

# Growing Pains (Acts 6:1-15)

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Date: 24 July 2022

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[ 0 : 00 ] Kia ora Saints. Kia ora.

Kia ora.

Kia ora.

Kia ora.

Kia ora.

[ 2 : 59 ] So before we do that, I'd love to invite you to pray with me. Let's bow our heads. Let's ask God for wisdom together.

Let's pray for God's word impact us so that we can reach God's world, perceptive to all the different issues around us, properly organized and ready to suffer for the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Would you do that for us today?

Who's the American factory before? Who's even heard about it? Okay, one, two. Okay. All right.

Obviously, this is like targeted at our generation or something. Okay. So American factory actually won an Oscar for best documentary in 2021.

Okay. It follows a story of how a former car factory in a town called Dayton, Ohio, kind of basically went bankrupt. And then a company from China comes in and says, we'll restart this glass making factory.

[ 4 : 48 ] And so this Chinese glass company is called Fuyau, which means like fortune and glory.

Okay. Comes in, buys a plant and then hires all these American workers, but brings in Chinese managers and specialists.

And they start to have this interesting experiment almost. It's workers from China working with workers from America. And so the documentary kind of follows kind of the lives of these people as they try and work together.

Right. Ordinary people working together from different cultural backgrounds. Okay. Trying to make glass together. Sometimes the clash between cultures is super obvious. Okay. There are scenes of Chinese staff getting a crash in culture, learning how to shoot a gun, trying to catch fish with the locals.

Right. And then there's also American workers that get flown to China and they're thrown into a different world where they're watching all these workers chant company slogans and run around and work like crazy.

And it just seems like a totally different world to them. And part of the drama that unfolds in American Factory is this. Can this company succeed when there is a clash of cultures?

[ 6 : 03 ] When there's a clash of cultures in this organization, can it succeed? And I just raise this because in our passage today, I think what we actually see is a clash of cultures.

I wonder if you heard from the reading, right, the Grecians and Hebrews. So these are reflecting two different groups of believers in the early church.

Right. If you look at verse one. Right. Grecian Jews and Hebraic Jews among them. And there was a grumbling. Last week we heard about the story of the church or image of the church from Pastor Nathan of the church being like a lighthouse.

Right. Built on a rock but being battered by plenty of storms. And we've seen plenty of storms hit the early church, have we not? Waves of persecution, whether from outside or issues that have festered from the inside of the church.

Right. From outside and within. And yet our first brothers and sisters, they stand firm on the rock of ages. On the king of kings. The message of the risen Lord Jesus cannot be stopped.

[ 7 : 10 ] That's what we see time and time again in the next so far. And yet here in chapter six, do we have a conflict that's going to threaten to support the church?

Now, I think Luke here, the author of this account, is addressing deep questions to pick leaders, although that we'll see a little bit more.

The deeper question Acts chapter six has for us is how will the word of God keep growing? How will the word of Christ reach the world for Christ?

And that's a question all of us need to know. Because we want, I hope, the word of Christ to reach the world for Christ.

Whether you've been a Christian for many years, whether you're still exploring, we want the word of Christ to reach the world for Christ. And how will that happen? What threatens it? And what do you think you can do about it? I suggest that Acts chapter six, if you're the note-taking type, teaches us three things that the church must be for God's word to reach God's world.

[ 8 : 14 ] Okay, so for God's word to reach God's world, I suggest that the church needs to be three things. Firstly, perceptive to culture. Secondly, properly organized. And finally, prepared to suffer.

I think that's what we see three different things that the church must be to really keep that passion for God growing. To keep more and more people coming to know Jesus Christ.

Perceptive to culture. Properly organized. Prepared to suffer. That's what Acts six tells us. A bit of context. Some of you are here for the first time. We've been going through a series on the book of Acts. As we've heard from previous preachers, as the disciples proclaim the good news about Jesus, what did we see?

We saw the early church growing rapidly, right? Thousands of souls believed the gospel message, and they were added to the church. And actually, we left Acts five last week and encouraged that, but despite persecution, despite conflict, what does chapter five, verse 42 say?

The very verse before. It says, day after day, in the temple courts and from house to house, they never stopped teaching and proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the Christ. How about that?

[ 9 : 29 ] That is God's radical new community. This is how they draw in the masses. And then they devote themselves to the apostles' teaching, to fellowship, to breaking bread together, to prayer.

But what happens when something grows quickly? It brings pressure, doesn't it? Imagine a new neighborhood, and you put 200 houses in one year on it.

It's going to bring a lot of pressure on the roads and all the infrastructure around it. Or imagine filling a balloon really quickly. It's going to stretch the latex, right? Growth brings pressure, does it not?

As God's household gets bigger and bigger and bigger, it's putting pressure on some of its foundations. And so for this growth to continue, we see that firstly, for God's word to reach God's will, firstly, the church must be perceptive to culture.

Read verse one again with me. In those days when the number of disciples was increasing, the Grecian Jews among them complained against the Hebraic Jews because their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution.

[ 10 : 37 ] It's important to note how early on in the church, this early, the gospel has already included the marginalized, right? And cared for their needs.

It's amazing how I've heard this past week, half of you have been in ISO or, you know, just unable to go out and about, and friends and family have just been dropping off food, right? Groceries, praying for you.

That's a gospel in action. But if you were a widow in first century Judea, as this was written in, you're in a really tough spot. Maybe you had no friends or family.

Maybe you've come from a different town. Now you're in Jerusalem. And now you're stuck. You have no income. You have no way to look after yourself. And you've just joined this new community. What happens next?

Who will look after these people? And so the church takes it upon themselves to take on this responsibly and to care for them. I think daily distribution is what it literally says, but I think it's probably talking about distributing food or other essentials, things that people needed day by day.

[ 11 : 42 ] This is God's family in action. And yet some people were still missing out, right? And in particular, Luke tells us it was the Greek-speaking widows who were being overlooked in this daily distribution.

It would kind of be like this. It would be as if, imagine if everyone who was isolating this week got a grocery delivery and a care package except for those who spoke Cantonese. Ooh.

Wouldn't that be sad, right? They'd be missing out, right? But this is kind of what's going on here. We're not told exactly why and how they missed out.

Perhaps there was a language barrier, you know, talking about different groups. Perhaps these women who normally lived outside of Jerusalem, they found it hard to communicate clearly with their heart with people who had lived in Jerusalem all their lives.

You have to think of Jerusalem as kind of this hub. And then people who were Jewish, they lived all over the place, different countries, different regions. Do you remember Pentecost? They all came from all over the place.

[ 12 : 45 ] And now they were stuck in one city. So they've got different cultural backgrounds and maybe even spoke different languages. And so it could be language and yet it could also be just, even if they spoke the same language, they're different people.

They're different groups. Maybe they're not sure how to communicate across groups and cultures. Yes, perhaps they're all Jewish. But maybe the Greek brothers and sisters, maybe they were being looked at like outsiders, right?

Fresh off the boat or plane or whatever. Whatever the root cause, there was some kind of cultural or language difficulty. And it was going to lead to division, right?

And grumbling. Don't know about you, but I haven't heard of anyone speak Greek or Hebrew here. And yet we do have different languages among us, don't we? Maybe English is your heart language.

Maybe you're more familiar with Cantonese or Mandarin or Tereo. And yet even if we all spoke English to some level, our differences are more than just language, are they not?

[ 13 : 51 ] They include culture. For example, some of you are used to living in families where people just hint rather than tell you directly what's going wrong. Maybe some of you are in a family situation where people address each other by the right name or relationship.

If you don't say the right auntie or granduncle or the third brother, it's going to get really confusing for you, but it will offend them if you don't get it right. Some of you find it really easy to give and receive feedback directly, okay?

If there's a problem, come talk to me in person, please. And yet others of you, that's a little bit too intense. You'd rather someone speak to you indirectly about a problem.

And so actually, maybe you're hurt when someone speaks to you directly. Or maybe some of you, it's the opposite. Maybe you're hurt because you're in a culture where people speak about you indirectly.

And you'd rather them talk to you face to face. Can you see? We could all be speaking the same language, but there are different cultural differences. And our sin amplifies some of them, right?

[ 15 : 01 ] You might think that we've got PCBC English now. Problem solved. Hang on. Do we not have cultural differences among us too? Some of us are Gen Z.

Some of us are old parents. Some of us are probably more recent immigrants. You've only lived here two, three years. Some of us, you're born and bred Kiwis. None of us are culturally neutral. We all have some kind of accent, right? If you don't, trust me, you do, right? And so we shouldn't be surprised that as a church grows, there might be conflict as we misunderstand, as we communicate across cultures, as we sin across cultures.

We have to be aware of this. We can't just say, preach the gospel and ignore that sometimes our cultures can cause conflict. That would be like a Chinese CEO starting a glass factory in America and thinking, I don't need to learn the American culture, right?

So I want you to keep this in mind. The next time you get frustrated, maybe about something at church, maybe the way someone in church treated you or you treated someone, you could go ahead and just lash out and say, how unreasonable.

[ 16 : 14 ] How dare they? How prideful. How dare they? And that could be true. There could be issues to deal with in terms of sin. And yet would it not be wise to ask as well, what kind of culture do they live in?

Why do they do what they did? Why do they believe what they believe? Why do they value this particular thing so highly in this situation? I think behind a lot of our conflicts, right, in any organization, but especially in churches, we misunderstand that sometimes we are communicating across cultures and mistakes and understandings, misunderstandings can grow and amplify.

So I think the first point I want to make is simple. For God's word to reach God's word, it is so wise for a church to be perceptive to its own culture and the culture around it.

That's from verse 1. And next we see, I think, from verse 2 to 7, that for God's word to reach God's world, the church needs to be properly organized.

Properly organized. Have a look from verse 2. Read it again. It says here, verse 2, So the twelve gathered all the disciples together and said, it would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to wait on tables.

[17:34] You see what happens? The twelve gathered all the disciples together. That's how you know that they were Baptists, right? They decided to call a meeting and get everyone involved. And yet, how good it is that even a situation like this, they decided it was worth addressing altogether.

How good is that? It's not easy just to say, hey, one of the apostles, you sorted it out. You know, we're the twelve, we've been here the longest, we'll tell you what to do. But no, they don't do that. They call everyone in. They try and work it out together. Something we can learn. And again, an easy option perhaps could be for the apostles, right? To say, look, all right, we've been laying out and distributing possessions already.

Do you remember in Ananias, Sapphira? Barnabas, others, they've been doing the hard work of taking all the stuff that people were sharing willingly and giving it out. That was chapter five. And so, wouldn't it be easy just to say, look, you've done this the longest, you sorted it out.

Could you do it? Notice. Yep, we'll sort it out. We'll sort it out. We'll sort out this distribution.

[18:48] Why is that? It tells us, right? It would not be right for us to neglect the service of the word of God in order to serve table.

What they're saying is, do this, but it's a force of ministry that we are, that we've been enthralled. And that's important too.

Because while addressing this cross-cultural conflict could look at the gospel growing, a leader that is distracted from preaching and telling the word, that could also block people growing too.

Between two issues, two real problems. Look, Luke isn't trying to say that word ministry is good ministry. And, you know, cleaning church is bad ministry.

Not at all. Please don't ever think that. Don't ever think that because I'm here, it's more valuable than you or welcoming someone at the door.

[19:55] That is not true. We need both. We need both. And what the apostles are trying to provide in verse three is that we appoint qualified servants to address the practical needs of the church.

So that both ministry are in service of the word and in service of practical needs. And this is what we see actually develop, right?

Later in the Bible, we read 1 Timothy 3. And there, Paul, the apostle, he lays out a similar pattern for the church. He calls them overseers and leaders.

Some to focus on the ministry of the word, able to teach, and some focused on practical needs, I think, of the church. Proclaim the word and to provide practical care.

Both are vital. We've got to be properly organized to keep the gospel going up. One pastor put it this way. This is Thabidi Anjula.

[20:53] He says this. Without the word, the church ceases to be the church. Without the table, the church ceases to be a family. So you can't neglect one or the other because both the word and the table are essential to being a church.

And what is a church, friends? Church is a family on a mission. Church is a family on a mission. PCBC, we want to be a family on a mission.

And so we want to take seriously anything that might hurt the ministry of the word and anything that might hurt us practically as well. We need both. Let me illustrate it in another way.

Okay, so in a church, we need both because let me share you a story. We moved to Sydney a few years back and this was when our kids were much younger.

So our oldest was handing out. She's 10 now. And our youngest at the time though was I think like six months, eight months old. And so when we moved to Sydney to study a Bible, we brought our baby stroller with us.

[22:00] Okay, it is. Okay, now. Okay, it was alright. Okay, we got by around it. But in Sydney, the footpaths are terrible. And so there was us moving into a new city.

Footpaths were uneven and full of cracks going okay, alright, don't fall out, baby. And just trying to get by, right? We didn't have a car at the time. It was tricky, right? We felt every shock as we tried to get around the place.

And then we upgraded our stroller. Wow. This one, alright, it's heavy because it had a lot of stuff in it. It had suspension. Suspension.

And so it was like this. It was so good. Look, when you're a parent, like these little things matter a lot. Okay, alright? At first you feel cool because it's so, you know, it's so amazing.

Eventually you just forget about it. It's so great. Alright? You don't feel the shocks anymore. That was what a different I don't know.

[ 23 : 04 ] Okay, you might not own a stroller but some of you are mad at cars. Alright? I've seen you selling car parts. I know that you exist here. Alright? Alright, why do you take the suspension out of a car?

You want to feel every shock, right? As you doof, doof down the road. Is that true? Is that true? It's okay, we're friends here, you can tell me. But, when you take the suspension out, you feel every shock deliberately.

You don't want that to happen though, if you're a church. If you're a church, you don't want to feel every shock. And a church without servants, like what we see here, deacons, and so on, is like a car without shocks.

A church without deacons is like a stroller without suspension. Because, friends, we don't want our church to feel every single shock along the way as we go out as a family on God's mission.

It would distract us from just getting God's word out to the world. And so, the church is gathered and they, verse 5 tells us, they pick some shock absorbers for the church.

[ 24 : 11 ] That's what they are. Shock absorbers. Have a look. Verse 5. This proposal, right, to give our attention to prayer and the word, but also to delegate people to sort this issue out.

This proposal, verse 5, pleased the whole group. And they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit. Also, Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicholas from Antioch.

A proselyte. Jewish. Notice two things about this decision that I think we can learn from as we pick leaders. Firstly, it's someone who's full of faith and of the Holy Spirit that gets picked.

I don't see any mention of kind of business card qualifications. It's not Stephen MBA or a Philip registered architect that gets picked to be a deacon.

What mattered most was that these seven were full of the Holy Spirit. What matters was that they were wise. Now, no doubt, they had many talents.

[ 25 : 15 ] We'll see Stephen and Philip in particular becoming really bold, courageous preachers of his word. But the most important thing to the church was their character, not their CV.

The most important thing when picking leaders is character, not their CV. Because you don't want anyone, just anyone, to hand out, even hand out a care package to widows.

You don't want someone just to drop stuff off and see you later. We don't just want Uber drivers. We want people who have empathy. How are you doing? Here's something for you from the church.

Is there any way I can pray for you? The kind of servants that we want. So to properly organize the church means finding people with more than just a pulse to lead and serve.

To properly organize a church, it means we don't just need the oldest or the ones who've seen the longest. You could be a time member or you could be a new person for this church.

[ 26 : 18 ] If your character is full of the Holy Spirit, if you exude wisdom in how you act in the Lord Jesus, then you have a part to play in building up God's people here.

Let me encourage you with that. Can I also say, right, second thing about this kind of choice of leaders, I think representation also matters. So I read out some names.

One of them stands out because it sounds like he's from the Lion King, but actually all of them are Greek names. They're all Greek names. Why is that important? Who are the ones who are being left out?

It's the Greek speakers, right? It's the Greek speakers. And so, funny, the church goes, wow, it's the Greek speakers who are missing out. The church decided to help them out by speaking servants to help them out.

Representation is, the church decided that actually the widows who felt disadvantaged needed to have as great a voice as possible. I'm not saying we should just stack, you know, the leadership with certain people over others, but you see that having someone and someone speak up for the divided now about how what it is.

[ 27 : 40 ] And so I'm so grateful in our church we have leaders who represent different groups. You may not even know them.

They represent different groups. and they have spoken up time and time again for those who've disadvantaged, even in the past week. They have absorbed countless shocks over the years. So we, from now on feeling all the shocks, love each other, loving Jesus week after week. Luke tells us these seven were chosen by the spirit and wisdom matters, representation matters. The apostles pray and they lay hands and look at the result. So the word of God spread. The word of God spread. That's a key verse. The word of God spread. And notice what happens. Even the priests, right, some of them probably opposing the disciples earlier, they're now responding to the gospel. They now become obedient to the faith. Isn't that amazing?

[ 28 : 49 ] What a miraculous spiritual work. The word of God continues to increase. Why? Because this church realizes what's at stake.

He realizes the gospel needs to keep going out and they organize themselves firmly. For God's words must be properly organized, right? So that we're devoted to the word and prayer and we care for those shocks in our church appropriately.

For even the Son of Man, Mark 10, 45 says this, came not to be served, but to serve. I bring this up because actually literally the word there is to minister, to deacon literally, and to give his life as a ransom for many.

In this verse, right, we are reminded because the Lord Jesus served us by hanging on a cross, being a ransom for many, through faith we receive his spirit and wisdom as a Christian to then serve others.

That's the gospel, isn't it? And the fruit of the gospel. Christ became the ultimate servant for us at the cross. Being found in human form, Philippians 2, verse 8 says, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on the cross.

[ 30 : 19 ] I don't know about you, but perhaps you're here and you're still unsure about the church, about following Jesus. Can I invite you to turn to the ultimate servant, the ultimate deacon, our Lord Jesus.

He hung on a cross. He served you. He suffered for your sake. He says, turn from your sins. Trust him with your life.

Only when you know yourself to be overwhelmingly, radically, unfairly served by the servant king will you then have the best motivation to go out and pour out your life and serve others with joy. Come to Jesus. There is no other servant like him. Come to Jesus. He lived a perfect life. He gave up his life to pay for our sins. He rose again three days later as we sung, victorious, victorious over sin and death.

On the cross he served us, he took the punishment that we deserve for our own selfish, self-serving sins. sins like serving each other but actually just to make myself look good.

[ 31 : 33 ] Sins like grumbling and gossiping about different cultures and issues around us. Only Jesus can change us from the inside out and make us true servants for him.

Only Jesus can turn us around so we then pour out our life not just to serve our own desires but to serve a worthy ambition, the kingdom of God, the gospel.

Can I encourage you, turn to Jesus, follow the servant king today. And for some of you, you have served, you feel like you've served for decades here at PCBC.

Can I just say, look to Jesus too. There will be some weeks where you're out of gas, you're out of steam, and if you try and top yourself up, it will not work.

We need to go back to the servant king who poured out his life for us. When we know Jesus as our ultimate servant king, he can transform our hearts, he can renew us with the spirit, he can shape us to become a family on a mission, and we become willing to go wherever he calls us to, to serve however he asks us to.

[ 32 : 49 ] And you know what, it's when this church, our church, every church, is perceptive to culture and its conflicts, when it's properly organized, to value the preaching of the word and prayer and the practical issues of the church, then we see in the rest of chapter 6 that for the word to reach God's world, his church must be prepared to suffer, to suffer and be opposed.

Jesus. Thank you, Julianne, for bringing out that theme today. We have a suffering servant, and so we should not expect anything different as we live counter-culturally for him.

And I think verse 8 onwards sets up the scene where we start to hear the account of one particular servant, right? His name is Stephen. And Stephen's story will continue next week into chapter 7,

when he gives a very long speech.

But for now, I want us to just focus on the rest of this chapter. We first hear Stephen's name in verse 5. He's the one that Luke singles out, right? He's named first as a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit.

And it seems like under the Spirit's influence and empowering, Stephen, the disciple, is given an amazing ability to perform wonders and signs, right?

[ 34 : 09 ] Verse 8, to speak with wisdom. What's going on here is that Luke is kind of alluding or giving him a little bit of a portrait that makes him look like another anointed servant from the Old Testament.

Anyone want to guess who it might be? Some big names from the Old Testament, if you know the Old Testament. Someone shout it out. Famous people in the Old Testament. Moses, that's it. Yeah, Moses. You might be surprised, but Luke is deliberately making him look like Moses 2.0. And just like Moses, Stephen becomes confronted by opponents.

Just like Moses, leaders, Jewish leaders, take exception to Moses' and Stephen's teaching and preaching ministry. And just like Moses, right, these people who don't like the teaching and the wisdom, they start to instigate a secret plot to get at this powerful teacher.

That's what we see here. And look at these Jewish leaders. They seize Stephen, they summon the full council of Jewish leaders called the Sanhedrin, and they accuse him in two ways.

[ 35 : 22 ] One, Stephen, you're preaching against Moses and his law and customs. And the second accusation, Stephen, you're preaching against God and the temple.

Have a look at verse 14. It summarizes it for us. For we have heard him, Stephen, say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and change the customs Moses handed down to us.

Again, if we read this verse knowing a bit of the cultural background, reading it cross-culturally, we will understand their strategy. Here are a bunch of jealous Jewish people trying to accuse Jewish people who have now found their chosen one, Jesus the Messiah, and are now living for him.

We're not sure what happened. Perhaps these jealous Jewish leaders, they lost some of their priests. Verse 7 says a lot of them became obedient to the faith. That's less people to keep the Jewish system going. Maybe they're feeling a little bit of pressure.

We're losing members. We're losing leaders. Perhaps they're stirring up false charges here. They accuse Stephen, this upstart, of spreading some kind of new foreign teaching.

[ 36 : 32 ] It's not true to the true Jewish faith. Maybe if we could paraphrase their complaint, perhaps would argue it this way. This man, he's betraying our people, our customs, our way of life.

And you know what? Some of us Jews, we've come a long way to worship at Jerusalem. And this dude, he's disrupting the whole thing. He's telling us you don't need the temple anymore.

He's telling us Jesus, you know, he's the new thing and this temple and the system is no more. And they even claim that Jesus will destroy this temple.

They're bringing up a false accusation from earlier in Jesus' ministry. I want you to imagine for a moment that you are Stephen. how would you respond?

Oh, this is a bit too hard. Maybe I'll just be quiet. I can just get on with living a quiet life. Why would you even dare to challenge the authorities in this way?

[ 37 : 38 ] I think Stephen is brave enough to challenge because he knew the risen Lord Jesus. He was speaking in the power of the Lord Jesus.

He knew that his Messiah, the promised one, lives and reigns and his spirit is empowering him.

Friends, when we really know and truly know the spirit is in us, working in us, he can empower us to be witnesses whatever the cost.

He will make us prepared to suffer and be opposed for proclaiming the Lord Jesus. Jesus, if you have his spirit empowering you with his gospel, if you are convinced that this is life for the world, that people know Jesus, then whatever heritage, traditions and habits are around you, they cannot stand in the way.

They cannot. And so this chapter ends by setting up a bit of a showdown, doesn't it? Who is the one who understands the law of Moses and the temple of God correctly?

Is it the Jewish council with their traditions and rules? Or is it Stephen with the face of an angel?

That comment, by the way, that's another way of saying Stephen is the one most like Moses.

[ 38 : 56 ] Remember there's a scene where Moses gets a shiny face because he's been so close to the Lord. Now Stephen is being described as having the face of an angel. And Luke is obviously

saying look at angel face.

Listen to Stephen. Stephen, he is the one who knows Jesus best. He is the one who knows how to be a true Jew. Because Stephen knew this, and we should know this, God is not confined to a temple in Jerusalem.

God is now present in a far better temple. A people. You, you, you, me. A family with Jews and Greeks, rich and poor.

widows and fathers. A temple that can include fishermen and tax collectors. It can include people of Asian descent, European descent, Maori descent.

A new people, a new temple, not shaped by just blindly adhering to rituals and customs, but empowered for the gospel through Jesus Christ. And Jesus, God's true people, are now a family on a mission.

[ 40 : 07 ] perception, perceptive to culture and issues it causes, properly organized so we can make sure that everything is prioritized well. And you're prepared to suffer.

Because we know we are a greater temple than anything, anyone who opposes us. And if this is true, if all this is true, perhaps let me leave you with a final question.

Are God's word to reach God's world? God, are we prepared to suffer like Stephen? For God's word to reach God's world, are we prepared to suffer like Stephen?

Are you prepared to be falsely accused? Maybe called a traitor to your family, your upbringing, to follow Jesus?

To be laughed at by your friends, your age group, to follow Jesus? Look, you may not be called to die for Jesus like Stephen. Many of our brothers and sisters, of course, in Afghanistan and China and elsewhere, follow that call daily.

[ 41 : 13 ] Yet you may be called to lay aside valuable things because Jesus is the pearl of greatest price. You may be called to be made fun of and insulted by others close to you because you want to hold on to God's word and how it teaches you to live your life.

no matter the cost. Just as we join Jesus in his victory over sin and death, friends, we join Jesus in his suffering.

But we join it with his spirit in us, with his wisdom guiding us so that we can be servants of the servant king.

Helping this world see his word across cultures for the glory of God. Let's pray. Jesus, friend of sinners, our brother, our saviour, we thank you, Lord.

we thank you that as we face our gaze on you, you empower us with your good news, your sacrifice for our sins, life for our broken hearts, and faith and hope and love for this corrupt world.

[ 42 : 41 ] Father, would your spirit empower us now, refresh us once again to be your witnesses for the nations. Forgive us where we have messed up across cultures and misunderstood some of the hurts among us.

Forgive us when we have not been prepared to suffer and held on to comforts so that we can be liked, be accepted when we need your acceptance most.

And forgive us, Lord. Forgive us because sometimes we have not been a family on a mission. So help us, Lord. You are the servant king. You are the servant who laid down your life and now you reign in victory.

Help us to look to you, to worship you, to live for you. In Jesus' precious name, we pray. Amen.