

## Remember Stephen? —I'm A Scared Layman!

By Leonard C. Albert

I only joke about this but follow my thinking for minute. Peter was a premier preacher in the New Testament. After Pentecost, he preached and 3,000 people got saved in one service. Now that's preaching! Do you remember Stephen in Acts 7? He was a layman and when he preached, they stoned him! "*And they stoned Stephen, calling upon God, and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.*" (Acts 7:59). Well, that's some of my humor. I tell everybody that if I try to preach, I'll get stoned! I know the real truth—I know that God is using both laity and clergy to fulfill the Great Commission. I know that He has given me a calling in life to join up with Him in the pursuit of winning the lost. But I am still scared! Why? It's a big world out there and when I realize that God has called me, as a layman, to preach and minister it is frightening. Let's talk about that call.

### Who's An Ordained Plumber?

All laity are called and this calling includes preaching. Probably the greatest *coup d'état* that the devil ever pulled upon the church could be titled, "**But I'm just a layman.**" When we look at the first century church we find that the laity preached. Stephen preached in Acts 7. Acts 8:4 says, "*they [the laity] that were scattered abroad went every where preaching the word.*" Philip (a layman) in Acts 8:35 "*... opened his mouth, and ... preached unto him Jesus.*" In the early church everyone was a minister. In just 300 years the church accomplished the most amazing results. The whole Roman Empire was undercut and overthrown by the power of the Gospel of Christ. In fact, the pagan Celsius wrote a book against Christians in the second century and admitted that it was the "wool-workers, cobblers, laundry workers and the most illiterate and bucolic yokels" who carried the gospel. Who was he referring to? The laity! The devil would make us believe that only preachers are called. But I would like to sink a dagger into that lie because our pulpits are everywhere—coffee tables, work tables, gas pumps, office desks. Every Christian occupies some kind of pulpit and preaches some kind of sermon every day. Someone asked one of our laymen if he was called and he replied, "Certainly, I'm an ordained plumber!"

### We are ministers.

We are never told that Stephen ever did one thing his position as *deacon* demanded, but he did extremely well in what his *mission* demanded. Long before Stephen had a position, he had a mission. In fact, the word "minister" is the translation of the Greek word *diakonia*, which means "servant." Thus, a minister can be a deacon who is a servant. Ananias (a layman) was a servant like this. He laid hands on Saul in Acts 9 both healing and commissioning him. Aquila and Priscilla were lay missionaries in Acts 18. The Bible clearly indicates that the work of the church is not solely the responsibility of the pastor—it is for all believers. Originally, the word "minister" was a function of the church. It was a verb—something we did. It was the assignment of all believers and each follower had his own ministry or ministries. Slowly, through the centuries, it has

moved from being a *function* of the church to become a *station* in the church. ***Ministry is a function for all, not a station for a few.***

### **We are gifted.**

In Acts 6:8 we read, “*And Stephen, full of faith and power, did great wonders and miracles among the people.*” For many years I have pondered this scripture. What were those “wonders and miracles” that he performed? Here is a layman performing “wonders and miracles.” I have asked God to help me do the same. I believe that every Christian is called of God as a minister and gifted for ministry. Peter says it best in 1 Peter 4:10, “*As every man hath received the gift, even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.*” Stewards of His grace? Have you ever thought of that? Think it through. We (all of God’s people) have received a gift (or gifts) and we are to minister that gift! How do we find our gift? Ask these simple questions:

- **What do you see?** So many people are waiting for a mystical call from God while all around them work is to be done. If no call seems obvious, then do the obvious! Is there a class with no teacher, a jail with no volunteers, a nursing home with no church service? Get busy!
- **What do you do?** Can you teach, sing, or play a musical instrument? If you are good at it, do it!
- **What do you enjoy?** There was a time when we thought that if we enjoyed doing something, it was wrong. What you love to do is a clue to your anointing.
- **What do you feel?** What burdens you? What hurts you when you see it? Help heal those hurts.
- **What you do hear?** What do others say about you? You can expect affirmation from the body of Christ as to the reality of the gift of God within you.

**God has called us to do more than *pray, pay and obey*.** There’s a new reformation coming. It is a second reformation—a reforming of the priesthood of all believers. This second reformation will take place when the ministry is in the hand of all of God’s people. If we understand, accept, and act on the doctrine of the laity, it will bring about a reformation such as the world has not seen since Martin Luther nailed his Ninety-Five Thesis to the door of the church at Wittenburg in 1517. My prayer is that the laity like myself will realize that they too are called of God and begin to get more involved in personal evangelism.

Let’s get busy but keep an eye out for those stones!