

Am I Actually Making Progress In My Christian Walk

by Sandeep Poonen

This sermon emphasizes the importance of aligning one's life with God's plan, focusing on measuring spiritual progress through key indicators like lovedness, gratitude, hope, and longing for purity. It highlights the shift from a performance-based old covenant to a loved-based new covenant, urging surrender to God's love and grace. The message stresses the significance of leading indicators over lagging indicators in spiritual growth, encouraging a focus on internal transformation and reliance on the Holy Spirit.

Scripture: Romans 5:8, John 14:15, Ephesians 3:14, Romans 8:24, 1 John 3:2, Romans 6:10, Proverbs 15:4, Romans 8:37

Topics: "Aligning with God's Plan", "Spiritual Transformation"

Description

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Transcript

I'll start from where we just heard. I'll just repeat it. The most useful life I can lead is to fulfill the plan that God has for my life.

The most useful life I can lead is to fulfill the plan that God has for my life. Well, if that's the case, then I must be able to answer the question, how's it going? What's the plan and how are you doing? How is that working out for you? How long have you been a Christian? How long has it been since we heard that goal for our lives? It's written outside. And so we have to be able to answer that in whatever way we think is appropriate.

If we agree that that is the most useful life we can live, is to fulfill God's plan for our lives, it'll be useful to be able to measure it, to be able to say, here's how I measure it. Here's how things are going relating to that. And that's something that has been something I've thought about for years.

As long as I've known that the goal for the Christian is to become like Jesus in the purity of his character and to be a fully functioning member of his body. As long as we've had a church, we've had that as our

goal. So as long as I've had that as a goal, I've asked myself many times, how am I going to measure this? What's the measurements that I use? And I don't have the corner on that.

I don't have the answer to that completely, but I want to share today what I've discovered and am discovering are some measurements by which I can discover that. Because it's so important. Because if I have the wrong measurements, I could be completely deceived or discouraged or feel that I've blown it.

Which I have experienced all of the above in my journey. And to see that that is not the message of Jesus Christ is extremely important for me to know. I'll start by saying this to an old covenant life is performance-based.

Okay, the old covenant life is performance-based. What is the new covenant life? I'm going to make up a word. The new covenant life is loved-based.

Loved, not love-based. Loved-based. It's not a word.

But I live my Christian life at the level of my lovedness. Loved by God. We love because He first loved us.

And Jesus gave a new commandment that summarizes how we ought to live. Love one another as I have loved you. So the first step is not love one another.

The first step is as I have loved you. The response is love one another. So my spiritual life always will remain at the level of my lovedness.

Whether I fast and pray, whether I make a decision today to be different, whether I weep, whether I fast, whether I have some commitments to read the Bible, this and that every day. At the end of the day I will live at the level of my lovedness. Not loved by the human beings, but loved by God.

The old covenant life is performance-based. The new covenant life is loved-based. Which is why I believe that the old covenant life, the symbol of that is the Ten Commandments delivered through Moses.

The new covenant life is the Father's lap delivered to us through Jesus Christ and His cross. To me that is what Jesus says. Abide in me.

The law came through Moses. This is John chapter 1 verse 17. The law came to us through Moses, but grace and truth came to us through Jesus Christ.

And then goes on to say in the very next verse, He who was in the lap of the Father, He has come and explained the Father to us. Very clear the distinction between the old covenant and the new covenant. The old covenant is the law, the Ten Commandments.

The new covenant is grace and truth delivered to us through Jesus Christ to take us to the lap of love. So to me, the symbol of the new covenant to me is the lap of love. That is the only way pathway to that is I'm the way, the truth, and the life.

The cross is the only way to get to be seated on the Father's lap, which is where I am loved. Which is where all insecurity goes to die. Which is where all ambitions go to die.

Which is where all complaints go to die. Which is where all anxiety goes to die. It's through the cross onto the Father's lap who fills me up.

There's an expression that I heard. You can bring up this slide. There's an expression I heard in business, but it has many applications.

Let's say I wanted to lose weight. Let's say I wanted to lose weight. I can look at the weighing machine every day and tell myself I'm not losing weight.

I'm losing weight. I'm trying to get down 10 pounds and I can keep trying to look at my weight. The weighing machine is just going to tell me how things have been in the past.

The weighing machine is not going to change my future. Even children can understand that. The weighing machine is what they call a lagging.

It lags behind. It comes behind you. It's a reflection of all that you've done in your past.

It's called a lagging measurement. A lagging indicator. But there are other measurements.

Remember what we were talking about. How do I measure my life? How do I measure whether my life is successful or not? Towards the goal that I have set out for myself. May not be money.

Okay, it's Christ-likeness. Well, what's the things that are going to lead me towards that goal? The leading indicators. They are going to drag me towards the goal.

So if my goal is to lose 10 pounds, the leading things will be, let's look at what you eat every day. Let's look at how you exercise every day. You do those things right, three months later, the weighing machine will tell you what you've been doing for the last three months.

But the great obsession is for us is to obsess with the weighing machine. And to have our own, a whole identity defined by the weighing machine. And I've seen a similar parallel in my life and in many Christians' life.

That my track record becomes the key indicator of whether I'm fulfilling God's plan in my life or not. I'm not saying it isn't an indicator, but it's what drags behind you. It's the trail that will follow me is my track record.

Track record is an indicator. Victory over sin is an indicator, but it is not what leads me in my goal. If I were to ask you, how was your week? Just think about that for a second.

Think about it. Interact with that question, literally. How was your week? You're going to think about all the things that happened in your week.

The default way our mind works. When you think about whether you're fulfilling your goal to be like Jesus, you think about all the activities you've done. We're so performance-based.

And there are lagging indicators, a lag behind. Well, what are the indicators that can lead us towards the goal? And it is such a culture shift. It is such a mind shift that I have to do these things so often every day to keep reminding myself, don't get pulled down into despair and discouragement and defeat by the lagging indicators, the trailing behind indicators of my track record.

They will change over time, but they are not what lead me. The weighing machine, like it is to losing weight. I must change my eating habits.

I should change my exercising habits and then give it time. Because one day I may gain weight because even though I ate and exercised properly, because things like water weight, or I don't know how the body works, but you give it time and it'll figure itself out if I eat correctly and exercise correctly. So what are these leading indicators in the Christian life that have really helped me? First one, number one, our lovedness.

This is a measurement, red, yellow, green, zero to a hundred. We have these kinds of measurements that we do. How good is your computer system? What's your health? Well, red, yellow, green, red is bad, green is good.

What's the measure of my lovedness? I have to make this a key indicator for my life. Say, Lord, my movement towards the plan on a daily basis is constantly engaging with how loved I am, not how loving I am to other people. It's receiving the love of God.

We heard about being filled with the Holy Spirit. Romans 5 is a beautiful chapter that among many, which talks about the love of God. Because he says, hope doesn't disappoint because the love of God has been shed abroad, poured upon your life through the Holy Spirit has been given to you.

So being filled with the Holy Spirit is to be filled with the love of God so that I feel infinitely loved. And Romans 5 verse 8 says that when we were still sinners, and Romans 5 verse 10 says, while I was his enemy, Christ died for me. Another passage that I will share with you just on this is Ephesians chapter 3. You can turn there.

Ephesians chapter 3. I believe we memorized it a few years ago. Ephesians chapter 3 verse 14 to 21. Ephesians chapter 3 verse 14 to 21.

Paul says after these three chapters of talking about every spiritual blessing that God has given us, how he brought us and saved us by grace through faith and three chapters full of it. Near the end of it, he says, verse 14, Ephesians chapter 3 verse 14 says, for this reason, I bow my knees at the end of all that I've written to you. At the end of the day, what I'm just saying, I just bow my knees before the Father from whom every family on earth derives his name.

And I say, I'm going to ask him that he would grant you to be filled with the Holy Spirit, to be strengthened with the Holy Spirit so that Christ may dwell, may live in your hearts, may visit, may dwell in your hearts through our confidence in him, through faith. That's how the Holy Spirit strengthens us. Christ, so that we may be strengthened with power through his spirit in the inner man.

What's the fact, what's the proof that I've been strengthened by the Holy Spirit in the inner man? Not on the outside, but on the inside. Well, that Christ may live. And what will be the result of Christ living in me by faith? That I will be rooted and grounded in love and that I may comprehend together with all the saints what is the love of God.

And then beyond that, beyond all my church fellowship, I go back to my secret closet and in verse 19, to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge. So it's love on the first floor, it's love on the second floor with the other believers, and then it's love, a super abundant love beyond all comprehension. Again, love upon love upon love, being loved, being loved, to know the love of Christ and to be able to comprehend and to know the love of Christ which surpasses all knowledge.

I can't even explain it. I can't even describe it. I can't even, I don't know what I'm, but it's a love that I feel.

And this is a daily leading indicator. And so if I bring up my indication list of how am I doing towards my goal? Well, what's the measurement of your lovedness? Well, I'm not getting victory over sin. Hold on on that one.

Hold on on that one. That'll come over time. But what's stopping us from being loved? I'll tell you what's stopping us.

You know, I've believed this truth, what I'm saying here for years. The prodigal son story has meant so much to me, but it is really hard because I'm such a slave to performance. Eating of the tree of knowledge of good and evil has so made me an addict to performance that it creeps in, in every facet of my life, including my spirituality.

And it sounds very easy to just embrace my lovedness, but it's really hard. And the key word that I want to leave with you about this is surrender. I really have to surrender what my coworker said to me.

I really have to surrender deep down how my children are acting. I really have to surrender all of my ambitions so radically and make space for the love of God to say, you are enough. No matter if your business goes kaput, no matter if all the things are going haywire, you are loved.

And I have to surrender every other metric and throw it out to allow the lovedness of God to come in because bad moods dominate because of something somebody said or some sprinkler that went wrong. The dog just chewed on the sprinkler can get me into a bad mood and messes up my day. Start of a mess day.

Well, go back to your lovedness. You're not such a horrible human being. You're not somebody who's just so given to anger.

Yeah, that's the track record. What's the solution? Go back to the leading indicator. Go back to that leading off.

Oh, but surrender that. Surrender all of those complaints and things that we don't understand to say, but aren't you fully loved? If I live the perfect life for the next 50 years, I'm 47, 48, 48, so old I can't remember my age. 48, I think.

Yeah, 48, 48 years old. If I live another 50 years and I don't sin even once, does that give me the chance to get into God's presence? Yes or no? Thank you. No.

After 50 years, I'm still having to get on one thing alone of strong and perfect plea. Even if I were to give myself a perfect track record for the next 50 years, it's not doing me any good to get me into the gates of heaven. It's a leading indicator.

It's a lagging indicator of many things, but it's not going to get me into God's presence. 50 years of a perfect life from now on still is not going to get me into God's presence. It's Jesus Christ alone.

That's who we're going to be singing for all eternity is Him. So I have to allow that to sink in. And He's going to be worthy of every praise of mine when I get to heaven.

Let's start that now. And that means me surrendering so much of my complaints and why questions and the things that I don't understand to say, but I am loved. Next one.

As a result of that, I will be grateful. Dear brothers, that's another indicator for me, another leading indicator. What's my gratitude level? It's not complicated.

Hebrews 12 talks about how it compares, you read this passage, it talks about the difference between Mount Sinai and Zion. And Mount Sinai, they were so afraid to even come near God, because if you even touched the mountain, you would die. If a beast, if a donkey touched the mountain, the donkey would die, I think, if I remember reading that right.

And then it says, we're not going to Mount Sinai, we're going to Mount Zion, where God is a consuming fire. Well, how do you deal with a consuming fire? You show gratitude. Can we do that? Can we bow our knees, put our face in the dust and say, thank you.

And the word is actually not, the word in the Greek is actually the word for grace. The King James uses the word grace. Let us show grace, sometimes translated as gratitude.

But I liked that connection between grace and gratitude, between gratitude and grace. If I want to have grace within me, the Holy Spirit is called the spirit of grace. Grace came to us through Jesus Christ.

If I'm going to have grace, one of the first things that I can have is be thankful. Romans 1 talks about how the society goes completely horribly wrong. And many of us who are raising children, many of us who are looking at the culture can say that culture is going horribly wrong.

What's the start of that? Because they did not honor God and give him thanks. Because they were not grateful. They were not thankful to God.

Well, we're going to suffer the same fate. We may be more sanitized on the outside, but we'll have the same corruption inside if we don't follow that principle, which is be grateful. Among the 10 lepers in Luke chapter 17 that were healed, only one got salvation.

Only one got progress in fulfilling God's plan for their lives. Healing is immaterial for God's eternal blessings. We know that we're going to be healed from sickness, but then we're healed from another sickness and eventually we're going to die, right? Physically.

That's still coming, no matter what number of sicknesses we get healed from. 10 lepers got healed from sickness, leprosy. They still died.

So did the 10th one. But the 10th one, because he was grateful, coming back to the Lord Jesus, shouting with a loud voice, glorifying him, got salvation. Gratitude is another metric that I can look at myself, a measurement that I can look at every day and say, what's my gratitude? Lord, I'm struggling horribly today.

Can I not be grateful for so many things? Look around you. That's what Paul says. Invisible attributes are manifest to us.

We can see it. Look at the air we breathe. Look at the comforts that we have.

Children, we can do that when we're in a bad mood. We've got to fight and say, Lord Jesus, fill me with the Holy Spirit so that I can be grateful for the parents you've given me, for the school you've given me, for the abilities you've given me, that I've got two feet to walk on. I've got two hands.

I've got eyes that can see. I can hear. Gratitude comes so easily.

These are not complicated things, but they are things I have to fight for. We know this. And he also tried to be grateful, trying to live in our lovedness.

Next one. Next leading indicator for me is hope. We cannot lose hope.

It's in hope that we're going to get saved. Romans 8 verse 24. It's with hope.

And it's very clear in Romans 8 verse 24. You can't see hope. Hope is for what you do not see.

Because if you can see it, it's not called hope. Paul is very clear about that. It's in hope that we find our salvation.

You want the track record to be worked out? Salvation? That's a lagging indicator. That'll come later on. But what we need to have in the beginning is hope.

The opposite of hope is hopeless. And here again, we hear about the Holy Spirit. Because in the same way, with the same hope that we have, the Holy Spirit has that same hope with what? With our weakness.

Not with God's plan for our life, but the Holy Spirit looks at God's plan for our lives. The Holy Spirit looks at our weakness, our inability to make it. And he says, I've got hope.

I'm not going to lie to you, telling you you're great. Everything's great. No, no, no, no.

Not looking good, but I have hope. And I'm groaning within you. This is what it means to be filled with the Holy Spirit.

To be filled with his lovedness. Deeply, infinitely loved. To seek to have the spirit of gratitude.

And to hear the Holy Spirit groaning. You groan, you weep. It says in the previous verses, we weep and suffer the pains of childbirth.

Well, guess who's groaning with you? The Holy Spirit. Have we ever heard a voice within us groaning? He's on our side. And Jesus ever lives to intercede for us.

We have to hear the new covenant voice of God, as it is in scripture, as it is in scripture. The Holy Spirit groaning, saying, well, I'm groaning at it with hope. Not done with you.

Not finished with you. Don't give up now. Keep getting up.

He's groaning. That's a strong word. We have to sit with that.

That's not me groaning. God's not telling you you need to groan. God's saying the Holy Spirit's groaning within you.

What a wonderful partner in the journey. Leading indicator number four. Longing for purity.

I wrote this down initially as purity, but I changed that. Longing for purity. Purity will come later on.

Purity is a lagging indicator. 1 John chapter 3, verse 2 and 3. We don't know much about what will happen when he appears, but we know this, that when he appears, we will be like him. Because we shall see him

just as he is.

He who has this hope, first get the hope right. He who has this hope, I want to see Jesus. I want to be like Jesus.

Such a person will purify themselves as Christ is pure. The hope comes first, and then as a result of that, God says, I immediately said a desire for purity, but I was like, no, it's bigger than a desire. It's a craving for purity.

Like a baby craves for milk. It's the Holy Spirit groaning, but we also have to partner with that groaning. And I like this verse in Romans chapter 6, verse 10 and 11, because purity is not freedom from sin.

That's what I like about this passage. Purity is not freedom from sin. Purity is a being alive and full of life with God.

The purity, freedom from sin is an empty, clean cup. What good is an empty, clean cup to a thirsty man? What a thirsty man needs is a clean cup filled with water. That's the life of Jesus.

So yes, I must clean the cup. It's not desire to be free from sin. It's a craving for purity.

And purity is a positive word. Purity is beauty, craving for beauty, craving for the beauty of Jesus Christ. So when my wife bothers me, a silent tongue is not sufficient.

A sustaining word is the tree of life. That's what it says in Proverbs chapter 15, verse 4. I need to search for the Holy Spirit to give me sustaining word. Silence is a lot easier.

Believe me, I know sustaining word. I'm clueless. I'm clueless for the 16 years that I've been married, for my children, not responding to them in anger when they exasperate me.

Silence kind of figured that one out most of the time. Sustaining word, getting an F. I need the Holy Spirit. Longing for purity is not absence of sin.

It's not just saying I didn't say anything with my mouth. Well, did you give the sustaining word because the sustaining word is the tree of life. That's the garden of Eden life.

It's a sustaining word. So I don't ever stop at not getting angry at my children. Well, I need to learn, listen to them, watch them, see them, see the brothers and sisters around me and say, Lord, what is the sustaining word that can bring a life into this situation? I want to say something about the lagging indicators about victory over sin.

In my understanding as I've lived this life myself, the first indicator, and I'm speaking even to teenagers onwards, young people, the habits are what are extremely dangerous. Be careful of sinful habits. That's the short term things that we got to fight.

It's not that I stumble and I fall into sin. It's I keep falling into sin and it becomes a habit. Romans chapter six, verse 14 is very clear.

Sin shall not have mastery over me. It's not that sin won't trip me up. Sin won't have mastery over me because I'm under grace, not under law.

And so it's the mastery over sin that comes from my craving for purity. And God will say, if you keep craving for purity, you may fall into sin. Don't be discouraged, but don't let it be a master over you.

And that's the first step that I must fight. It's the habitual sins. It's the habitual lying children.

It's the habitual disobedience. As we grew up, it's the habitual looseness with the eyes that has get us into bad habits. It's the habitual looseness of the tongue that has got many of our marriages in all kinds of trouble, small little body part, but it's the habitual looseness of the tongue.

And on the way to recovery, I have to say, Lord, let me at least cut off the habit. I want to do it less and less often. Then long term, I must be able to see consistent victory, even in my inner life too.

It will come. It must come. It's an indicator, but it's a lagging indicator.

And I will tell you, I got discouraged, I despaired, and I was defeated for many years because I made victory over sin the leading indicator of how I was doing spiritually. I've learned to change those things along and keep these things more and more often. And that last slide I put up because I wanted it to be in front of me often, all four indicators.

How are you doing in terms of your lovedness today? How are you doing in terms of your gratitude today? How are you doing in terms of your hope? The thing that you cannot see? How are you doing in terms of your craving for purity? Fight for those now. Reclaim the lost land now. All the other things will come over time.

Is it possible to be falling into sin all week and have a good week? Is it possible to be falling into sin all week? I'm speaking especially because I know my teenagers. I know how it was at times. I don't know if it was all week, but it was over and over again.

Is it possible to be falling into sin over and over again and still have a good week? Yes. Fight for these metrics first of all. I absolutely believe in living a life of overwhelmingly conquering.

Absolutely believe in it. That's Romans 8.37. I'm fighting for it, but I'm not going to make that the leading indicator because that discouraged me. That gives me despair.

This is what we ask when we ask people, do you want to be baptized? Similar kind of questions we ask. Do you know your sins have been forgiven you? Do you know that you've been justified? Do you know that you're sitting on the Father's lap? You got entrance to the Father's lap? Do you want to be fully obedient all the time? Do you want to be fully free from sin, craving for purity? Do you want to know God more? Hope, gratefulness. These are the things.

I'm realizing in the questions that we ask our teenagers about baptism, it's the same questions we adults need to ask ourselves. That's it. That's it.

The track record will follow, dear brothers and sisters. Romans chapter five was three through five and James chapter one through to four convinced me that getting up was being successful. Getting up was being successful.

I could fall a thousand times, but a righteous man falls many times and gets back up. The first step towards perfection is endurance and perseverance to these virtues. What have we done this week or this month or this year that stops us from getting into the green in any of these areas? Our lovedness, I need

to surrender.

For gratitude, I just need to think for five minutes, letting go of all of my agenda and all of my complaints and say, just count a few things that I have to be thankful for before the Lord takes it away. Why have I lost my hope? Because you got defeated in sin. That's the devil.

The devil loves to poke me with my spiritual track record and say, stay down, young man, stay down, young woman. And we've got to fight that with hope and listen instead of the Holy Spirit's, so instead of the devil's accusations, listen to the Holy Spirit groaning and Jesus interceding for you over and over again and tune your frequency to that voice. The groans of the Holy Spirit saying you can make it, keep getting up, keep craving for purity in your interactions with your children, crave for it.

That's what may have been lost. All of this is possible only through the Word of God that it comes alive through the Holy Spirit. I can't know how loved I am by going to a seminar, by going meditating and taking a fast for 30 days.

That's what the world will tell you. The only way we know we can do this for eternal results is when the Holy Spirit makes the Word of God come alive. His Word shall last forever.

And that Word though has to come alive and the Holy Spirit needs to make it come alive to assure me I am a child of God. I am. I can't prove it to you.

I don't have any scientific proof for it, but I am. Only the Holy Spirit can do it. It's not done by flesh or by man, only by the Word of God.

I must ask God to keep reaffirming me. Lord, am I still your child? Speak to me. Tell me that I am your child and that'll be enough.

Tell me, show me, Lord, the little things that I've forgotten that I can be grateful for today. Amidst all the things that are going wrong in my life today, and Lord, I repent for losing my craving for purity. Amidst all of my complaints of what's gone wrong in my life, I'm sorry that I've lost that craving for purity.

I want to have that hope again. I want to see you. I want to be like you.

He who has this hope, we will purify ourselves as we are pure. Such a beautiful gospel.

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