



# PAYING THE PRICE FOR REVIVAL

WEEK 7  
01.17.16

## FOCUS VERSE

### Acts 6:1

And in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplied, there arose a murmuring of the Grecians against the Hebrews, because their widows were neglected in the daily ministrations.

## LESSON TEXT

### Acts 6:1–12

1 And in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplied, there arose a murmuring of the Grecians against the Hebrews, because their widows were neglected in the daily ministrations.

2 Then the twelve called the multitude of the disciples unto them, and said, It is not reason that we should leave the word of God, and serve tables.

3 Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business.

4 But we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word.

5 And the saying pleased the whole multitude: and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Ghost, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicolas a proselyte of Antioch:

6 Whom they set before the apostles: and when they had prayed, they laid their hands on them.

7 And the word of God increased; and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly; and a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith.

8 And Stephen, full of faith and power, did great wonders and miracles among the people.

9 Then there arose certain of the synagogue, which is called the synagogue of the Libertines, and Cyrenians, and Alexandrians, and of them of Cilicia and of Asia, disputing with Stephen.

10 And they were not able to resist the wisdom and the spirit by which he spake.

11 Then they suborned men, which said, We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses, and against God.

12 And they stirred up the people, and the elders, and the scribes, and came upon him, and caught him, and brought him to the council.



## FOCUS THOUGHT

The Pentecostal revival was possible only because followers were willing to sacrifice.



## CULTURE CONNECTION

### The Cost of Revival

Is the church suffering more persecution today than it did in the first few centuries of its existence? Was there more persecution of believers following the outpouring of the Holy Ghost in the early 1900s than presently? These are difficult questions. There has always been opposition to righteousness, for Satan is the architect of opposition.

When the church was born on the Day of Pentecost, Satan immediately launched an offensive to destroy it. The Book of Acts records many of those persecutions. Although the Roman Empire continued the persecution of Christians until the fourth century, it is estimated that worldwide more Christians have been martyred in the last fifty years than in

the church's first three hundred years. Since the church is the body of Christ in the world, Satan's instigation of persecution is constant.

In addition to persecution, other things are also included in the cost of revival. Missionaries, whether called to cities in North America or to other countries, leave family members and relocate to the city or country to which God has called them. Prayer and fasting might also be considered a "price" for revival because these spiritual disciplines require time and commitment.

Whatever the cost, the price for revival must be paid in order to see an influx of people into the kingdom of God.

#### OUTLINE

##### I. THE FIRST MINISTERS

- A. Division
- B. Addition
- C. Multiplication

##### II. THE FIRST MARTYR

- A. Stephen, a Tremendous Worker
- B. Stephen, a Truthful Witness
- C. Stephen, a Triumphant Warrior

##### III. OUR FERVENT MISSION

- A. Requires Different Ministries
- B. Requires Dynamic Conviction
- C. Requires Determined Sacrifice

#### CONTEMPLATING THE TOPIC

Someone has said, "Nothing worth having comes easy." Paul Harvey, the late news commentator, made popular the statement "There's no free lunch." Everything of value comes with a price, and revival is no exception.

Although there are times when God shows the church with special blessings that seem to come as a result of no unified effort or plan, revival usually is a result of concerted

prayer, fasting, and consecration. This trio of effort represents sacrifice. God rewards those who seek Him.

*"If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land" (II Chronicles 7:14).*

We often hear great reports of revival without hearing just how the revival came about. When we hear of a one-hundred-soul revival, we usually do not hear about the price that was paid for the revival. We do not hear about how many doors were knocked, how many people were contacted, how many meals were fasted, and how many hours were spent in prayer.

Although we may have heard of the amazing revival in Colombia, South America, we may not have heard much about missionary Verner Larsen who went to Colombia in the late 1930s and ministered seven years without a convert. Not only could he not speak

the language, but his wife died during this time, leaving him with a small child to raise. He preached his wife's funeral, dug her grave behind his house, dragged her casket to the grave, and buried her. However, there are over one million believers in Colombia today. According to Darry V. Crossley, United Pentecostal Church International Global Missions regional director of South America, we can "trace the genesis of all of these believers back to Verner Larsen's missionary efforts."

In this lesson we will study the integral part sacrifice plays in the spread of the gospel—from the sacrifice of the coming of God to this world in the body of a man to the sacrifice of His life on the cross. Getting the gospel to the world involves sacrifice.

In addition to celebrating the occurrence of revival in the early church, we will consider the cost of that revival. We will see that when God moved, Satan moved. And we will rejoice that the former always wins the victory over the latter.

## SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

### I. THE FIRST MINISTERS

As the number of believers increased, some of the Grecians (Hellenized Jews) began to complain that their widows were being neglected. To alleviate this problem, seven men "full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom" were appointed to oversee the care of the widows (Acts 6:3). Although these men were to take care of the mundane, they were not excluded from the miraculous. "Stephen, full of faith and power, did great wonders and miracles among the people" (Acts 6:8).

Unlike the corporate world where employees are often trained to be specialists in one area of responsibility, Stephen functioned as a deacon and also preached. Believers in the early church multitasked in many areas of responsibility.

#### A. Division

In spite of the miracles occurring in the early church, "There arose a murmuring" (Acts 6:1). As miracles are natural with God, murmuring is natural with people. The Spirit's

moving does not prohibit the spirit of carnal man from getting stirred up. It is unfortunate that in the midst of miracles, the Book of Acts records murmuring.

The Grecians, the Greek-speaking Jews in the church, began to complain their widows were not being properly cared for. All the power of the Holy Ghost the early church believers enjoyed did not keep some of them from murmuring. All the miracles of the early church did not make the believers less human.

#### B. Addition

To solve the problem that surfaced in the beginning of Acts 6, the apostles added a ministry to the church. Apparently up to this point, the apostles had been overseeing the distribution of necessities to the widows. But as the congregation increased, this task became too time consuming for the apostles to administer in addition to their spiritual ministry to the church.

*Ministries and helps are vital to the function of a healthy church.*

To alleviate this situation, seven men, sometimes called deacons, were chosen to take over what had been the apostles' duty to minister to the widows. This new ministry would allow the apostles to focus on the spiritual needs of the church.

This example underscores the importance of the willingness to serve in whatever capacity is needed in the church. Not everyone can be a pastor. Not everyone can have a leadership role. Ministries and helps are vital to the function of a healthy church.

*"And God hath set some in the church, first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, governments, diversities of tongues" (1 Corinthians 12:28).*

When the church, the body of Christ, is functioning properly, believers will be added to the assembly. "And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved" (Acts 2:47). Therefore we need not worry about church growth. We should, however, be concerned about doing everything we are required to do as members of the body of Christ.

God adds and multiplies. Satan divides. If we keep a right attitude and spirit, and work for God instead of ourselves, He will see to it the church grows.

### C. Multiplication

As a result of the apostles having more time to focus on prayer and ministering the Word, the church greatly multiplied.

*"And the word of God increased; and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly; and a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith" (Acts 6:7).*

Perhaps some churches do not grow in number because their motives are wrong. Seeking an increase in attendance for the sake of numbers represents the wrong motive, for success in the work of the Lord is not always calculated in numbers. Sometimes the desire for numerical growth may come from ego and competition. However, our desire to see church growth should come from our longing to see individuals born again into the kingdom of God.

At times when a church is going through a spiritual drought, it is natural to get frustrated. But God cannot be put in a box or forced to work on our timetable. Much like the butterfly emerging from the chrysalis, when it is time, revival will happen.

As spiritual as multiplication is, it is really natural. God is even more interested in the growth of the church than we are. The church is His body, and He is interested in its growth.

Revival is not the result of a "quick fix." It is often a slow, gradual accumulation of the things that comprise revival. Crash programs to trigger revival are not the answer. We must be aware of the value of faithfulness.

## II. THE FIRST MARTYR

Although Satan seemed to enjoy a temporary victory in the martyrdom of Stephen, that victory was short-lived. Satan never learns. So often his victories develop into defeats, for witnessing Stephen's martyrdom was a young man who was to become one of the most productive ministers of the early church. Apparently Stephen's martyrdom made a lasting impression on Saul, who is better known as Paul, for two chapters later he became a new convert to the fledgling church.

Stephen did not choose martyrdom, and he surely did not plan to be the first martyr of the church. He was simply doing what he felt God wanted him to do. It was the resistance to his message and ministry that effected his demise. The opposition, having no other way to refute his arguments and to silence him, resorted to false witnesses and subsequent execution to accomplish their goal.

The persecution of the early church, which was orchestrated by Satan, effected the scattering of the church at Jerusalem. Instead of decreasing the church, it served to increase its membership. "Therefore they that were scattered abroad went every where preaching the word" (Acts 8:4). As the disciples were scattered, the seeds of the gospel were scattered.

### A. Stephen, a Tremendous Worker

*"And Stephen, full of faith and power, did great wonders and miracles among the people" (Acts 6:8).*

From his selection as a deacon to his martyrdom, Stephen was busy. Being full of faith and power, he was able to work wonders and miracles among the people as he yielded himself to God. He was a tremendous worker as he allowed the Lord to work through him. His success was due in part to his willingness to yield to the Spirit of the Lord.

It seems an important part of Stephen's work was disputing with the opposition. According to Acts 6:9, the Libertines, Cyrenians, and Alexandrians were in opposition to him. "And they were not able to resist the wisdom and the spirit by which he spake"

(Acts 6:10). When we are in agreement with God, we are in disagreement with the spirit of the world. Therefore it is only natural for conflict and disputation to develop.

Undoubtedly Stephen's willingness to work was one of the keys to his working wonders. Some individuals want to be wonder workers, but they do not want to work. Wonders may not occur every day in our walk with God, but our work should. He requires faithfulness. God is the wonder worker. Only by yielding to God and letting God work wonders and miracles through him could it be said Stephen did great wonders and miracles.

## **B. Stephen, a Truthful Witness**

Stephen's tremendous work created such a degree of opposition the council hired false witnesses to state they had heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses and God. When the high priest asked him if these accusations were accurate, Stephen took the opportunity to witness to the council.

Stephen's witness was a stirring rehearsal of Israel's history from Abraham to Solomon. He then reminded them of the prophets Israel had persecuted. Unafraid of the council or the multitude, he closed his witness with an accusation of their betrayal and murder of Jesus, whom he called the "Just One." (See Acts 7:1–53.)

There are several kinds of witnessing. A non-verbal witness represents a godly life lived before the ungodly. It is the equivalent of letting your light shine. This seems to be the level of witnessing Jesus referred to in Matthew 5:16: "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven." This is what Peter referred to in his epistle: "Likewise, ye wives, be in subjection to your own husbands; that, if any obey not the word, they also may without the word be won by the conversation [behavior] of the wives; while they behold your chaste conversation [behavior] coupled with fear" (1 Peter 3:1–2).

Another kind of witnessing is a verbal witness comprised of generalities such as "God is good," "I love the Lord," and "Jesus loves you." We should not underestimate the

effectiveness of this level of witnessing. It is of a non-offensive genre that might be more conducive to the workplace and on the street as we meet strangers.

A third kind of witnessing has a more pointed and direct line of presentation. It is the level Paul used in Acts 19 when he found certain disciples of John. "He said unto them, Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed? And they said unto him, We have not so much as heard whether there be any Holy Ghost. And he said unto them, Unto what then were ye baptized? And they said, Unto John's baptism" (Acts 19:2–3).

When he heard their answer, he said, "John verily baptized with the baptism of repentance, saying unto the people, that they should believe on him which should come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus" (Acts 19:4). After hearing this explanation, John's disciples were baptized "in the name of the Lord Jesus" (Acts 19:5).

Stephen used this kind of witnessing and went right to the jugular saying, "Ye stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost: as your fathers did, so do ye" (Acts 7:51). John the Baptist was another who employed this aggressive style. He said, "O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come?" (Matthew 3:7). To employ this kind of witnessing, we must be sure we are led by the Holy Spirit and not by our own spirit.

## **C. Stephen, a Triumphant Warrior**

When Stephen so pointedly indicted the council, they were cut to the heart (Acts 7:54). Screaming and stopping their ears, they ran upon him and cast him out of the city. Hurling stones, they mercilessly put an end to his illustrious life.

Stephen, triumphant warrior to the end, "being full of the Holy Ghost, looked up stedfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God" (Acts 7:55). Unafraid to tell the council the truth, he went to his death just as bravely.

Some have attempted to use Stephen's vision as proof of three separate and distinct persons in the Godhead. Note what Stephen

saw. He saw the glory of God, not the Father. Jesus was seen standing on the right hand of God, or according to the clarifying statement, “the glory of God.” He did not see God, for “No man hath seen God at any time” (John 1:18). In the Book of Revelation, John looked directly into Heaven and said, “I was in the spirit: and, behold, a throne was set in heaven, and one sat on the throne” (Revelation 4:2).

### III. OUR FERVENT MISSION

Several definitions are given for the word *mission*, but the one that serves the thrust of this lesson is “a strongly felt aim or calling.” A mission is a spiritual direction emphasized by the Spirit as we walk with the Lord.

We have a general obligation to be a witness when we receive the Holy Ghost. (See Acts 1:8.) This general obligation to be a witness in “Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth” is the same for every believer. But often a more distinct goal and calling becomes our mission.

In fulfilling our personal mission, we are to be “fervent in spirit” (Romans 12:11). The word translated as *fervent* comes from a Greek word meaning “to be hot, boil with heat.” Our mission should create fervency within us that the coldness of this world and its icy stares cannot permeate.

*The church needs various ministries at different times depending on particular needs.*

#### A. Requires Different Ministries

Many different ministries are involved in the dissemination of the gospel.

*“Now there are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. And there are*

*differences of administrations, but the same Lord. And there are diversities of operations, but it is the same God which worketh all in all” (1 Corinthians 12:4-6).*

The various needs of a congregation dictate different ministries. As in a factory there are different operations depending on what is needed in the timeline of the product, the church needs various ministries at different times depending on particular needs.

*“And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ” (Ephesians 4:11–12).*

May we as believers yield ourselves to God’s Spirit to the extent that if He chooses to use us in any of these ministries, we will be ready. These equipping ministries referred to in Ephesians 4 require a special calling.

#### B. Requires Dynamic Conviction

Our fervent mission requires a dynamic conviction. *Dynamic* is defined as “forceful,” and conviction is defined as “a fixed or firm belief.” To be able to do the work of the Lord effectively and fulfill our mission, we must have a firm and forceful belief in what we are doing.

Without such a belief, a person will be deterred from his mission more easily. With the opposition a believer faces, it is of utmost importance to have this kind of conviction. Paul said: “For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 8:38–39).

Stephen’s heartfelt conviction prompted him to be assertive and deliberate. Without hesitation he witnessed to the council, knowing his words could indict him. But because he was so fervent, he did not fear.

*Every believer should be involved in a ministry of the church in which his or her gifts and talents can be used for the benefit of others.*

### C. Requires Determined Sacrifice

The work of God as we know it exists because of sacrifice. Of course the principal sacrifice was made by Jesus Christ. Without His sacrificial death on the cross, there would be no church. In addition to this sacrifice, someone paid the price before us. Often this meant going without some of the necessities of life. It meant the kind of sacrifice our flesh tries to escape. But somebody was willing to sacrifice that we might receive salvation.

We too must be involved in sacrifice to share the gospel with those who need to be saved. For anything received, something must be given. When anything is given, it is sacrifice in its simplest form. For the gospel to reach the lost of the world,

sacrifice is involved. Sacrifice is defined as “an act of giving up something you value for the sake of something that is more important.”

### INTERNALIZING THE MESSAGE

God’s work is comprised of many ministries, for various needs must be addressed. Not everyone can be a pastor or an evangelist. Paul asked, “Are all apostles? are all prophets? are all teachers? are all workers of miracles? Have all the gifts of healing? do all speak with tongues [have the gift of tongues]? do all interpret?” (1 Corinthians 12:29–30). The answer to Paul’s question is no.

*“If the whole body were an eye, where were the hearing? If the whole were hearing, where were the smelling? But now hath God set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased him” (1 Corinthians 12:17–18).*

Every believer should be involved in a ministry of the church in which his or her gifts and talents can be used for the benefit of others. If you are not yet involved, consider what your abilities are and what you do well. Talk with your pastor or others in leadership to see what ministry is available in which you can use your talents for the kingdom of God. ■

### REFLECTIONS

- Discuss Stephen’s contribution to the work of the Lord.
- Discuss Philip’s contribution to the work of the Lord.
- As a believer, what is our mission?
- Discuss the difference between our mission and our calling.