

(2006 Conference) 6.the Need in Our Midst Today

by Zac Poonen

Zac Poonen emphasizes the critical need for humble, godly leaders in the church and the dangers of pride and complacency in spiritual life.

Duration: 42:56

Scripture: Proverbs 16:18, Proverbs 22:4, Matthew 6:24, Luke 16:10, 1 Corinthians 1:27, Galatians 6:3, Philipians 2:3, James 1:22, James 4:10, 1 Peter 5:5

Topics: "Spiritual Leadership", "Humility Before God"

Description

This sermon emphasizes the importance of raising up godly leaders in churches, highlighting the joy of seeing humble brothers whom God has blessed without becoming proud. It warns against the dangers of pride, material prosperity leading to spiritual decline, and the need to remain faithful, humble, and obedient to the Holy Spirit. The speaker shares personal experiences and challenges listeners to prioritize seeking God, valuing godly examples, and living a life of simplicity and faithfulness.

Transcript

We have heard this afternoon One of the great burdens I have had from the time we moved out of Bangalore to particularly Kerala and Tamil Nadu especially, where God has raised up many churches, is that God would raise up godly men to be leaders of churches. To me the greatest miracle has not been churches that are established, but that God has raised up brothers to lead those churches in different places. I have had the great honor of being to these places and seeing, you know, like you see little children grow and become men.

Like, you know, I saw my own children grow up in my home. They were little children one day and now they have grown up and they are standing on their own feet and established their own homes. It's the same joy I have had we first went to Tamil Nadu 23 years ago and it's been a tremendous joy.

Many of you have seen these brothers come here through the years and you've seen them grow and take responsibility and set up their own home and themselves go and plant churches. It's been a tremendous joy. I've also seen other brothers in these places, Tamil Nadu, Kerala, who wonderful young brothers, but think of what I've always repeated many times.

It's the easiest thing in the world for God to bless somebody. The most difficult thing is for him to bless somebody and keep him humble after that. So my great joy has been to see humble brothers whom God has blessed and it doesn't go to their heads.

They remain humble and if they continue to remain humble, it will just continue to go better and better with them in the days to come. Because I've seen other young people for whom I had tremendous hope and I see them today. Some of them have left the church, but God has removed this grace from many of them and not all elder brothers are equally humble.

I don't judge anybody. It's not my business, but I do discern according to the wisdom God gives me and I don't tell people you're proud. That's not for me to tell.

They should listen to the Holy Spirit to tell them. But I see this danger in different places. God has blessed someone and then it goes to their head.

And then I can see that when I see them a couple of years later, the grace of God is not there like it was before. So when I see brothers like the ones who stood here today, personally I'm really very thankful for them. You don't know what they have struggled through.

Some of these brothers have come from places where, not the ones who stood here, but from the places they have come from. When they had to travel all the way to Nanilam for a Sunday meeting, one of the other brothers told me that they would walk for many hours 20 years ago because they could save the 80 paisa for the bus fare. That's how they went to church Sunday morning and walked back.

Are you surprised that God has blessed them? I'm not. He who is faithful in little things is faithful also in much. I'm very thankful for the fact that God has given me the privilege to fellowship with these brothers.

I often say, Lord, Bangalore is such a sophisticated place. Please, I can lose touch with reality if I live here all the time. Take me down to the grassroots of India and help me feel the pulse of people there so that my Christian life is rooted in reality, so that God can humble me and show me godly brothers who don't understand a word of English, but who don't have so many translations of the Bible to turn to.

Only one. There's only one translation in Tamil. You know, we have so many translations that what can gradually happen, I sense that translations, all these translations are useful.

I use them a lot to get more light on the word, but I see a danger there, and I see that danger coming in CFC where you don't get revelation from God. You get revelation from the message translation, and your message is not what God has spoken into your life. Your message is another translation.

I want to say that particularly to... I use the message translation. I use the Living Bible. I use many versions, but I want to say to all of you, particularly in Bangalore, there is a danger that when you get up and share something, you're just sharing another translation, something exciting, new, stimulating, but it's not coming from your life.

It's an intellectual stimulation. So that's the advantage these Tamil brothers have. They've got only one translation.

You can only speak from that one translation. You have no variations on that, and you've got to see how it applies in your life. And that's something which we can learn.

You know, I believe that in the body of Christ, God gives us different brothers, and there's something we can learn from them. You know, like we heard that if I understood the Tamil right, it's not, you know, that verse he quoted from Isaiah 30 verse 21. It's not that you turn to the right and turn to the left and go, but some of these vernacular translations are interesting, that it's you incline towards the right and incline towards the left.

It's that slight inclination that the Holy Spirit says, stop. It's not after you've made a full turn and gone off like that, but, you know, leaning towards the left. When you lean towards the left and lean towards the right, the Holy Spirit will say, that's not the way.

This is it. That's how it is in the Tamil, and I believe it's so good to understand that, that long before I've turned and gone off, the Holy Spirit sees within me an inclination towards slightly left or right off the center track, and the Spirit warns us. He doesn't catch us by the neck and say, come on.

No, no, no. You'll hear a voice behind you saying, hey, that inclination is not good. You shouldn't lean in that direction.

You're leaning in the wrong direction now. Lean a little more to the left. I think of, you've probably seen these people who walk on tight ropes.

They carry a big stick, they tie a big rope across two buildings and they walk on that rope, but you can't walk on that rope without a stick. Even the best fellow cannot do it. You can't just walk there and reach the other side.

You'll just fall in a few feet, but you know what they carry that long stick for? Because when you walk on this tight rope, there is, you know, our body inclines this way or that way, and then they tilt this long rod the other way, and that's how they go right across to the other side, tight rope walking. And the Christian life is very much like that. If you see a picture of a man walking on a tight rope, see, that is the Christian life.

If you are not sensitive to the slight movement of the, like immediately act, you're going to go down, you're going to crash. And that's the thing these tight rope walkers develop, a sensitivity when the equilibrium of their body is moving a little to the right or left. That's the most important thing.

It's the most important thing in the Christian life because otherwise you can lean so much that you crash. That's why I said earlier how if your conscience was very sensitive 15-20 years ago, let me take a practical example. Nowadays a lot of our young people have started watching movies.

There are movies on television, and some are probably clean, very small percentage, most of them are not. Now what can happen is, you may see something very humorous, it's probably very clean, okay. And then another time you watch another one, and it's not so clean.

And there's a little inclination and the Holy Spirit says, watch that. Don't watch that direction you're going now. And you pass it off and say, oh that's not so serious.

It's just a matter of time before you go further and further. And someone who saw you 15 years ago, when they come and see what you're watching on television now, they'll be shocked. You're the one who told us 15 years ago about the new and living way and purity and holiness.

What's happened? It's like you see somebody after 15 years and he's a skeleton. He was a strong, hefty person. You say, what happened? It didn't happen overnight.

Strong, hefty people don't become skeletons overnight. Even if they get TB, it's a process. The fellow's got TB and he neglected it.

Finally his skin and bones and you see him after 10-15 years and say, what happened? I wonder if people would say that about you. Because when the first inclination came and the Holy Spirit spoke to you, you heard a voice behind you saying, no no not this way, be careful now. But you were influenced by other young people, more than the Holy Spirit.

The voice of the Holy Spirit was one thing, but the voice of other young people was something else. You listened to them, not to the Holy Spirit. That's why you are where you are today.

And in order to keep you from being alert to your spiritual condition, the devil will make you prosper financially. And most people when they prosper financially, ignore their spiritual condition. Everything's going well.

I'm earning enough. I've got better clothes. I've got a vehicle now.

Things I didn't have before. I want to say to you young people, be careful. I have watched what has happened in the last 30 years of young people who came from very poor families.

I'm talking about our own churches. They were so grateful for what they got in the church. So obedient, so humble.

And because of the teaching in the church, they prospered. Went well with them. Went well with their families.

They got better jobs. They earned a lot of money. And then many of them no more interest in spiritual things.

Some of them dropped right out of the church. I don't know where they are today. I see some of them sometimes when I travel to other lands.

I can see by one look on their face. It's not like it was in the old days. I see some who have not traveled to other lands who are here.

It's not like it was in the old days. It's not my job to tell them. They've heard enough.

The rich man told Abraham, please send somebody to tell my brothers to repent. Abraham said, no need. They got the Bible.

They've heard enough. They don't listen to it. Let's use somebody going from heaven to tell them.

There's no need. Be careful. We're living in a time of a tremendous increase in wealth in India.

It was not like this 25 years ago. Your fathers will tell you how they struggled. Please listen to those stories, you young people.

Tell your dad and mom to tell you some of the stories of how they struggled to bring you up and that preserved them and it preserved you. I remember when we started 30 years ago in Bangalore, I was the only one who had a vehicle, a scooter. I was the only one who had a telephone.

That was because my wife was a doctor. She could get one. I couldn't get one.

Those were the days 30 years ago. It's different today. I mean, I rejoice that most people in CFC today earn much more than I do.

Much, much more. But I'm afraid. What's going to happen to them? I really am afraid.

What's going to happen in the next generation? Because I don't see the anointing of God on our young people. And I see some people coming up and then they fall away. I can only say God had mercy on me.

I was about 22, 23 years old when I started preaching God's Word before large crowds. And a few years later, when my fame began to spread, it went to my head. I became a backslider.

This is long before we started in the church. I've written about all about it in my book. And I got, it became so bad that I said, Lord, I'm going to quit the ministry.

Not quit being a Christian. I'm going to quit the ministry. I will never be a hypocrite.

I don't want to fool people. I know I have a gift I can preach. I don't want to fool people.

I'm going to do some other job and just be a Christian. The Lord saw how desperate I was. He saw that I meant business with him.

I only prayed for one thing. I said, Lord, just turn my life around and make my words correspond with my inner life. And he did that for me 31 years ago.

Turned my life around completely. And life has never been the same since. And I want you young people who are inclining in the wrong direction.

And you're hearing the voice of the Spirit saying, don't go that way. Please listen to the voice of the Spirit. It's not a question of going to heaven.

I'm not interested in that. To me, that is absolutely secondary. One of the prayers I pray is, Lord, is there anything that will make my life blunt? You know how a knife can become blunt and then you can't cut anything with it? The knife is there.

All those who work in kitchens know how a knife that was once very sharp, one touch it would cut it. Or scissors that were very sharp. It doesn't cut so easily now.

More effort. And you can't cut the meat anymore with that. It's become blunt.

That's happened to many, many believers. I mean, it's, I've seen it happen to older people. I've seen it happen to most of the preachers I know.

I'll tell you honestly, among all the preachers I've met in this country, in my lifetime, there's one man I respect, Brother Buxing. I'm so thankful that God brought me in touch with him when I was, I mean, in close touch with him when I was 23 years old. Very, very thankful for that.

I think God planned it because when I was two months old, my dad knew Brother Buxing and he brought him home. And my dad said, here, I've got a little baby born now. This is 1939 December.

And Brother Buxing was a young man, about 36 years old or so. He picked me up as a baby and laid his hands on me and said, Lord, I pray that one day he will grow up to be your servant. Well, the prayers of a righteous man have great value.

All I can say is God answered that prayer. And years later, as I got closer to him, I saw in him certain things which I valued. Today's young people don't have examples.

All the examples they see in preachers and television and pulpits are all film stars. They're out to make money. They're out to show what great people they are and all these magic tricks.

They're magicians, not godly men. I thank God that I had one man who was an example whom I could follow. And I say, till today, he's the only man I have seen in this country who I could say, there's a man who endured till the end.

The Bible says, see how people ended their life. I've seen a lot of people, some of today's famous preachers, I know what they were when they were students. And I see where they have gone today.

Dear brothers and sisters, value godly examples and please be a godly example yourself to those little boys and girls who are 10 years younger than you in your church. You are 17, 18, 20, 21. There are 10 year olds, 11 year olds in your church who look at you.

Be an example for them. Be faithful with money. Don't be lavish in spending money on yourself because God will never give you true riches.

Learn to live simply. Brother Buxing told me three things when I was a young man. I was 23 years old.

He said, all your life, never let your financial needs be known to anybody. I've kept that word all these 40 years that I've served the Lord. Second thing he said was, never spend money on yourself unnecessarily.

Live very simply. And I have tried my best for 40 years to live very simply. Even when I have more money, I live simply.

In everything, I try to eat simply. I try to live simply. I try my best to not waste money going to hotels when we can eat at home.

That's how we did it in our children. I'm not saying, I know you're living in another generation and you can do what you like, but money was very important for me. If I had extra, I could use it for God.

People sometimes give me money saying, Brother Zach, this is for your personal need. Personal need, I have enough for my personal need. I use it for my travel.

I don't use it for my personal need. Even if they say that, because God's work is my work. God's home is my home.

God's need is my need. There's no difference. He's my husband.

We are one family. He's not my employer that I say, office money, my money. It's not.

I'm not running. I'm not working in an office. Jesus is my husband.

We have a joint account. So, if we are careful in these areas, the first time, I don't know whether I should be ashamed to say this or proud to say it, the first time I took my wife out for a wedding anniversary dinner to a hotel was last year, after 36 years of marriage. And we had a grand dinner together for about 150 rupees.

It was a luxury. I say, Lord, why should I waste money? There are so many poor people. I can help them.

I want to say to you, brothers and sisters, many of you earned so much. You were safer when you were earning little. I know I was.

I know my wife and I know very clearly the days when we struggled. We were very safe those days. We prayed.

We clung to God. Today, we have plenty. Our children have got good jobs.

We're doing well. I tell you, I am scared for myself. I live in fear.

I cry out to God, Lord, please lead me higher in this area. I want more revelation than I've got in my whole life. I want to live in such a way that when I stand before you in eternity, I have no regret.

I want to be an example to those younger to me till the day I die or till the day you come. I don't want to be a backslider. And I know I have to be extremely faithful with money, extremely careful with my mouth if I want to endure to the end.

I've seen what's happened to people who are careless in these areas. I don't judge them. I give you my word.

I don't judge any of you. That's not my business. But I want to say to you, there are laws in God's kingdom.

And if you don't follow those laws, you will never become rich spiritually. And if you ask me, what is the greatest grief in my heart? The greatest grief in my heart is there is such a poor level of anointing in our younger people coming out. I see a couple of brothers in Tamil Nadu.

I see one or two brothers in Kerala. I say, where are the men of God coming up in this next generation that are going to lead the church forward? It makes me weep sometimes. I never weep for anything anybody does to me because nobody can do any harm to me.

Romans 8, 28 has been true for my life for 47 years. Everything has only worked for my good. All the people who try to harm me did good to me.

So what have I got to weep about? Those are things to rejoice over. But when I see the shallowness, when I see among many young people, when I see the lack of knowledge of God's Word, lack of diligence in God's Word, and I see what God is doing with people outside our churches sometimes. I met one or two people outside our church who said to me, Brother Zach, I have gone through your 70-hour CD on the Bible twice already, and it's blessed me so much.

There are many, many in our churches who've never gone through it even once. Why? Because they know so much. They don't need anything.

They know so much. There are interesting movies to watch. Who's going to be listening to studying the Bible? We get enough for two meetings a week.

That's enough. It's sad. It's sad.

A generation that's growing up, it says that Joshua died, and the elders in Joshua's time died, and then another generation grew up that did not know the Lord. And I'll tell you honestly what I see happening now. I see that God is raising up people, young people, in other churches, in other groups who have a richer anointing than almost any young brother in our churches.

I praise God for that. Because my loyalty is not to CFC. My loyalty is to Jesus Christ and his church, which he is building, against which the gates of hell will never prevail.

And I don't care who he uses. I say, Lord, build your church in India. If you can do it through us, do it.

If you can't do it through us because people are not faithful, raise up somebody else, but let the heathen in this land know that Jesus Christ is Lord. Raise up godly men and women. For many years we used to pray, and I still pray, Lord, if there are some godly people who are seeking for a holy life, please bring them in touch with us so that we can help them.

And is that happening in your local church? Or are some of those people seeking godliness going somewhere else? I remember in one place a couple of very zealous brothers I met who are not in our church. And I asked them, why don't you come to our church in this town? They said, to tell you honestly, Brother Zach, we've been there and we get nothing. I mean, they say they are loyal to Brother Zach and come for the conferences, but I go to that church and I get nothing.

So why do you want me to go? I said, okay, I won't tell you to go. It's sad. You can't, you can think that, oh, we're in touch with CFC.

It doesn't make you spiritual. Doesn't bring any anointing. The Jews for many years thought God will never use anybody but us.

And Jesus got up in the synagogue one day and said, there were many widows in Israel in Elijah's time, but God did not use any of them to feed his prophet. He had to go to Zarephath to a heathen widow to be fed. God sent him there.

There were many lepers in Elijah's time. None of them got healed. A heathen leper from Syria was the one who was healed.

And the people got so mad. They said, stop this man who says that God will bless other people more than us. And they pulled him down from the pulpit and wanted to throw him over the cliff just because he said that.

But that did not change matters. God still bypassed Israel completely, destroyed them as a nation, and moved elsewhere. And through the centuries, that's always what happened.

The Lutherans thought, Martin Luther, that's a man God's raised up to revive. We are followers of Luther. God bypassed them.

Started with somebody else. Then later on, John Wesley, he was a great man of God. He said, boy, we're followers of John Wesley.

We're the Methodists. God bypassed them and left them. It's happened again and again and again and again and again.

God is no respecter of persons. If you are humble and you remain humble, you recognize that you're a nobody, you keep your mouth in the dust before God, no matter how much God uses you and allow God to break you and break you and humble you and don't follow the fashions of the world and be faithful with money and be faithful with your tongue and say, Lord, I want to live one life. I want to live it for you on earth.

You will endure till the end. But for that, I'll tell you, you'll have to live a very lonely life because you won't find many people around you wanting to go that way. Most people are taking the easy path.

I found that when I was a young Christian and I was in an assembly where I could not find one wholehearted radical disciple of Jesus and I said, Lord, what shall I do? The Lord said, look at me. So I spent my life looking at Jesus. I didn't judge the elders.

I didn't judge anybody. I went and sat in the church, respected them, but I looked at Jesus because there was no worthy example for me to look in that church. That's what preserved me.

And I want to say to you that may be what you need to do in your church. Make Jesus your example. He was radical.

Make people like Paul your example. Make people like Sadhu Sundar Singh, Pandita Ramabai. These are, read their biographies, Indian people who lived under the anointing of God and did a work for God that lasts.

You can be that. I want to say to all of you young people, you can be like them. If you are radical and don't be conformed to the standards of people around you, dare to be different and independent.

And like we heard, when you find an inclination to the left or the right, a leaning towards the left or the right and the Holy Spirit says, no, my son, my daughter, turn back, turn back. When he tells you to turn off that TV set, turn it off. When he tells you to put down that newspaper, this has happened to me.

I pick up a newspaper and the Lord says, put it down. Newspaper, just want to see the news. The Lord says afterwards, put it down.

Do you listen? God has something to say to me. And I tell you, I'm so thankful I put it down because God's always given me a revelation when I obeyed him. I think of past times when I didn't do it and I missed something.

I haven't always been exactly obedient, I'm sorry to say, but I want to be more and more obedient. The Lord's told me about little things about money. It's not just righteousness.

Righteousness is a low level. Faithfulness is a higher level. Be faithful.

Rise from the level of righteousness to faithfulness. He who is faithful with unrighteous mammon, God will give him the true riches. Not he who is righteous.

Millions are righteous. Very few are faithful. So think of the examples of people around you who have started well and fallen away.

Don't say that won't happen to me. I think of brothers in our churches, elder brothers whom I've heard years ago. Boy, what a word there was from their lips.

And I hear them now. It's not the same. The don't say anything.

I just leave it. What to do? It's not the same. Because I heard them 15, 20 years ago.

And I said, Lord, what loss your church is suffering. And the sad thing is, there's hardly anybody rising up to replace them. Okay, some elder brother loses the anointing.

There should be some younger brother at least filling up that gap. Or some younger sister. This is my greatest sadness.

I believe if I feel like that, can you imagine how God feels? God loves us so much. He started a work here in India 30 years ago with a purpose. We're not the only ones.

God has got raised up many, many things. But we are a small part of God's work in India. And we got to be faithful to that.

And God wants us to be revived. I want to encourage you, my brothers and sisters. I'm not condemning you.

I'm not hitting you on the head. I'm just challenging you to repentance, to faithfulness, to endure till the end with that original love you had for Jesus, some of you older brothers. How fervent it was your love for the Lord.

He was the only one that mattered to you in those days. Now you get offended with little things and sit back and comfort. You don't have time to wait on the Lord like you did before.

Other things have crowded in. Cut out some of those unnecessary things. Just like we tell people who are not able to live within their income, cut out unnecessary things and live within your income.

I say to you who are so busy that you don't have time for God, cut out certain things from your life schedule. It's more important to listen to God than anything else. It doesn't matter if you don't get that promotion.

It doesn't matter if you don't, your business doesn't prosper a little more. I made that decision years ago. I said, Lord, I don't want my business to prosper.

If I earn enough for my living, that's more than enough for me. Never in my life will I pursue more than what I need. God gives me more, that's fine, but that's not what I'm gonna live for.

I hope many of you have ears to hear. Let's pray. While our heads are bowed before God, I hope the Lord will find a response from your heart to what he has been speaking to you.

Don't let this be a passing emotional thing. Take it seriously, particularly you young people. Take it seriously.

Take the challenge that comes to you. There's no respect of persons with God. All are the same.

God is interested in his work, but he needs men and women. Learn to value godly older brothers and older sisters, some of whom you may have not valued or despised, you may have despised them, and that's why you suffer. If you had sought more fellowship with them, it may have changed your life.

Heavenly Father, help us to be wise. I think of the tremendous potential there is right here in this room to shake India, but I don't know whether India will be shaken. Have mercy on us and forgive us.

Fill us with the Holy Spirit. It's not by might nor by power. It's not by cleverness, knowledge, many translations, etc.

It's not by all these things. It's by your Holy Spirit. Help us to depend on you, Lord.

Bring us back, bring us back to our knees to fervently seek you for ourselves, for our families, for our churches, and for this land. We pray in Jesus' name.

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