the person of the Holy Spirit in the early church. Jesus had left, died when he came, when he taught, ministered, died on the cross, rose again, went back to the Father in heaven, and then he sent his replacement, the Spirit of Christ, the one who would be the other helper, the advocate, the Holy Spirit. He was put in charge of the church.

When Jesus was on earth, who was in charge of the disciples? Jesus. When Jesus left and he sent the Holy Spirit, who was in charge of the church? The Holy Spirit. Because he replaced Jesus.

Nobody told Jesus what to do. Jesus told everybody what to do, where to go, and he led them beautifully. When he left, he put in his place this invisible person, God, the Holy Spirit.

So let's see how he interacted with the early church, especially through a man named Steven. In those days when the number of disciples was increasing, the Hellenistic Jews, those are the ones who spoke Greek, they were Jewish, but they embraced the Greek culture, among them complained against the Hebraic Jews, those are the ones who spoke Aramaic and were more Jewish-Jewish, because their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food. So we have a problem in the church.

The number of disciples was increasing, and whenever God blesses, it brings problems. Growth always brings problems, but they're good problems. And you have to find a way to solve them.

What we have is the food that was handed out for the widows who had too little, there was an argument among them. See, even Christians can argue, right? Hellenistic Jews and the Hebraic Jews because of what was being done with the widows. So the 12, those are the leaders, the apostles, gathered all the disciples together and said, it would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God.

In other words, that we would stop preaching in order to hand out food. Not that we're too good for it, we're not too good for anything, but that's not our calling. And then it would take us away from the word of God in order to wait on tables and hand out food and settle disputes.

Brothers and sisters, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them and we'll give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word. That was their calling.

This proposal pleased the whole group. They chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit there is the one who produced the faith, but notice it's a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit.

Not everyone could do this job. You had to be known to be controlled, filled with, under the influence of the Holy Spirit. Also, Philip, who later becomes the first famous evangelist, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolaus from Antioch, a convert to Judaism.

They presented these men to the apostles who prayed and laid their hands on him, just like we did the people going to Ghana. So the word of God spread. The number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly.

Some translations have multiplied. At first, they were being added to the church. Now they're multiplying.

And a large number of priests, Jewish priests, became obedient to the faith, the faith of Christ. Now Stephen, one of the seven, a man full of God's grace and power. Well, wait a minute.

Before it says he was full of faith and the Holy Spirit. Now he's a man full of God's grace, God's blessing, and power, the blessing brought power. He performed great wonders and signs among the people.

Opposition arose, however, from members of the Synagogue of the Freedmen, as it was called, Jews of Cyrene and Alexandria, that's Africa, as well as the provinces of Cilicia and Asia, that's Turkey, who began to argue with Stephen. But they could not stand up against the wisdom, the Spirit gave him, as he spoke.

Mm, mm, mm.

That's a good story, isn't it? So let's just cut to the chase and see what do we learn here about the Holy Spirit. A lot of the ills of the Christian church around the world and in America and right here in New York City are linked to these verses. When Jesus left, before he left, he was in charge of everything.

He was master, he was lord. When he left, he put the Holy Spirit in charge. You would know that from most churches today.

The Holy Spirit's not looked to as being in charge. The board's in charge, the pastor's in charge, the pastors are in charge, the deacons are in charge, depending on what the church is. The Holy Spirit is not looked to to run the church because people have grown up with the tradition, no, men run the church.

But that was not God's plan. So right there, you have a major problem. The Holy Spirit is here today.

He's a person, he's in this room right now. How many say amen? Amen. He is the one who glorifies Christ and presents Christ to our hearts.

He's the one who convicts of sin. He's the one who empowers the church to do work. But he also is to govern the church.

He's to govern the church. Jesus is the head of the church, but since he left, he put the Holy Spirit in charge. The only one who can govern anything is the Holy Spirit because he knows everything, he's God.

So that is a major problem. Notice how this worked out. When they had to settle a dispute about handing out food to widows, they wouldn't let anybody do it unless they were known to be filled with the Holy Spirit.

To hand out food, you can't do that unless we know that you're filled, influenced, walking with God, controlled by God, and the blessing of the Holy Spirit is in your life, which is not obviously present in all believers, or it wouldn't have been a qualification. If everyone was full of the Holy Spirit, that would be like saying they have to be known to be alive. Well, everyone's alive.

No, they had to be known. How that was discerned, I have no idea. Scripture's silent.

But they had to be known just to hand out food. The ruin of the Christian church happens when smart people get in charge. The ruin of the Christian church happens when talented, sharp people get in charge and replace the Holy Spirit.

The church is ruined when this well-known minister in another part of the country told me when I spoke at his church, he had just inherited this well-known church, and he said, Pastor, I don't know what to do because the deacons I inherited, they're doctors, they're lawyers, they got a lot of money, they belong to all the best golf clubs. They hardly come to church. I don't even know if some of them are saved.

I said, well, how did they get to be deacons? He said, because they're well-known in the community. Oh, but don't laugh. That's the way it's run in most places.

You name someone a deacon because they got some punch. They got some props. This grieves the spirit out of the church, and you can create atmospheres of worship and all of that, but you can tell the Holy Spirit's not there because there's no conviction of sin.

People are living any old way, no matter what music they do or what preaching stirs them up, because the Holy Spirit has been grieved because he's a person. He can be grieved, and why is he often grieved? By sin of all kinds, but he's very much grieved when you put people in charge of things that he's in charge of. You replace him.

He's in charge. Jesus said he's in charge. He will show you what to do.

He will lead you in the way you should go, so I don't know how long. You have to study this. The church has been bogged down by sharp people, intelligent people.

Listen, the church was never to be run by educated people, i.e. fishermen were put in charge at the beginning. No seminary, no Bible school. They were fishermen.

Wealthy people are not supposed to run the Christian church. The Holy Spirit's supposed to run the Christian church. White people are not supposed to run the church or black people.

Spirit-filled people are the only one that God can use. So look, look, it's like this. The Spirit wants to govern the church, but he can only govern it through people that he's filled.

He doesn't do it through mystical means of vapor. He does it through people he controls, and whether they're fishermen or third-grade dropouts or whoever they are or PhDs, if someone's filled with the Holy Spirit, now he's representing the way God wants the church to be run. You see this over and over in the book of Acts.

Whenever there's a critical moment, it says, and Peter, full of the Holy Spirit, he made that decision. He took that step, full of the Holy Spirit. This is a problem, and we have to pray for churches all over and pray for our own, that the church is run not by good-looking people, talented people, wealthy people.

I see it everywhere I go. I see people in charge and people up in the front and people handling the mic. Many times they don't have the spirituality of a slug or of that microphone, but why are they up in the front? Wait, they're up in the front because they're sharp-looking, they're nice-looking, they're pretty girls, they're handsome guys, they have a PhD, they went to a seminary.

Listen, you can go to a cemetery, a seminary there. No, that was a mistake, I didn't mean to say that. No, I didn't mean to say that, that's the truth.

But maybe it's prophetic, right? You can go to a seminary, but you come out, it's like it was a cemetery. Because you're educating your mind, but there's nobody home in your heart. Come on, let's say amen.

Recently, some Christian leader was asked about, what's the position of your church on homosexuality, which is just one sin among many that the Bible teaches us are wrong. And they answered, well, we're not gonna talk about it because Jesus never addressed it. Well, I mean, how spiritless could you be? How about the rest of the New Testament? How about Romans 1? Do you know anything about God? How could you say that? But if you're glib and you're a good communicator and you're sharp and you can organize things, you can get in charge of a lot now in the body of Christ, but not so back then.

You couldn't even hand out food as a deacon unless you were known to be full of the Holy Spirit. So that's what we learned, number one. Stephen was one of those men.

Notice what the pastors, the leaders said. Now look, it's not right for us. It's not like we're so high and mighty we can't hand out food.

That's not the case. But that's not our calling. Our calling is to give ourselves to the word, preaching it, studying it, meditating on it, and to prayer.

Imagine what would happen if pastors all over, especially senior pastors all over, gave themselves just to the word and to prayer. So that when they got up, they would have something from God, because only the Spirit breaks the yoke. If the preacher isn't helped by God, he's just talking.

But it's good, it's funny, it's clever, he's very good, I know, but you won't see fruit. You won't see water baptisms, and you won't see people praying, because only the Spirit working produces prayer, calling on God, brokenness, tenderness. So now the apostles do what they're supposed to.

The deacons are deaking, that's whatever. And now notice the church multiplies. So what do we learn about the Holy Spirit? When we listen to his direction, and we all get where we should be, including all of you and you, then the engine runs.

And multitudes now were coming to the Lord and getting baptized, and the church was prospering. What money did they have? Nothing. What advertising did they use? Nothing.

What nice buildings did they have? Nothing. What kind of decorations did they have? Nothing. What kind of seating did they have? We don't know, but the church was multiplying because the Holy Spirit was running the church of Jesus Christ.

Let's say amen to it. Number two, notice how we learn that no duty was too small for this man named Stephen. Full of the Holy Spirit, he was full of faith, he was full of power, he was full of grace.

All of those four things are said about him. Stephen was something else. But notice that when they named him, even though he had all that from God, he didn't say what? Wait on tables? What do you think I'm gonna do? Hand out food? Talk to a bunch of widows? Hey, come on, I'm full of God.

And he was, full of faith. But you know what? When you're really full of the Holy Spirit, you are humble enough to do whatever you're asked to do. How many say amen to that? You're asked to do that, and you yield, and he yielded.

He was nominated, he yielded to the leadership of the church. They said, we need someone to wait on tables. You know, when the church was real small, and we were on Atlantic Avenue, we had no deacons, we had no anything.

No money, no anything. And Pastor Ware, God bless him and his memory. He was one of my associates.

I had one other, Pastor Bird. And the toilets were messed up in the men's room. We had no money to call a plumber.

There was no deacons to call on, and we had no maintenance. We had no employees. We didn't need a secretary, because nobody called.

And when no one calls, you don't need anybody answering the phone. Pastor Ware looked at me and said, Pastor Simba, let's get some gloves. We're gonna go down there and just get in that toilet.

And whatever's clogging it up, we're gonna pull it out. In the name of the Lord, how about that? He never thought, wait a minute, I'm an associate pastor. What am I cleaning this? You do what you have to do.

You can always tell when the spirit rests on someone, because they have a servant spirit. Whenever someone has to be in the front, has to be seen, something's wrong. You gotta wait for God to work in them.

Lastly, you can't keep a good man down. Stephen is just a deacon. Nobody appointed him and gave him any title.

Most people are looking for titles and stature in a church. And pastors, very often, always remember this, those of you that might be in leadership someday, wherever God sends you, you never give people a title so to keep them in the church, because they will bite you in the end, because that's not a right spirit. The Bible tells us that Stephen was just a deacon, if we're gonna call him a deacon.

He was one of the seven. Who told him to go start healing people? Nobody. God, the Holy Spirit.

Who put him in charge of miracles? Nobody, except God, the Holy Spirit. In other words, here was just a guy, a deacon, a member of the church. And remember, he was full of the Holy Spirit and full of faith before they made him a deacon.

The Bible says a person's gift makes room for themselves. You wanna be used by God? Just ask the Holy Spirit to fill you. And whatever the gift is, whatever the ministry is, just let it flow.

Just start praying for people. Call people on the phone. Obey the prompting of the Holy Spirit.

Call someone in the middle of the night. Wake them up and say, I can't sleep tonight. I gotta pray for you.

Then you might find out that they're ready to contemplate suicide, and you call just in time. And someone will say, who put you in charge of calling someone in the middle of the night? No one. Pastor never told me to call anyone.

The Holy Spirit told me to call someone. Now, will people abuse that and go nuts? Yeah, do people blame all kinds of things on the Holy Spirit? Act weird and blame it on the Spirit? Yeah, but the devil does that to try to get us away from the real. How many want the real with all your heart, all your mind, all your soul? So now Stephen not only starts to minister, he's a deacon.

You notice here, it's all unstructured. Today we're worshiping structure. We worship structure in churches.

There are people, they're just organizational mavens. They just wanna organize everything. But you won't find that in the New Testament.

Oh, there's leadership, there's deacons, there's things going on, obviously. You gotta have some wisdom. But notice, it's not organized.

No one organized Stephen to do anything. Stephen's just doing it because the Holy Spirit said, go out, do it. Go out and pray for those people.

Go out, start to witness. And because the Spirit is on him, he's persecuted. That's another sign that God is using you when people get all riled up by what you're doing.

And the Bible says that when this synagogue of the freed men, some people from Africa and some Jews from Turkey, when they got on his case and they confronted him, they couldn't overcome him. Now, we don't know what Stephen's background was. Was he a fisherman? What was he, a tax collector? I don't know what he was before he found Jesus.

But he was no highfalutin PhD, that's for sure. All the early Christians were just simple people. How are you gonna reach simple people except by simple people? Now, some are super educated.

Paul seemed to be one. You can't put God in a box. But for the most part, God just uses average people like you and me.

He's not looking for ability, he's God. Why would he need ability? He's looking for availability. He's looking for someone who will say, God, here I am.

God, here I am. Hey, listen, my friend, he could use you. You just got saved tonight.

A few months from now, you could be used by God to help people. Why not? You say, no, I just came in the church and all that. But that's the way that the Christian church is supposed to be.

Not by might, not by power, not by IQ, not by organization, not by software, not by hard drive, not by emails, but by my spirit, sayeth the Lord. Not by formula, by God's power. Can we say amen to that? Why is the church's influence in America declining instead of the church converting the world, the world's converting the church? Why is that? Because the Holy Spirit has been said, excuse me, you don't fit in our program.

We got this thing mapped out and you're really not part of the night. We got a script here, you know what I'm saying? And we got to run this thing because you got to run things efficiently, like a corporation. You got to be excellence, we need excellence.

I hear pastors say that everywhere around the country. I want to do my work with excellence. I hear hardly anyone say, I want to do it in the power of the Holy Spirit.

And where the wind blows, you don't know what's going to happen. All you can do, you don't know what's going to happen. Who God could use.

He can take a gang leader like Nicky Cruz, get him converted and make him an evangelist who travels all around the world. He's won hundreds of thousands of people to the Lord. He can't speak Spanish, he can't speak English.

I don't even know what he speaks. He gives his testimony. I don't even know what he's saying half the time.

And then at the end he comes and he gives his altar call and the spirit of God comes. But God's always done it that way. And I'm so happy he does.

This is the curse on the church in America today. People have decided we don't need the Holy Spirit. We learn how to do church.

And when you go to conferences, they'll teach you how to do church. They won't teach you to seek God. They won't teach you to depend on the Holy Spirit or to pray.

They will teach you, here's how you do church. And Pastor Brian will tell you, others will tell you, Pastor Todd knows, others know. They have conferences all over America now.

Here's the formula, copy what we do and you'll get results. What results? You can't even call a prayer meeting, nobody would come. People are living with, sleeping with each other, doing all kinds of crazy things.

But they go to church on Sunday for a meeting that doesn't challenge them because when there's no Holy Spirit, there's no conviction of sin. See, when the Holy Spirit comes, people either get in or get out. It's better if people come in our building and get saved like my friend did tonight, or they walk out because they can't take it.

They hate it. But the worst thing is just to sit there and not be changed. But say, oh, I dig the music, this is really nice.

No, the Holy Spirit has to be in charge. How many in agreement with everything I preach from God's word? Lift up your hand. God's just looking for people now who want to be like Stephen.

Well, I can't be like Stephen. Why not, what was Stephen? We don't even know what education he had. He could have had a lisp.

He could have had a learning disability. That's a horrible thing when churches only try to present good-looking, smart people as their image. It's a very horrible thing to do.

The Holy Spirit uses whoever he wants. The history of the Christian church, when revivals have come, God has used people that the world would laugh at. But that's the way it's supposed to be.

For God has chosen the foolish things of this world to confound the wise. I don't want to fit in with CNN. I don't want to fit in with the New York Times or anybody else.

I want to fit in with God. How many say amen? We'll fit in with God. Be filled with God.

The world is against the church and the spirit, and the spirit is against that spirit of the world, and so it is. So I think we need to pray, don't you think? We're gonna do it a little bit different tonight. The deacons and the pastors are gonna come, and we're gonna walk through the building.

I don't want you to stand. You'll stand later. We're gonna come to you, because if I make an invitation, I can feel the faith that's in the room now.

God is speaking to us tonight, am I right? No, do you really feel that the way I feel it, God? Speaking, he's speaking to me this week and over the weekend on this thought that the Holy Spirit is grieved. I say this for the glory of God. You know why a lot of people travel here to come and visit on a Sunday to some church in downtown Brooklyn with a pastor who's not trained and a choir director who's not trained? Because they wanna experience God.

They're tired of production. They're tired of deadness. They're tired of smoke and mirrors with no juice, no Holy Spirit, and the Holy Spirit is grieved by that, very grieved by that.

Like, who put you in charge of my church? Jesus put me in charge of his church. I'm the Holy Spirit. Who put you in charge? How do you oust me? And here's the way it happens.

When they have a chairman of the board, of a board, a corporate board, and there's people on the board who wanna oust that chairman, they start to work against him. You know, they're smart people. They start saying a few things.

They bring up opposite ideas, and the next thing, they convince others to go against the chairman of the board, and the next thing you know, the chairman of the board can't take it, and he says, you know what? I don't wanna face this aggravation. I resign from the board. That's the way it is with the Holy Spirit.

You get enough leaders who say, we don't need him. What do we need him for? What in the world do we need him for? We got this thing. I'm an orator.

I can speak. We got great music. We'll create a mood, a worship mood, a preaching mood.

We'll use the microphone to work people up. We'll use the organ to get people, but without the Holy Spirit, it comes to naught. Only the Spirit can produce fruit.

Jesus himself couldn't minister until the Spirit came on him in the Jordan River. Jesus couldn't do anything. My goodness, if Jesus couldn't do anything until the Spirit came on him, what in the world hope do you and I have unless we have more, and more, and more, and more, and more of the Holy Spirit? So we wanna pray for you.

I don't want you to raise your hand just because I'm asking you, but how many are actually, you're open and you're hungry to be filled with the Holy Spirit and to be used by God? Just lift your hand all over the audience, okay? All right, good. Sometimes we're gonna have to pray just for the end of the aisle. Sylvia's gonna go to some aisle and just lay her hands on the end of the person because we can't get through the aisles, but I just sense that if I ask people to come, we're gonna have a jam up here.

We'll never get to you, so we're gonna come to where you are. We're gonna go up in the balcony. Pastor Brian, would you get a little posse to go up in the balcony? Would you do that? And deacons, pastors, come on, everybody, pastors.

We're gonna go and lay hands on you. Holy Spirit, we are sorry if we've pushed you out of your leadership role. We repent, we humble ourselves and say, be our leader, be our guide.

God, you were sent by our Savior to administrate the Christian church. Help us to get out of the way so you can do your work. Fill us, empower us, give us faith and wisdom like Stephen had, so no matter what people say, the words you give us will overcome them.

Raise up men and women in the church full of the Holy Spirit, whether they have a title or not. Let them do the works of God. Let them bring healing and blessing to other people through the power of the Holy Spirit and in the name of Jesus.

We thank you for different Bible translations, but that's not what we need. We thank you for Bible schools, but that's not what we really need. Send the Holy Spirit.

Jesus, send more of him into our midst, our lives, our church. Let's pray for the churches all over New York City. Lift up your hands with me, God.

Send the Holy Spirit into all the churches in New York City. Let his presence replace programs. Let his power replace the efforts of man and women.

Visit the Bronx with a revival. Visit Manhattan, all the churches. Visit Queens, visit Staten Island.

All over Brooklyn, Lord. Red Hook, Bay Ridge, Diker Heights, or Bed-Stuy, East New York, Williamsburg. All over this borough, Lord.

All over Long Island, Lord. Revive pastors, revive churches. Holy Spirit, visit and make yourself alive and real there.

We pray that they'll sense their need of you. Congregation, I want you to answer me honestly. I'm speaking to you as your pastor.

How many of you feel the Lord has spoken to you tonight through his word, and you're hungry for God? Just lift up your hand, you're hungry. Hungry for more of God, just lift your hand. So let's make a covenant together.

I would appreciate if you would invite someone to come with you from the church, so we'll have more and more people seeking more and more. But let's make a covenant between ourselves. Next Tuesday, I'm gonna turn over my plate for breakfast, lunch, and dinner.

I'm gonna fast that day and come here and be with you. By the way, some demonic forces are only broken through prayer and fasting. So I'm asking you, maybe you can't skip all three meals, you don't feel you're ready for that.

Skip dinner, come here early. Skip lunch and dinner, just drink a lot of water. But if God has spoken to you, let's follow on to know the Lord.

Let's diligently seek him, not just seek him, but diligently seek him. How many are with me, say amen. So I want all of you in the balcony, I want the singers, they're gonna be in the front row.

In Africa. But all of us here, my wife's gonna be on the keyboard with Jonathan and the band's going to Africa. But Jesus is gonna be here too.

And I'll be with you, I'll guide you through the meeting and we'll have less talk and just more, God, come, fill me, change me. Aren't you hungry to be changed? And just think of the potential. If God could use Stephen with no title, don't believe that lie, I can't do anything because I didn't go to seminary and I don't have a title and I'm not up on the platform like some other people are.

Stephen never was up on the platform. He just was doing it. And whatever the Holy Spirit prompts you to do between now and Sunday, do it, say it, pray it.

Because that's how his influences get stronger. Obedience to every prompting. And if you're not sure if it's God, look at me, if you're not sure it's God, just say to God, God, I feel this prompting, I'm not sure this is you.

So God, the best feeling I have, I do this 100 times a month sitting over there and trying to know what to do in a service. The best I have feeling is to say this or do it. If it's not of you, God, give me a warning or give me a check in my spirit and I won't do it, I won't say it, but otherwise I'm gonna do it because I feel you're prompting me to do it.

And when you take that attitude, God will never let you down. He will always guide you, confirm it. He'll let you know that he's gonna help you when you take an attitude like that.

But let's not just live in a box, I wanna get out of the box and live where God wants us to live. I love you all a lot. How many, by the grace of God, you'll not only join with me next Tuesday, but you'll try, as God permits, I don't wanna make this legalistic, don't come if you're not fasting, don't you mean business with God, I don't believe in those things.

You go as the Lord leads you. But how many will covenant, will meet together again next Tuesday to seek the Lord? Let me see your hands, come on. Okay, up in the balcony too.

Now do this, some of the people in the church are just, they go to church on Sunday. Get ahold of one of them that you sit near this Sunday and say, come on, let's go on Tuesday. We're gonna see God do something great in our church, greater and greater and greater.

I got some things that are developing today on the phone that I just can't even believe. I can't even share it with you, it's so beyond. You know the thing beyond what you could ask or think? This is beyond what you could ask or think.

A way for us, us, this church, to influence this entire country. I can't even, I can't, I can't, I'm waiting to see all the pieces fall in part, but it's happening quickly. I certainly wasn't looking for it, but oh my goodness, God is awesome.

Can we give God a hand clap of praise? Everybody turn and hug a bunch of people, you're dismissed. Good to see all of you in the balcony, I love you.

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