

Bloom Where God Plants You

by Annie Poonen

This sermon emphasizes the importance of encouragement, gratitude, and surrendering to God in difficult times. It encourages listeners to seek inner beauty, thankfulness, and to bloom where God has planted them. The speaker shares personal stories and biblical examples to illustrate the power of faith, patience, and the presence of God in challenging situations.

Scripture: Hebrews 6:12, 2 Timothy 2:9, 1 Peter 3:1, Luke 17:15, Daniel 3:25, Isaiah 43:2, 2 Corinthians 10:5, Psalm 139:14, 1 Thessalonians 5:18

Topics: "Encouragement", "Surrender to God"

Description

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Transcript

Let's begin with the word of prayer. Heavenly Father, we praise you and thank you for giving us this opportunity when we can be together and encourage one another. Thank you for keeping us safe all these days, Lord.

In these difficult days, you kept us in the hold of your hand. Thank you for your care and protection. Thank you for providing every need.

We want to be grateful to you always, Lord. And we humbly come to you, Lord. We pray that you speak to us and help us to be encouraged so that we can follow you and be faithful to you.

Bless this time we spend together in your presence, we ask in Jesus' name. Amen. It's so good to see you all and to be together and encourage each other and be encouraged.

Yes, we all need encouragement. All of us, especially sisters, ladies, we need encouragement all the more because we have our own special needs. And that's why the Lord gives us chances like this when we can be encouraged.

The purpose of my talking, I mean, giving these talks is not my own choice. A couple of months back, my sons, Santosh and Sandeep, asked me if I'd like to talk to the ladies. As always, my first reaction was a big

hesitation.

I'll tell you the reason for that hesitation, because for one thing, I don't want to come out as a teacher or an expert or a professor, knowing things and I can speak things out, you know, prepare something from the Bible and speak it out. I have that fear that I might speak things which are beyond my boundary. I might speak things which are not true or not attained by me and give a wrong impression.

And thirdly, I'll have to stand before God and give account to him for every word I've spoken, especially the words that I speak in God's presence. I have to be more careful and give account for that. So my initial reaction was a hesitation, but I didn't want to be coaxed, so I just kept quiet and I prayed.

Then a verse in Hebrews came to me, because I had come here with a feeling that I'm going to have a restful time and I'm just going to take it easy and get up late and do what I like, nothing to worry about. Then I read this verse in Hebrews, Don't be sluggish, but imitate the faith and patience of those who have gone ahead of you. That's in Hebrews 6. That spoke to me and I said, yes, I don't want to be sluggish.

I want to take my spiritual life seriously and use this time to free God's word. And then a few days later, I got a phone call from my brother who lives in Nigeria. Now that brother and I are very close.

He was he's working in Nigeria and he was planning to come back to India to celebrate his 70th birthday with his family. But because of this COVID restrictions, he is staying on in Nigeria. His name is Alexander.

We call him Sonny. So because he's all alone, I try to ring him up. And with this WhatsApp, we can talk to each other freely.

I try to ring him up and he calls me and we talk to each other and encourage each other. Then one morning earlier than usual, I just got out of bed. I got a phone call from him and I thought, oh, something's happened to him.

So I picked up the phone. He said, I sent you a song. Please listen to it.

And he usually sends things which are interesting. So I switched on. I turned on the phone on WhatsApp and the song, beautiful song came and that really spoke to me.

I just want to read the chorus of that song. My tongue will be the pen of a ready writer. What the father gives to me, I will say.

I only want to be your breath. I only want to glorify the king. And the words of that song are also beautiful.

But these words came to me and I said, no, this is exactly my need at this time. I offered my whole body to you, including my tongue. And I want to use it to glorify your name.

You breathe through me so that I only want to be your breath. And I made a fresh dedication of myself to the Lord. And I said, Lord, let your will be done in my life.

I'll do whatever you ask me to do. So again, at the back of this mind, this thought of speaking to the sisters was there. I said, yes, Lord, I surrender.

And then a few days later, I got a card from one of my grandchildren. See, first it was my brother. Then one of my granddaughters gave me a card.

And it says here, ask and you will receive that your joy may be full. And thank you, grandma, something. And then she put a bookmark to put in my Bible when I read.

And then she sent this picture, which she had colored. And it says there, bloom where God plants you. And I thought, really, God has planted me here for some mysterious reason.

He has not made a mistake. He put me here all the way from my home country and made me stay here for some time. I have to bloom where God has planted me.

And I want to share that challenge. Wherever you are, dear sisters, God has planted you there. Just bloom.

Live for the glory of God and his name will be glorified. That last line of that verse, I only want to glorify my king. Let that be our motto.

And we use every opportunity to encourage those who are near me. I want to use that. And we want to encourage ourselves and encourage each other in these difficulties.

Now, when the COVID first started, there was a lot of fear in our hearts. We thought, oh, how is it going to be? What's going to be the end of it? But now, after a couple of months, it's not fear. Something has changed.

We got used to this monotony. And there are other challenges now. There's boredom.

Some of us are bored. When is it going to end? Or is it going to continue like this? There's discontentment in some. And, sadly, some people are depressed also.

We hear of people, especially older people, who are depressed. And they don't like the restrictions that are coming, that are imposed. They cannot go out.

They are not free to visit their children, grandchildren, and so many other restrictions. And health problems. They cannot go to the hospital.

So, there are new challenges now. But whatever challenges we are facing, God has allowed it. And it is his will.

We are living in his will. And he'll see us through. And he'll encourage us.

And make sure that we are encouraged. That we are not cast down. But we are always living in triumph.

Very often, these days, I think of the Apostle Paul. Because I'm reading the epistles. And I think of the days when he was put in prison.

In 2 Timothy, chapter 2, verses 9 and 10. I read these verses. It says here, he speaks about himself.

Somewhere in the middle of verse 9, it says, Remember, Jesus Christ risen from the dead. Descendant of David, according to my gospel. For which I suffer hardship, even to imprisonment.

As a criminal. But the word of God is not imprisoned. In another translation, it says, I am bound, but God's word is not bound.

That really spoke to me. Yes, we are bound in many ways. And Paul especially was bound in such a cruel way.

He was put in chains for preaching the gospel. But he is able to encourage us. In those days, he encouraged people.

And even now, he encourages us. Even though I am bound, Paul says, God's word is not bound. Yes, God's word is freely given to us.

It's open to us. We have the Bible in our own language now. And think of people who, even in recent years, were put in prison.

And who didn't have the Bible with them. And they didn't have the chance to read God's word. People like Richard Wurmbbrand, Corey Ten Boom, and others.

In recent years, how they longed to hear God's word. And have God's word. And read God's word.

Recently, I came to experience that in a special way. Because I found out that my eyesight is getting worse. And I needed to get thicker and thicker glasses.

And then I thought, Lord, just give me enough eyesight so that I can read your word. I don't want to lose my eyesight that I can't read your word. That's how much I value my eyesight.

But more than anything, I want to read your word. So, think of Paul, the words that Paul said. God's word is not bound.

It's open to us. Dear sisters, God has freely given us his word. And we can read his word in these difficult times.

And we can be encouraged. And, thinking of, talking about encouragement, I think, how can we practically, in a practical way, encourage others? Recently, I heard that some of my grandchildren have made a Bible club. I mean, I call it a Bible club.

The girls get together of their own age group. They get together with other girls of their age in the different CFC churches. And they are studying women in the Bible.

Ruth and Esther and others in the Bible. And they read God's word and they study. Even some of the boys are doing that.

They praise and thank God. And I thought, that's a wonderful idea, to have a Bible club. We can read God's word together.

Maybe we can find someone who's not able to read or focus. Or who has some memory problem. Or who's old in our churches.

Or who have other limitations. Maybe we can call them and say, let's pick up a cup of coffee. You sit near your phone.

And I'll sit with my computer or phone. And we can read a portion of the Bible. Maybe 1 Corinthians 13.

We don't have to share. But we'll just read God's word together. And maybe two or three of us can do that together.

Maybe someone not in our church. Some friend of ours who's going through some difficult time. Some loved one.

Somebody who's lost a loved one. Someone who's not having a church facility. And they don't have any way of fellowship.

Just read God's word. I'm not going to preach. You don't have to preach.

But we'll just read God's word together. And we can enrich and encourage one another. I thought of that.

Even our grandchildren can teach us this Bible club idea. And nowadays we can maybe go for walks together as a family. And bond together.

Keep a distance. But walk together. And maybe during that walk we can pray.

We pray with our eyes open. One person at a time can pray together. Or bike together.

Some of our children are biking together. Or games together. These are so many ways in which we can get rid of that boredom.

And make use of the time. And mothers and daughters can bond together. Maybe we can cook something together.

And say, okay, this time we'll have this project of doing this banana cake. Or whatever you have. And we'll do it together.

And while we're doing it, we can talk about the Lord and bond together. Or some art. I'm sure all of you are doing.

In fact, I got all these ideas from observing what all of you are doing. So, for the benefit of those who haven't heard about it, I just want to share that idea. You know, some things, we can do some wrong things when we are bored.

Like we can eat, eat and eat things which are not so good for us. Because we are so bored. We find there's some food lying around and we can eat.

Especially moms who are always dealing with food. We see some leftover thing and we eat. And then we spoil our health.

We have to remember, Lord, my body belongs to you. My body is your temple. I don't want to spoil your temple by eating too much.

Or eating the wrong type of food. I want to surrender to you and discipline myself. Maybe, if I feel like eating also, I can take a fast in that area.

And say, Lord, I want to discipline myself. Another wrong thing which we can do is, we can waste time over the TV. Or use our mobile phone, talking to wrong type of people.

I know some of my friends who got in touch with their old friends. And they waste a lot of time. And it's good to get in touch with our old classmates and friends.

If we can help them and share. Look, this time, how are you getting along in this time? Are you doing okay? You know, this is where the Lord has helped me. And this is the way my children have helped me.

Or we can share something good. But if you find your friends are leading you in the wrong direction. Limit that.

And pray, Lord, help me to be a blessing to that friend. Not let her go astray by joining in the wrong things that they are doing. So, there also, I tell myself, Lord, this mobile phone is yours.

It's not mine. Actually, it doesn't belong to me. It belongs to my children.

But I tell them, Lord, this phone belongs to you. Let me not use it for anything wrong. Let me please you.

And let me use it to bless others. So, every part of mine, every possession of mine belongs to you. Another danger that we can have is being discontent with our Lord.

You know, we can say, oh, I can't go on a vacation. I can't visit my family. I can't, I can't.

But say, Lord, I don't want to be discontented. I want to be content with what we have. Like this, which my granddaughter said, I want to bloom where God has planted me.

And I want to encourage others. And many young girls, they have written to me and they say that they are so idle that they start daydreaming. And that's a big disease of young girls.

They start, their thoughts start wandering. And we have to help them. We have to say, give them this verse.

There's a verse in 2 Corinthians 10, 5, which says, bring every thought to captivity to the Lord. Bring, every thought must be under the Lord's captivity. And think that my thoughts also must be under the Lord.

So, those are the ways in which we can encourage our children and our loved ones. Then, we think of our husbands. They also need encouragement.

Just like we need encouragement, our husbands need encouragement. And, you know, I have heard some wives say the difficulties they face with their husbands. And they say there are some things in their husbands that annoy them.

Small things, maybe. The way they blow their nose or the way they whistle. Or the way they don't come in time and the food is served.

Or, you can fill up the capsule, whatever things you think that the husbands are not doing the way you want to do. And, they are human too. But, I think, when I think of that, I think, I'll take a piece of paper and write down at least 10 things about me which my husband may not be liking.

And then I find that list is more than the list I can find on the other side. I can say, ask myself and say, is there anything in my life which makes my husband behave like that? For instance, if he's quiet and doesn't want to talk. Is there anything about me that's making him not wanting to talk? Maybe I'm such a chatterbox or I trivial things or I don't give him a chance to talk.

Or, something or other. Maybe that's why he's behaving like that. And I have to search myself and say, Lord, show me, is there anything in me that's a hindrance? And then the Lord will help us to work in our lives.

And very soon, husband will say, hey, something's changed. Things seem to be a little different now. What's happened? Yeah, things get better and better.

That's the beauty of the gospel. When we follow the Lord, things get better and better. You know, a lot of women think of beautifying themselves for the husband.

We all want to look beautiful in our husband's eyes. And the world may think of beauty, you know, doing your hair like that or doing glamorous clothes. So many things, tips to appear beautiful in the eyes of others, in the eyes of our husband especially.

But if we turn to 1 Peter chapter 3 verses 1 to 4, we all know that. Then it says about a lasting beauty. You know, all the other earthly beauties and the lotions and the beauty creams and all, they are temporary.

They won't last forever. But there's a lasting beauty which a girl can have and which we can concentrate in these days and meditate on and work on. And just read those verses.

Chapter 3. You wives be submissive to your own husbands so that if any of them are disobedient to the word, they may be won without a word by the behavior of their wives. I said about this, I was saying about how we find fault with our husbands. There are women, especially in India, whose husbands are not converted.

And this is the word for such wives. By a submissive and Christ-like way, they can be won over. They observe your chaste and respectful behavior.

Your adornment must not be external, braiding of the hair and wearing gold jewelry or putting on dresses. But let it be the hidden person of the heart with the imperishable quality of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is precious in the sight of God. That gentle and quiet spirit is that lasting beauty, that inner beauty, which only the Lord can give.

There are so many tips for beauty, but there is a beauty which the Lord gives, which is hidden and which is a secret and which very few have valued. You know, when I talk about, I am reminded of something that happened when I was working in the leprosy hospital. When I went to the leprosy hospital, all I could see was hands and feet which were crippled and some people's noses were crippled.

And it was not a pleasant time working there. But one day I saw a really beautiful woman who had leprosy. When I saw her, I was taken because she was not beautiful as the world looks beautiful, but because she had been through suffering.

Her husband had died and she had three small children and she was brought by the missionaries to this institution. And she found a job working as a housemaid in one of those houses. She was cured of her leprosy, but even leprosy is a disease you can't say you're cured.

You may be, you don't have those germs, but after a few years it may flare up. So she was like temporarily cured. But I saw in her face such a charm because through that suffering she had found the Lord.

There was such a serene, submissive, pleasant. And even now when I think that beauty, I'm reminded of the beauty which the Lord can give. And that face has often challenged me when I think that hidden beauty.

And she was a young widow, but there was such a beauty and calmness in her that made me just look and look at her and appreciate. I said, Lord, what a wonderful Lord you are, that you can transform people like that and make them so beautiful. And how much more beautiful they are in your eyes.

And that's the hidden beauty which the Lord can give and which cannot be taken away. Even with age, it cannot disappear. We can get more and more of that hidden beauty.

And that's what we should look for. But also at the same time, we should not be dressing because we are not concentrating on outward appearance. It doesn't mean that we should dress shabbily.

We should always be clean and dress well and be attractive. But not in the worldly sense, in the sense of modesty and looking good to please our husbands and to please the Lord. Then another thing which I want to encourage you and me about is to be thankful.

That brings that hidden beauty more and more in our lives. A few weeks back, we heard about 10 lepers who were cleansed. And we read that all of them were healed and they went back.

But one came back. He realized that he was healed and he came back and he said, I came back to Jesus and to give thanks to the Lord. And Jesus not only healed them, all were healed, but he got eternal.

He said, your faith has made you whole. You've got a place in God's kingdom. And there we heard about being grateful, having that attitude of gratitude, being thankful.

Paul says, overflow with gratitude. You know, Paul has some amazing ways of saying overflow with gratitude, overflow with joyfulness. When Paul talked about Corinthians, he said, my heart is overflowing with thankfulness, overflowing with gratitude.

And that's how we should be. There's not enough gratitude. Whatever I can say, I'm not thankful enough.

Every morning when we get up, we can say, Lord, I cannot number the things which you have done for me, which you've been to me. You've taken care of me and my children, my husband. You've given me a loving family.

You've given me good children. You've provided all our needs. You've kept us safe.

You've healed our sicknesses. Even though there may be some small sickness, you've kept us all safe. How can I ever repay you for all your goodness to me? I want to be thankful and grateful to you.

That attitude of gratitude should be with us, dear sisters. And we can never outdo it. It can never be enough.

If we keep on doing it, it should be overflowing. It will get more and more. Multiply it more and more, thankfulness.

And that thankfulness to the Lord and gratitude to the Lord will come out in our families also. Our children will learn that, have that attitude of gratitude. Our friends, all those who come in contact with us will see.

That's an infection, a good infection, that gratitude. And I've seen some children, even if you do a little bit, they come and say thankful. Grandma, I'm so thankful you did this.

Grandma, I'm so thankful you made okra for me. And you cut the mango for me. You know, who taught them to say that? Their parents didn't whisper and say, go say thankful to grandma.

It's the attitude of gratitude that they have imbibed from their parents. And that's the legacy we can give our children. And they can grow up to be good children, thankful to the Lord, and contented, thankful, and be content with their present state, not look for better toys or better facilities.

Wherever they are, where God has planted them, they'll grow. And I was also thinking of another thought that encouraged me, which I want to share with you. You know, in Daniel chapter, Daniel chapter 3, we read of Daniel's friends who were put in the furnace.

And those three of them, Daniel wasn't there because they didn't bow down to the statue. They were put in the fire, in the fiery furnace. And the king said, make it hotter, seven times hotter, hotter, hotter.

And they were bound and they were put in that fiery furnace. And we know the story. What happened when they were put in that furnace? First of all, the cords which bound them burnt up.

They didn't get burnt, but the cords got burnt. And secondly, Jesus was with them in that fire. They actually saw Jesus, can you imagine, before he came to earth.

He was there with them in that fiery furnace. And when they came out of that furnace, when the king said, come out, they must have wished, oh, please put us back in that fiery furnace. Because we had such a wonderful experience with Jesus.

We want to hear him again. We want to fellowship with him again. And they must have wished that they could go back and they must have thought about it and talked about it.

It shouldn't be like that with us, dear sisters, after this COVID time is over. Remember those COVID days, wonderful days we had when Jesus was with us. And he spoke to us and he gave us this special message, this special word that came to me on that particular day.

Jesus, the Lord said, when you go through the fire and through the flood, I will be with you. That's really true. When we go through these days, it may not be difficult for some of us, but for some it's been really difficult.

Husbands have not had their jobs and some have even lost their loved ones. We know of some whose relatives are affected by this COVID. It's been difficult for some, but we can look back and say those precious days when the Lord was with us.

So praise and thank God he has not left us alone and he's with us. And we can only say, Lord, let your will be done. Let your will be done in my life always.

I don't want to be in a place where you're not there. I want to be in the center of your will. And every day of my life, I want to be rejoicing and be thankful to you.

Amen.

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