

“We Send Every Member” // Acts 7:54–8:4 // *Be the Movement #4*

This is the 4th and final week of our series through our core values--4 primary values that we build our church around. These were embodied in the life of Jesus and exemplified by the Apostles. They are values not only to build a church on, but also values to build your life on.

1. Gospel above all
2. We do whatever it takes to reach all people
3. We make disciples not just converts

Our 4th and final value is **WE SEND EVERY MEMBER**.

There is a myth that a lot of people in the church believe, and that is that **‘calling’ is a special, mystical moment that only a select few experience. Cheerios...** And if that doesn’t happen, God just expects you to go to church, be a good person, pay your tithes, and don’t cheat on your spouse.

But that’s not true. I stared into my Cheerios for years...

Here’s the truth: the call to leverage your life for the GC *was* included in the call to follow Jesus—

- **Matthew 4:19:** *Follow me and I will make you a fisher of men.*
- **When you accepted Jesus,** *you accepted the call to missions*
- The question now is **NO LONGER IF you are called,** only where and how

For years, this has been a huge part of our church, and it’s probably what we most known for nationally.

Works consulted:

“Missions” (John 17, Isaiah 6), Tim Keller
“Here I Am, Send Me” (Isaiah 6), Joby Martin

- By God’s grace, we have sent out 1258 people from our church domestic and international church planting teams--people that have uprooted their lives to be part of a church plant. **597 have gone on** full-time international missionaries. **Take a minute and think about that. Almost 600.** Most churches only get to experience maybe 2 in their lifetime. The IMB tells us we have 7x more members on the field than the next closest church.
- **These people we have sent out have planted** 376 churches--about 60 here in the US and 320 overseas. That makes us right at 1/3 of the way to our goal of 1K, and that’s the result of your generosity and your commitment to the GC, TSC.

So, it’s what we--our church--is known for nationally. But here’s the question. Is it true of you?

Every weekend we say a little phrase at the end of our services. Do you know what it is? Say it out loud with me: *YOU ARE SENT.*

When we say that, we are not talking only to the church planters and international missionaries. We are saying that to you. Every member is SENT.

Listen, the more I have studied the book of Acts, the more I have come to the conviction that Jesus’ plan for reaching the world is not gathering large groups of people to bask in the anointing of one prophetic teacher, but raising up ordinary people in the power of the Spirit and sending them out.

So, to that end, I want to **walk you through the story of an ordinary guy** in Acts who literally changed the world and show you **4 convictions that shaped his life** that should shape yours also.

His name is Stephen, and his story begins in Acts 6 if you have your Bible...

(Acts 6)

Let me give you the context. Stephen was not an Apostle, he was just an ordinary guy, but his story marks a turning point in the book of Acts.

- **Up until this moment**, you see, as far as we know, the gospel movement has yet to leave Jerusalem, even though Jesus had clearly told the Apostles he wanted his gospel carried to the ends of the earth...
- **Now, it's been an exciting ride, to be sure...** with all the **3000 baptisms and miracles** and people **getting struck dead** in the offering and such... but the bottom line is that by Acts 6 the Apostles are still meeting in small groups in Jerusalem, holding hands and singing Kum-ba-yah.

That all changes with the story of Stephen. In chapter 6, Stephen gets **selected to help** deliver food to widows so the Apostles could devote themselves to prayer and the word.

- His job, in one sense, was not that important:
 - He wasn't elected **teacher** or **group president**.
 - He didn't **write any books**.
 - He was not considered to be one of the **theological leaders** in the early church.
- Just a table waiter: the meals-on-wheels of the early church

But **Acts 6:7** tells us that **he did his job so well** and his witness was so full of the Spirit, and so compelling, **that it got the attention** of many in the community, including many of the Jewish priests, who began to turn to Christ.

- Well, this **gets the attention of the Sanhedrin**, who begin to try to discredit him.

- Love this verse: **"But they could not withstand the wisdom and the Spirit with which (this ordinary layman) he was speaking."** (Acts 6:10)

In Acts 7 they drag him before the Jewish council, where he proceeds to give the longest recorded **and least seeker friendly sermon in the Bible**. It's basic point is: **"You Jews killed all the other prophets and that's why you killed Jesus, too."**

The message reaches its climax at the end of chapter 7:

Acts 7:54–8:4

[54] Now when they heard these things they were enraged, and they ground their teeth at him.

[55] But he, full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. [56] And he said, "Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God."

[57] But they cried out with a loud voice and stopped their ears and rushed together at him.

[58] Then they cast him out of the city and stoned him. And the witnesses laid down their garments at the feet of a young man named Saul. [59] And as they were stoning Stephen, he called out, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." [60] And falling to his knees he cried out with a loud voice, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them." And when he had said this, he fell asleep.

Now, watch this (chapter end?): Acts 8:1, And there arose on that day (the day of Stephen's martyrdom) a great persecution against the church in Jerusalem, and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, *except the apostles....* [4] And those who were scattered went about preaching the word.

- **There it is! This is the *first time the gospel leaves Jerusalem***, the first fulfillment of Acts 1:8, and—I want you to let this sink in—not **a single Apostle** is involved, even indirectly.
 - **Stephen’s service** provoked the trial;
 - Stephen’s **testimony** provoked the riot;
 - And of those **who left preaching the word—that doesn’t mean what I do, it means all those, men and women, who tell others the gospel—Luke goes out** of his way to note that not a single Apostle was included.

I believe Stephen’s story is given to us as an example of how the gospel expands globally. You see, it occurs at a **pivotal moment** in the book of Acts.

Scholars say the key verse in Acts is Acts 1:8—“*But you will receive power...*” That verse gives the outline of the book—the gospel is going to expand in concentric circles outward from Jerusalem to Judea to Samaria to the UPOTE. Luke’s repetition of those places in **8:1** is his signal that Stephen’s story is the **pivotal moment** in the culmination of this vision.

Stephen is a picture of **what so-called “ordinary Christians”** in the church should look like, and **what will happen in the world** when they do. He’s a picture of EVERY MEMBER, showing you how every member, not just the super spiritual ones, or those who have been to seminary, or those with squeaky clean pasts, are to live sent. If you’ve been a Christians for 10 minutes you are sent.

You. You are sent.

So here is the first of the...

4 Convictions of Those Who Transform the World

1. God wants to use me

- Summit, I hope I have said this enough to you that it is drilled into your subconscious. You. God wants to use YOU.
- Historically, ordinary believers, like Stephen, have always been the tip of the gospel spear.
- If you go back and study it, the gospel has travelled around the world faster on the wings of business than it has even through Apostolic effort.
 - **Stephen Neill, *History of Christian Missions***: the only thing more remarkable than the rapidity of the spread of the gospel in the 1st century was its anonymity. **3 great church planting centers...**
 - **The story of the founding of the church at Antioch is recorded in Acts 11.** All it says is “**some brothers moved to Antioch** and the hand of the Lord was with THEM” and they planted a church in Antioch. THEM. Everybody say, ‘THEM.’ THEM means a few guys who are not significant enough for me even to tell you their names because you’ll never hear about them again. Just some dudes.”
- **The same thing is true today: I read this recently... 40K** evangelical missionaries / 2 million Americans in secular employment (200K). ⅓ identify as born again. Let’s all look at each other and acknowledge that’s not true. **If we only count a third of that third as serious... What if...**
 - **My dad**
 - **I could tell you about the Parker’s**, who moved to N Africa to run a CrossFit gym there as part of one of the teams
 - Craig, head of engineering firm in South Asia
 - Kevin, a former firefighter who now builds wells in Central Asia,
 - Sam, a woman working in red light district in Central Asia doing wellness and hygiene training for women,
 - Or Rachel, counselor who works with abuse victims,
 - Or Cameron, who runs a textile manufacturing shop,

- And Jessica an elementary ed major who teaches missionary kids

I could **also tell you about countless people** who have gone with one of our domestic church plants and pursued their careers as part of one of our church plants here in the United States in places like Denver, Orlando, ATL, Miami, and the DR

Let me give you a vision for following Jesus: Whatever God made you good at, do it well for the glory of God, and do it somewhere strategic for the mission of God.

The second conviction goes hand in hand with this first one...

2. The Holy Spirit fills me

What makes Stephen remarkable is his confidence, a confidence he apparently gained from an awareness of the fullness of the Spirit within him.

- ‘**The most common characteristic repeated** about Stephen was that **he was** filled with the Spirit.’

What gives ordinary people such extraordinary confidence and effectiveness is the *knowledge* of the power of the Spirit within them. **All believers have** the Spirit of Jesus, of course—what gives believers confidence is the knowledge of the Spirit within them.

Jesus made **such extraordinary promises** about the power and potential of the Spirit in believers: so staggering that if you don’t watch yourself you won’t take them seriously!

“Nevertheless, I tell you the truth. It is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you.” John 16:7

- How absurd must that have seemed to those first disciples? To your **advantage**? *What’s it like to walk around with Jesus for 3 years?*
 - *How awesome would it have been to walk around with Jesus...* That’s one of my favorite jokes.
- And he’s telling you that **if you understood who the Spirit was** and what his potential was, that you’d be more excited to have him than even if Jesus left? If I told you I was resigning, I hope you’d be sad.
- **Are you as excited you are leaving here with the HS? God’s plan to reach the world is ordinary** people filled with the Spirit walking in obedience. They will have a collectively greater impact than if Jesus himself had stayed.
- Stop thinking about how incapable or unqualified you are. Don’t you understand that because the Holy Spirit is in you, it’s more about your availability now than your ability?
- The HS can do more through one surrendered vessel than the most talented and richest people in the world could accomplish on their own.
- **We have a really good example of this in Acts 8:** Philip, another ordinary guy preaching in Samaria taken by the Spirit to a road...
- **He’s still doing that today.** Are you listening?
- **59 times; in 36 of those he speaks! Here’s the thing:** Ambiguity in how he speaks. Acts 13:2. Ambiguity in how he speaks, not whether he speaks
- He’s speaking to some of you right now. Are you listening? Can you say, “Here am I, Lord, send me!” Are you listening?
- Do you want to get the conversation started? **TEXT SENDME to 33933.**

3. As Jesus was to me, so I will be to others

Vs. 59 may be my favorite part of this whole story, because it gives us a window into Stephen’s soul, showing us what he was thinking about at the very moment of his death.

[59] And as they were stoning Stephen, he called out, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." [60] And falling to his knees he cried out with a loud voice, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them."

Where have you **heard these phrases** before?

They sound **almost identical** to what Jesus said when he died:

- "Father, into thy hands I commit my spirit."
- And, "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do."

It seems that in Stephen's dying moments he was thinking about what Jesus had said on the cross—things that Jesus had prayed for Stephen, and now he is saying those very things for others.

- **Get that:** In Stephen's dying moments, he is **attempting to do for others** what Jesus had done for him.

Because, see, that's what it means to follow Jesus: to look at your life as a sacrifice for others like Jesus sacrificed himself for you.

Let me ask you a question: Where would you be without Jesus? I've told you the answer is: the same place millions are without you. Hearing the message of the gospel is an essential part of the salvation process.

- Like Luther said: 1000x?
- **CFH Henry: the gospel is only good news for someone** if it gets to them in time
- **That demands something of us**

Let me ask: Have you wrestled with the obligations you and I owe to the gospel? **Have you squarely faced the fact that 2.8 billion people in the world have little to no access to the gospel?** People who are no more unworthy than us? People made in the image of God like us?

- I think of a place like **Northern Yemen**, which has a population of 8 million--almost the size of NC. Guess how many believers in that whole nation? 20 or 30.
- Each one of these is a person just like you, made in the image of God just like you, who knows what it's like to feel afraid, lonely, lost.
- **I think sometimes about meeting people in heaven who got there because of my obedience or my witness and my sacrifice.** They'll be my brothers and sisters and over eternity I'll come to know them and love them and care deeply for them, and with a heavenly heart and all of eternity I'll love them more deeply that I've been able to love anyone here. I'll look back and be so grateful I made the sacrifices to get the gospel to them. I may not know them well now, but then I will and I know I'll be glad I gave so they could be saved. **Don't you think you'll feel that way, too?**

If Jesus sacrificed himself to save us, it makes sense that we ought to sacrifice ourselves to bring salvation to them, like Stephen did for his countrymen.

For some of you, that is going to mean leaving here and moving somewhere to take the gospel. For others, it means giving like crazy so others can go

So, Conviction 3 is "As Jesus was to me, so I will be to others."

Conviction 4:

4. Jesus is worth it

- **Let's return one final time to Acts 7.** As they began to hurl stones at Stephen, he said: [56] And he said, "Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God."
 - **Scholars point out that Jesus' standing here is odd,** because everywhere else we see Jesus as the right hand of God we see him sitting.
 - **Why is he standing?** He's standing to receive home his son.

- **The world has risen up against Stephen** to tell him he is a fool, a traitor, that his life is a waste, but it's almost as if **Jesus can't contain himself. He stands in the same moment** to say, "Well done, good and faithful servant. They call you heretic. I welcome you home."
- **And Stephen looks up and with face beaming with angelic brightness says, in essence, "Yes, Jesus is worth it!"**

The only thing that will give you the power to live a life of truly being sent it is the conviction that Jesus is worth it!

We like to talk about coming to Jesus as bringing peace in our lives, and fulfillment, and that is true. But **at some point, if you're really serious about following Jesus, following Jesus** is going to cost you—it is going to take you 180 degrees opposite of where you think you want to go—and **in that moment the only thing** that will compel you forward is the belief that Jesus is worth it!

Many of you know that I spent the 1st 2 years of my ministry serving as a missionary in a Muslim UPG in SE Asia. About 11 one night...

Fajar:

- There is something that rises up in the heart of every truly believer when we hear Fajar's story and we say, "Yes, brother, Jesus is worth following even if it costs you that."
- I'm gonna go on record and say **it is hypocritical...** *The same Jesus that calls Fajar to forsake all to follow him is the same Jesus who calls us to forsake comforts and security and desires for our lives to get the gospel to Fajar.*
- The **cost to follow Jesus in places like SE Asia is severe**—the cost to get the gospel to places like that is severe, too.

And the **only thing that will compel you to go all the way**--to do the **hard work**--to leave your **family** and **endure the hardships** and **loneliness** of missionary life--is a sight of the worthiness of Jesus.) Is he worth it?

AT SOME POINT, YOU HAVE TO DECIDE WHO IS WORTHY of the offering of your life, if he is worthy of your absolute obedience.

- Your parents love you, but Jesus created you, and then died to redeem you. Your parents won't be waiting for you at the end to receive you into eternity and you won't be standing around their throne proclaiming their worthiness for eternity
- A job is a great thing to pursue but it's nothing to give your life for.
- Your **parents are precious, your dreams are important, your career hopes** are bright, but **none of those things is worthy** of the offering of your life.
- **JESUS IS WORTHY of it all!** He's the ONLY one who is worthy, **FOR BY HIS WILL ALL THINGS WERE CREATED**, and **BY HIS BLOOD** we were redeemed, and **FOR HIS GLORY** we now exist. **JESUS IS WORTHY!**

You've only got one life. You've got to make it count.

Conclusion:

So here's my charge to yo: Be sent! 3 ways

- **Locally:** Look for the upcoming "Neighboring trainings" our campuses will be doing, equipping you to engage those in your community. Get engaged in what our church is going with various areas of disaster relief..
- **Domestically:** We have 5 church plants going out this year: 1 to Orlando, Miami, Myrtle Beach, the Dominican Republic--yes, we got a thing for awesome beach places--and St. Louis, which has an awesome beach, too. J/K. No beach, but they have the Arch.
 - We have interest meetings happening in October.
 - Maybe this year is your year.
- **Internationally:**
 - I know this is a crazy time to be thinking about moving to another country, but for many of you, that is what God is

stirring in your heart. So your first step: International CP Cohort...where you come to learn about international CP life. This is not a commitment, it's just a way you can keep your hands open to see what God has in store for you.

- Or maybe you want to find out about doing a STT. STT's are when you are sent on a 7-10 day mission trip. Obviously, we haven't been able to do that this summer, but you can still "go on a STT" to disaster relief sites--both here in NC and across the country and you can find out about international ones we'll be doing next year

College students/young professionals--be thinking about all these things. I wrote a book, not just for students: WYD

What better time to rethink than when nothing is normal?

Let's get the convo started. For all of these. Text **SENDME to 33933**

4 convictions that shaped Stephen's life should yours, too:

- God wants to use me
- The Holy Spirit fills me
- As Jesus was to me, so I will be to others
- Jesus is worth it

These are 4 convictions of those who change the world. Do they shape yours?

Challenge: Pray like Piper: is this year you want to send me? Right now, bow your head, and pray this, if you can: "Lord, I'm all yours. Completely. (Can you say that?) I'll go where you tell me to go, do what you tell me to do. I surrender, Lord, and I'm listening. *Here am I, send me.*"

What better time to rethink than when nothing is normal? ASHBY'S

Bullpen:

~~Long gone are the days when we should be content with a bunch of people who sing out loud, don't divorce, and give to missions. I now want to know I can drop off any member of my church in a city, and that person could grow in Jesus, make disciples, and help start a church.~~ **Francis Chan**

~~**These are the convictions we ought to be cultivating in believers the world!**~~

