

A Spiritual Leader

by Zac Poonen

Zac Poonen emphasizes the vital role of divine calling, personal knowledge of God, and the fear of the Lord in effective spiritual leadership.

Scripture: Matthew 6:33, Matthew 27:5, Luke 10:37, Luke 13:1-4, John 13:27, Acts 13:27, Galatians 1:10

Topics: "Audio Books"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of being a strong and uncompromising leader for the next generation of believers. He urges listeners to take their calling seriously and to repent for any dishonor they may have brought to God's name in the past. The speaker shares a personal anecdote about his time in the Navy, highlighting the responsibility and vigilance required of a leader. He also warns about the potential dangers of financial and music power in God's work. The sermon concludes with a reminder to evaluate one's ministry and live in a way that will minimize regret at the judgment seat of Christ.

Transcript

You are now listening to A Spiritual Leader by Zak Poonen. About this book, spiritual leadership is the need of the hour in the churches in India. This book contains a series of messages that were given to a group of Christian workers, Bible college lecturers, and pastors of churches.

The messages have been reproduced in their spoken form for easy reading. May the Lord speak to your heart through this book and challenge you to be a role model for today's younger generation as an exemplary servant of God and a truly spiritual leader. Bangalore, Zak Poonen.

October 1999. Chapter 1. Called by God. A spiritual leader will first and foremost have a calling from God.

His work will not be his profession but his calling. No one can appoint himself as a spiritual leader. He has to be called by God for this work.

Hebrews chapter 5 verse 4 living. This is a principle that cannot be changed. The next verse goes on to say that even Jesus did not appoint himself as our high priest.

The Father appointed him. If that be the case, how much more this should be true of us in our calling? The tragedy today is that the vast majority of Christian workers in India are working to earn their living. It is a profession for them.

They have not been called by God. There's a lot of difference between a profession and a calling. Let me explain what I mean.

Suppose there's a sick child in a hospital and a nurse looks after it for eight hours on her shift duty. That nurse then goes home and forgets all about that child. Her concern for that child was only for eight hours.

Now she has other things to do, such as going to the movies and watching television. She doesn't have to think about that child again until the next day when she goes back to work. But the mother of that child doesn't work eight-hour shifts.

She can't go to the movies when her child is sick. That's the difference between a profession and a calling. If you apply that illustration to the way you care for the believers in your church, you'll discover whether you're a nurse or a mother.

Paul said in 1 Thessalonians chapter 2 verse 7, we proved to be gentle among you as a mother tenderly cares for her own children. Having thus a fond affection for you, we were well pleased to impart you not only the gospel, but our own lives because you've been very dear to us. Paul not only imparted the gospel of God to those Christians, but his life as well.

Any ministry that is not done in this way is not really a Christian ministry. Paul served God like that because he had a calling to the ministry. He didn't take it up as a profession.

It's wonderful to serve the Lord. It is the greatest thing in the world. Nothing on earth can be compared with it, but only if you're called.

It cannot be reduced to a profession. God called me to serve him full-time on May 6, 1964, when I was an officer in the Indian Navy. I handed in my resignation then to the naval authorities, but it was like Moses asking Pharaoh to let the Israelites go.

The Indian Navy wouldn't release me. It took two years and repeated applications before they finally released me miraculously in God's perfect time. Being called God has made all the difference in my life.

First of all, it doesn't matter to me now what people think about me or my ministry, because someone else is my master and I have to answer only to him. Secondly, I can trust God to stand by me and give me grace whenever I face any trial or opposition in my ministry, and that happens often. Thirdly, it doesn't matter to me whether I receive any money or not, and whether I get any food to eat or not.

If I receive food and money, well and good. If I don't get any food or money, that's fine with me too. I cannot stop serving the Lord just because I didn't get money or food, because God has called me.

I can't get rid of my calling. I'm not a salaried employee who can stop working when I'm not paid or fed. It's like the case of a mother and her child.

A nurse will stop working if her salary is not paid one month, but a mother can never stop. She doesn't get a salary in any case, and she'll look after her baby even if she doesn't get any food or money. That's how the apostles served the Lord.

What a glorious thing it is to be called of God. You can never do the Lord's work the way God wants you to do it. If you do it as a profession, it has to be a calling or nothing.

Every other job in the world can be done as a profession, but not a mother's or a father's or that of a servant of the Lord. All these are the result of a calling. Paul told the Corinthian Christians that even if they had 10,000 teachers, they still had only one father, 1 Corinthians 4.15. Paul was both a spiritual father and a mother to his flock.

His was not a profession, but a calling. Take this child and nurse him for me, and I shall give you your wages is what the Lord has said to me, Exodus 2.9. He said that to me first of all concerning my own physical children, and then he said that to me concerning my spiritual children too. When we take care of God's children, he's the one who is responsible to give us our wages, not man.

If we serve men, then let us look to men to pay us. But if we serve the Lord, then let us look to him alone to provide us our needs in whatever way he sees fit, and let him also decide how much we should receive each month. There is a dignity about a true servant of the Lord, but it is possible that you as an elder feel no such sense of responsibility for the people in your church.

You may content yourself with teaching the Bible every Sunday, but you may get a surprise when Jesus comes again and evaluates your ministry, and you discover that your entire earthly ministry was only wood, hay, and straw, fit only for being burnt, 1 Corinthians 3, 12, 13. Think of the tragedy that will be. If you take this warning seriously now, it could reduce your regret at the judgment seat of Christ.

All of us are going to have some degree of regret when Christ comes again concerning the way we lived and served the Lord, but we can reduce that regret by examining our ways and judging ourselves now. We must evaluate our ministry and see how it will look in the light of that day. Take these children and nurse them for me, says the Lord.

Bring them up for me, and I will give you your wages. Those wages will not be in terms of money primarily. I believe the Lord takes care of our earthly needs since he taught us to pray for our daily bread and he has ordained that those who preach the gospel should live of the gospel, so he will take care of all our earthly needs, but there will be a far greater spiritual reward in addition.

Paul wrote to the Christians at Thessalonica that they were going to be his crown and his joy when the Lord returned, 1 Thessalonians 2, 19. He found his delight in them, just as a father finds his delight in his children. An elder who is a spiritual father will be delighted when he sees that believers who came as raw material to his church once have now become men of God.

This is something akin to the delight a sculptor has when he has fashioned a shapeless rock into a human form. He had to chip away at that block for many months and years before the face and figure of the man came out of it. That is a work that God has given us to do too.

We must never be satisfied with merely having instructed people correctly. If the image of Christ has not come forth in their lives, we have accomplished nothing at all. An earthly father is also delighted when his children can stand on their own feet.

He doesn't want them to be perpetually dependent on him. A true spiritual father will be like that too. He will make himself dispensable, less and less needed by his spiritual children as they grow and mature.

Consider a home where there are twelve children. You may wonder how any mother can manage twelve children when your wife finds it difficult with even two. But amazingly, in the long run, the mother of twelve has less work to do than the mother of two.

That's because the mother of twelve trains her older children to help her in the home. Ultimately, the children do all the work and the mother is totally free. This is what we must do as shepherds in our churches too.

Delegate. But what do we see in most churches? Overburdened pastors are becoming nervous wrecks because they have to do everything themselves. That mother of twelve would become a nervous wreck too if she had to take care of all her children herself.

Many churches are like orphanages where hundreds of babies lie on the floor, kicking their legs, wailing, and holding onto their feeding bottles. This is the result of a one-man ministry. The believers never grow up because they are never given any responsibility.

In the body of Christ, each member has a task to fulfill. Jesus disciplined only twelve people and I don't think any man can handle more than that number effectively at a time. So, by that reckoning, a church of 120 people should have at least ten pastors taking care of the flock.

By pastors, I do not mean full-time workers, but brothers working in a secular job who have been gifted with a shepherd's heart to care for the sheep and encourage them. The harvest is plentiful today, but the true shepherds are few. If you serve the Lord, let it be because God has called you to serve him and not because you want to earn a living or for the sake of man's honor.

Chapter 2 Knowing God A spiritual leader will be able to lead others along God's ways because he knows God personally. Daniel 11, 32-33 speaks of two types of preachers who will be found on earth in the last days. There will be many who speak smooth words and turn people to ungodliness.

On the other hand, there will be a few who know God, who give people insight and do great exploits for God. Today, both these types of preachers are found in Christendom. There are many who speak smooth words to please their hearers, but those who know God speak the truth, whether their hearers are pleased or offended, and whether men shower them with praises or abuses.

Human beings are like sheep. They tend to follow the crowd and are afraid of being different. But if the crowd is going in the wrong direction, everybody goes astray.

This is the situation today. So, God is looking for some who will stand true to Him and lead people along His way. But if we are to be bold enough to be different from the crowd, we must know God and His mind, His thoughts, and His ways.

Most Christian leaders whom I've met in India during the last 30 years do not seem to know God personally or His thoughts. They simply repeat what they've read in some western Christian magazine or book. Some particular emphasis is popular in every decade among American Christian leaders.

In the 1980s, it was one thing and today it is something else. And like the echoes that one hears in the mountainous regions, these emphases are faithfully echoed by their sycophants in India and other third world countries, especially when they present their papers at congresses on evangelism. If the American leaders write about church growth, then the Indian Christian leaders faithfully echo church growth.

If the Americans speak about the 1040 window, then the Indian preachers faithfully repeat the 1040 window. If western Christians teach the pre-tribulation rapture of the church, then Indian Bible teachers will teach only that. They never dare to question western Christians.

But doesn't God ever speak to anybody in India directly? Does He speak only to the white races? The reason for all this imitation is the slave mentality that is found among all third world Christians. We Indians were ruled by the British for more than 200 years and it is difficult for us to be free from this slave mentality. Almost all Indian Christians feel that the white man is superior to them and more spiritual than them because he is assertive and domineering and has lots of money.

I met a black American brother once who told me that although the black people in USA had been legally delivered from slavery more than a century ago, the spirit of the slave was still found in most of them even now. When they look at a white man, they feel inferior to him. I find exactly the same attitude in almost every Indian Christian.

To tell you quite honestly, I've found most western preachers who've come to India that I've met to be quite shallow and worldly. They don't know God. But because they have plenty of money to throw around, they become celebrities wherever they go.

Look at the advertisements for Christian conferences in India. In the vast majority of cases, the main speaker is always a western preacher. What a sad state our country's Christianity has come to.

If this were true only among nominal Christians, one could understand it. But it is just the same among those who claim to be born again and spirit baptized. We must break free from this slave mentality.

But if some white man is paying your salary, then of course it will be difficult for you to break free from him. Then you must decide to stop serving men and start serving the Lord. Whose servant are you in any case? The Bible tells us not to be slaves of men because we have been bought with a price.

1 Corinthians 7 23. Let your passion be to know God personally. Then you won't be an echo of some western leader or of an Indian leader for that matter.

You won't be anyone's slave. You'll be a man of God. Spiritual authority can come only through a personal knowledge of God.

I urge you, my brothers, be men who know God. That will make your personal life glorious and your ministry authoritative. That is what our country needs today more than anything else.

It is much easier to know the Bible than it is to know God. Because you don't have to pay a price to know the Bible. All you have to do is study.

You can be immoral in your personal life and impure in your thought life and still know the Bible very well. You can be a well-known preacher and yet be a great lover of money at the same time. But you can't know God and be immoral in your life.

You can't know God and be a lover of money. That's impossible. And that's why most preachers take the easier path of knowing the Bible rather than knowing God.

I want to ask you, brothers, are you happy with just knowing the Bible or is there a desperate hunger in your hearts to know the Lord? The Apostle Paul said in Philippians 3, 8 to 10, that his greatest longing was to know the Lord better. He considered everything else as rubbish compared to knowing the Lord. Paul gave up all his pearls for this pearl of great price.

The secret of Paul's ministry is to be found not in the years that he spent studying the Bible at Gamaliel's seminary but in his personal knowledge of the Lord. Eternal life is to know God and Jesus Christ personally. John 17, 3. We have perhaps defined eternal life as living eternally in heaven but that was not how Jesus defined it.

Eternal life has nothing to do with going to heaven or escaping hell. It has to do with knowing the Lord. To know God intimately and personally has been the passion of my life and the burden of my heart.

I know that my ministry can have divine authority only as I know God personally. And so in all of our churches I have sought to lead people to a knowledge of God himself. There is more Bible knowledge today than ever before in history.

For nearly 1,500 years after the day of Pentecost there were no printed Bibles available anywhere. Only in the last two centuries have Bibles been so freely available. Today we have so many versions and concordances and study helps.

But do you think all this increased Bible knowledge has produced holier Christians? No. If Bible knowledge could produce holiness we should be having the godliest people in history living today. But we don't.

Satan himself would have been holy if Bible knowledge could produce holiness. For no one knows the Bible as well as he does. We have so many seminaries today teaching the Bible to thousands of students.

But are the godliest people in the world today found in those seminaries? No. Many seminary graduates today are worse than the heathen. Some years ago I met a seminary graduate from one of India's top evangelical seminaries who had stood first in his graduating class.

He told me that after three years in that seminary his spiritual condition was worse than when he first joined it. What then did that seminary teach him? It had taught him facts about the Bible and about Christianity. Satan himself could have graduated as first in the class from such a seminary.

What was the use that young man learning hermeneutics and what the Haider critics had said and what the root meanings of Greek words were if he hadn't overcome anger, bitterness, lustful thoughts, and the love of money? With his newly acquired certificate he would soon become a pastor of a church. But what would he teach the people in his church whose biggest problems would be moral and not theological? He wouldn't be able to help them at all in any of those areas. This is how God's work in India is being destroyed.

Only if you know God yourself will you be able to lead your flock to know him. If you have victory over sin in your own life you'll be able to lead your flock also to victory over sin. Then they too will be equipped to go out and serve the Lord with authority and power.

Do you think the devil is impressed by anyone's Bible knowledge or degree certificates? Not at all. Satan fears only holy, humble men and women who know God. May God help us to lead our younger brothers and sisters to know God.

Chapter 3. Fearing God. A spiritual leader will fear God greatly. The more we get to know God the more we will fear him.

We won't be afraid of God but we will reverence him. In Psalm 34 11 David says, Come you children listen to me and I'll teach you the fear of the Lord. It's not an easy task to teach people the fear of God.

It's far easier to teach them how to analyze Romans and Ephesians. If we are to teach others to fear God we must fear him ourselves first. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.

A man who fears God can teach his flock far more than a man who merely knows the Bible. Those who do not fear God can only communicate knowledge not wisdom. Knowledge makes a man proud as we read in first Corinthians 8 1. But wisdom makes a man mature and teaches him how to apply his knowledge to the problems of daily life.

Only men with wisdom can build the church of Jesus Christ. The fear of the Lord is the ABC of the Christian life. If you haven't taught your flock the fear of the Lord first then however much you may have taught them other subjects you've failed in your primary task.

You would then be like a teacher who tries to teach his students geography and history before they can even read. No teacher in the world makes that mistake. To learn the fear of the Lord is like learning how to read.

But most elders in churches don't teach their flock the fear of the Lord first. Here is the proof that the children of this world are wiser in their generation than the children of light. Let me ask a question of those who have graduated from a seminary.

Did you learn the fear of the Lord there or did you merely get a degree certificate? Let me ask you a second question. Why did you join that seminary? Was it to get a job or was it to learn the fear of God? Why did you choose one seminary in preference to another? Was it because it was a more prestigious one? And did you join it even though you knew it was not evangelical in doctrine but liberal? Can you imagine Jesus sending his disciples to such seminaries to prepare them for his service? How many of you can honestly say that you chose a seminary to learn the fear of God? Probably none. Isn't that tragic? I know that many people join a Bible school here in India only as a first step to go to the United States to make money.

Some apply to Bible schools in America in order to settle down there. How can such people ever serve the Lord? Can you acknowledge today that you've joined a Bible school with wrong motives? If you're willing to be honest then there's great hope for you for God loves honest people. Now make sure you warn others not to repeat your mistake.

Teach them the fear of the Lord first. Our children don't have to repeat the mistakes we've made. In Proverbs 24 3 4 we're told that a house is built by wisdom and that by knowledge its rooms are filled with many precious things.

Notice the contrast here between wisdom and knowledge. I'm not devaluing Bible knowledge. Not at all.

I've spent more than 40 years studying the Bible and I think I know it as well as anyone else. But what I seek for most of all is wisdom. Divine love is the greatest thing in the world but divine love is always guided by divine wisdom.

Love without wisdom is dangerous. Love can be likened to the petrol in the tank of a bus and wisdom to the driver of the bus. You certainly need love to lead your flock forward but you need wisdom to decide

which way you're going to lead them.

Wisdom is fundamental. It is possible for you to get 100 percent in Bible knowledge and zero for wisdom. That would be like a student getting 100 percent in physical training and zero in mathematics.

It would be better if he got 100 percent in math and zero in physical training because in the long run math is more important than PT and in the long run wisdom is more important than knowledge. We saw that knowledge fills the rooms. Knowledge is like the furniture, chairs, tables, and beds that we put into our rooms.

So if you have knowledge without wisdom you'd be like a man who puts out all his expensive furniture on an empty plot of ground. Many expensive tables and sofas are there. The only thing missing is the house.

You can well imagine that such a man will be the laughingstock of everyone around him but that's exactly what we see among most leaders and preachers in Christendom today. They have knowledge but no wisdom because they do not fear God. We hardly hear any preacher preaching these days about the fear of the Lord and that's why most believers are not wise and have so many other fears.

Chapter 4. Listening to God. A spiritual leader will take time to listen to God every day. A phrase that occurs frequently in the very first chapter of the Bible is this then God said.

God said something on every one of those first six days when he remade the chaotic earth and each time God spoke the earth became a better place. So right there on the very first page of the Bible we learn one very important truth that we must hear what God has to say every day and if we submit to what God tells us every day we will be transformed into better and more useful Christians. There's a lot of difference between hearing what God has to say to us and just reading the Bible.

Remember it was people who studied their Bibles daily who crucified the Lord. They studied their Bibles but they never heard God speaking to their hearts. See Acts 13 27.

That's the danger we face too and then we can be as blind as they were. Genesis 1 also teaches us that God wants to speak to us every day but most Christian leaders don't listen to God every day. They only read the writings of men.

It's a great tragedy if you preach only what you've heard other men speak because the word of man can never produce anything eternal. It's only the word that God speaks that can produce eternal fruit as we read in Isaiah 55 11. In Genesis 1 we read that whenever God spoke supernatural things happened.

That's how it can be in our ministry too if we preach what God has first spoken to our own hearts. Paul told Timothy to take heed to his own life first before his teaching if he wanted to save himself and others. 1 Timothy 4 16.

The only way to escape self-deception is by hearing what God has to say to us. If you don't listen to what God has to say then you'll preach in one of the following three ways. 1. You'll find out what the so-called great Christian preachers in the world are saying at this time especially in America where most of the money for Christian work in India comes from.

I say so-called great preachers because these preachers are not great in God's eyes. You'll read their books and repeat what they say. Once you discover that a particular subject is popular in Christendom

currently you'll decide to speak much about that.

Your undiscerning flock will be impressed and will consider you well-read and spiritually minded. 2. You'll study biblical themes academically and teach them like a college lecturer studies and teaches chemistry and one can get a doctorate in biblical studies far more easily than a doctorate in chemistry. Many honorary doctorates are being given away today by third-rate bible colleges to title hungry preachers and pastors for a few hundred rupees each.

You can get as many as you like but even if you get an earned doctorate in theology that will still prove only that you're clever man. You may still not know either God or his word. 3. You'll try and sense what is most acceptable to your flock because you want to be popular with them.

You'll then be like businessmen who conduct market surveys to find out what most people want. This is how most pastors preached today and that was how all the false prophets in the old testament preached too and they flourished. Every false prophet would try to sense what the nation of Israel wanted to hear and they would preach just that.

So they were popular with the people and made a lot of money. There are many such false prophets in Christendom today but every true prophet in Israel was unpopular because they told the Jews what they needed to hear and not what they wanted to hear. Jesus once rebuked Martha for being busy with so much work instead of being like Mary who sat and listened to him speak.

Our Lord went on to say that what Mary did was the only necessary thing in life. Luke 10 42. We must all have that attitude that Samuel had who said speak Lord your servant is listening.

What did we see in the very first page of the Bible? Whenever God spoke something was immediately accomplished. Light was produced. The earth came up out of the waters.

Trees, fish, and animals were created etc. Isaiah 55 10 11 tells us that the word which goes forth from God's mouth will never return empty without accomplishing what God desires and without succeeding in the matter for which it was spoken. Notice two words in these verses that are highly valued by all people in the world accomplishment and success.

We all want to accomplish something in our lives and we all want to succeed but life is short and we don't have the time to experiment with various methods for success and accomplishment certainly not in spiritual matters. We shouldn't try out some method of doing the Lord's work and discover 20 years later that that was not God's way of doing things and that we were on the wrong track. We can be saved from all such wastage of time if we listen to the word that God speaks that will always bring success and accomplishment.

I want to listen to a man who listens to God because such a man can teach me more in five minutes than the Theologians with long tales of degrees can teach me in hours. John the Baptist could teach people more about God than Professor Gamiliel or any member of the Jewish Sanhedrin. When you listen to God you won't preach what you've read in Christian books and magazines or heard from Christian tapes.

The man who hears God speaks from revelation not from academic knowledge or study. Such a man first experiences what he reads and then speaks forth from his life. What you teach from your head will go only into other people's heads but what you preach from your heart and from your life's experience will go straight into their hearts and change their lives.

I'm not saying that you shouldn't prepare your messages or that you shouldn't have written notes when speaking. Whether you use notes or not depends on how good a memory you have not on how spiritual you are. What I'm saying is that whatever you speak must be from your heart and from your life.

Today we have liberal theological colleges and evangelical theological colleges but what's the difference between the two? In one the information transmitted from one brain into another is theologically incorrect whereas in the other the information transmitted is theologically correct. But spiritually speaking the evangelical seminary may be no better than the liberal one. In both seminaries the lecturers and the students may be lovers of money and slaves to their lusts.

Jesus did not teach his disciples like that. He did not come to make us better informed about theology. He came to make us like him in character.

Jesus taught his disciples more about character than about theology. What about you? Do you teach your flock how to overcome the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life? There are a lot of people in our churches who look up to us to hear what God is saying to them. It's a solemn responsibility to preach to them Sunday after Sunday.

If I were you I would fear because we are accountable to God for what we tell them. We have to give an account to God one day for every message we ever preached, for what we spoke, why we spoke it, and how we spoke. If you take your responsibility in this matter seriously your ministry can change radically.

For over 20 years now I've judged my own ministry in the Lord's light. After I preach God's word I ask the Lord to tell me whether there was something unnecessary in what I said, whether I wasted people's time, whether I sought my own honor, etc. Thus I've cleansed myself gradually from these evils and from boring people and preaching over their heads.

Do you listen to God after you've preached a message? Do you ask him to show you whether you could have done it better? The fact that others considered it to be a good sermon means nothing at all. What did God think of it? That is the important question. Many of you have so many people listening to you in your churches Sunday after Sunday.

Are you influencing their lives for eternity? Have you changed their sense of values so that they are no longer worldly but heavenly? This is what you must ask yourself frequently. We must be especially careful to listen to God when we have some important decision to make. God speaks to us through many ways.

He speaks to us primarily through his word. If something is clearly written in God's word then we don't need to pray to find God's will because it has already been revealed. God also speaks to us through our circumstances.

Our Lord has the key to every door, Revelation 118, and when he opens a door no one can shut it, and when he shuts a door no one can open it, Revelations 3.8. So our circumstances are very often an indication of whether God wants us to go along a particular way or not. We don't have to bang away at a door that God has not opened. We must of course pray when we see a door shut, but if after repeated prayer a door still remains shut it may mean that God does not want us to go through that door.

We must ask God to show us if this is so or whether he wants us to continue in persistent prayer to open that door, Luke 11, 5-9. God also speaks to us through the advice of mature godly brothers. Such men have gone through many experiences and they can warn us of pitfalls that we are unaware of ourselves.

We don't have to blindly obey them, but their godly counsel can help us. God often speaks to us while we are fellowshiping with other believers. Thus he teaches us our dependence on other members of the body of Christ even for revelation on his word.

God always has something important to say to us whether we go through a trial or when we are sick. God also warns us through the failures of others. If for example we hear of some servant of God who has fallen into sin, it is good to ask God what lessons we can learn from that man's failure, for we are all weak, and how we can preserve ourselves.

God can also speak to us when we hear news of evils being done somewhere or of accidents that have taken place. Jesus told the people of his time to repent when they heard of Pilate butchering some Jews and when they heard of the accident in Siloam where a tower fell and killed some people, because such things could happen to anyone. Luke 13 1-4.

Let me add a word of warning, however, against trying to hear what God is saying by randomly opening the Bible and reading the first verse that you see. If you're eager to marry a particular girl, you may open the Bible at random to find some confirmatory verse, and if you don't find it, the chances are that you will keep opening the Bible until you find the verse that you want. That's how you can deceive yourself.

I heard a story of a man who was trying to find God's will in this way, who opened the Bible at random and read, He went away and hanged himself. Matthew 27 5. He opened the Bible again and found, Go and do the same. Luke 10 37.

He opened the Bible a third time and read, What you do, do quickly. John 13 27. That cured him forever of trying to find the will of God in this way.

There may be times, however, when we are under pressure, when the Lord may encourage us through a verse that we get by opening the Bible at random. So this method is all right if you're looking for encouragement, but not if you're looking for guidance. I want to encourage you, dear brothers, to develop the habit of listening to God.

This is the single most important habit that you can ever develop. Chapter 5. Balanced by the Body of Christ. A spiritual leader will recognize that his ministry is imbalanced, so he will find his balance in the ministry of other members in the body of Christ.

The body of Christ can be compared to a hospital. When a man is sick and goes to a hospital, the hospital has various departments to help him. Perhaps he needs an injection, a physiotherapy, or surgery.

He may need to visit the eye doctor or the ear doctor. So the hospital has various departments. The eye doctor spends all his time just looking at people's eyes and nothing else.

That's not because he feels that other parts of the human body are unimportant, but because his specialty is the eye. In the body of Christ, too, each believer has a different gift and calling, and each one is imbalanced by himself. The only perfectly balanced person who ever walked on this earth was the Lord Jesus Christ.

All the rest of us, even the best among us, are imbalanced. We can find our balance only as we work together with other brothers and sisters, with the other departments in the Lord's hospital. So there's no place for individualism in this hospital.

A good hospital will have many departments to cater to the various needs of people. In the same way, the body of Christ, too, has a variety of ministries and many spiritual gifts to help people. No church or group has all the gifts of the Spirit, but in the total body of Christ, they are all there.

We must know what our own specific calling in the body is. The world is full of spiritually sick people, and nobody's case is hopeless. Everyone can be fully healed by the Lord.

This is the good news of the gospel that we proclaim. The worst sinner and the most perverted person can find healing in the Lord's hospital. A good hospital will never turn away a seriously sick person.

Inferior hospitals do that because they are not equipped to handle serious cases. In the same way, a good church will never tell even the greatest sinner in the world that his case is hopeless. A good church will be able to change the worst of sinners into the greatest of saints, if the sinner is willing to take the treatment given.

We can compare the church to our human body, too. In the human body, each part has a function, and that part concentrates on fulfilling its own function alone. But it appreciates, values, and cooperates with the other parts that have different functions.

That's how it must be when we work together with other ministries in the body of Christ, too. In 1 Corinthians 12, the Holy Spirit uses the example of eyes, ears, hands, and feet to picture the way the gifts of the Spirit are exercised in the body of Christ. When you hear me speak, you'll find me emphasizing certain things from the Bible over and over again.

That's because that is the burden the Lord has given me. I'm stuck to the ministry the Lord has called me to, because I know that is the only ministry in which I can be useful to the Lord. I'll frustrate the Lord's plan for me if I try to do something else.

But I'm not against other ministries. I value them highly. The stomach values the hand highly, but it never tries to do what the hand does.

For example, it never tries to pick up food from a plate. It allows the hand to do that, and then does its own job of digesting the food that the hand picks up and sends down to it. That's a picture of how we complement each other in Christ's body.

Most believers haven't seen this truth of the variety of ministries in the body. But if you don't see this truth, you'll never be able to fulfill all that God wants to accomplish. It's good for all of us to be clear in our own minds as to what God has called us to.

The burden the Lord gives us in our hearts is usually an indication of the ministry he has for us in his body. As far as I'm concerned, it has been crystal clear to me for many years now what my ministry in the body is, and also what God wants me to emphasize in my ministry. That clarity has produced great rest in my life and great liberty as well.

No one can now move me away from my ministry, even if they accuse me of being imbalanced. No prophet in the Old Testament was ever balanced in his ministry. Only diplomatic preachers seek to be balanced.

The prophets were all imbalanced. They kept stressing the same thing over and over again because that was the need of Israel or Judah in their generation, and that was what God laid on their hearts as a burden. I'm not saying that all of us can know as soon as we begin serving the Lord what our gift and calling is.

It took me about 15 years after I was born again before I was clear as to what my ministry was. It may not take that long for you. It may take much less.

You'll have to leave the timing with God. But you must understand this clearly that you have a distinct and unique ministry in Christ's body that no one else can fulfill. And that ministry will never be a balanced one.

It will be imbalanced. You'll have to find your balance by working in fellowship with others who have different ministries in the body. That's the way God keeps us humble, by making us dependent on others.

Praise the Lord. All of us are strong in some areas of our life, but weak in other areas. Just like the student may be good in English and weak in maths, but we must know where we are weak and strengthen those areas.

Your church may be strong in its emphasis on evangelism, but weak in its emphasis on holiness. If so, then you know what type of ministry your church needs to expose itself to. Never judge the success of your labors by your popularity.

Jesus pronounced a woe on all those who were popular with the people, because that was the identifying mark of a false prophet. Luke 6 26. So, if you're a very popular preacher, you could be a false prophet.

On the other hand, Jesus told his disciples to rejoice when everyone spoke against them, because that was one of the marks of a true prophet. Luke 6 22 23. Do you really believe what Jesus said here? Remember that every true prophet in Israel's history and in church history was a controversial figure who was hounded and hated and falsely accused by the religious leaders of his time.

There has not been a single exception to this rule, whether it be Elijah and Jeremiah in Old Testament times, or John the Baptist and Paul in the first century, or John Wesley and Watchman Nee in more modern times. So, we should never gauge the eternal success of our labors by how popular we are. We shouldn't gauge the success of our labors by statistics either, by how many people raise their hands in our meetings, or how many people we preach to, etc.

Going by statistics, we would have to say that Jesus' ministry was a total failure, because at the end of his ministry, he had only 11 men to present to his father, John 17. But the success of his ministry was seen in the type of people those 11 disciples were. They were worth far more to God and could accomplish more for God than 11 million of today's half-hearted, money-loving, compromising, worldly believers.

I felt that if I could produce 11 people of the caliber of those first apostles in my whole life, my ministry would be a glorious success. But it's not easy to produce even two or three such people. It is far easier to gather a crowd of worldly compromisers who believe in Jesus, but who do not love him with all their hearts.

In every moment that God started in Christendom during the last 20 centuries, declines set in by the time it ended the second generation, and it no longer remained the same vibrant, fiery movement that it was when started by its founder. Why? One reason was that the second generation began to be taken up with

numbers. They thought that their increasing in number was the proof that God was blessing them.

But the fastest growing groups in the world in recent years have been the cults and the fundamentalist groups of other religions. What does that prove? Just this, that numerical growth is no proof of God's blessing. God calls us to concentrate on the ministry he has given us in Christ's body and, at the same time, to work in cooperation with others who have different ministries.

It is impossible to evaluate accurately the results of our ministry because we are part of a team, the body of Christ. All we need to ensure, therefore, is that we are faithful to the task God has given us to fulfill. Chapter Six Broken Through Submission A spiritual leader will be a broken man.

God breaks us in our early years by setting some authority over us to whom we have to submit. It is thus that he breaks us. Even Jesus had to submit to the authority of Joseph and Mary for 30 years before God gave him a ministry.

The law of submission is an important law in the body of Christ. It is similar to the way that law functions in the human body. The right hand, for example, is part of the right arm's team and submits to the leadership of the right arm.

The left hand, however, is not a part of this team. It submits to the left arm. In the body of Christ, too, God connects some members like the in one local church or in one team of workers more closely with each other than with others.

God guides us in two ways, individually and corporately. The head can tell the right hand to move by itself without the right arm moving at all. That is individual guidance from the head.

There are many matters concerning our personal life, marriage, job, where we are going to live, etc., in which we should get individual guidance from Christ, our head. We can get advice from other members of the body, but we must get our guidance from the Lord directly. But when the head tells the right arm to move up, the right hand moves up along with the arm without getting any separate guidance from the head.

That is corporate guidance. The right hand cannot say at such a time that it is not going to move because it did not get any individual guidance from the head. One doesn't need individual guidance in corporate matters.

If you're connected to a particular section of Christ's body, God will guide your leaders in such matters, and you just have to follow them. I'm referring here only to corporate matters that relate to that section of the body that you are teamed with, and not to personal matters. If you are certain that God has joined you to a certain team, you must move along with your leaders in that team.

We see an example of this in Acts 16 9. Paul and his team, who had been placed together by God, were in Troas, when a vision appeared to Paul in which a man asked him to come to Macedonia and help them. In verse 10, we read that although Paul alone saw the vision, all in his team were convinced that God had called them to preach in Macedonia. How were they convinced of that when none of them had received any individual guidance from God? Because they had confidence in Paul as the leader of their team.

In team matters, God doesn't have to give individual guidance to everyone in a team. He guides only the leader. If you don't have confidence in your leader, then of course you must leave such a team or such a

church at once.

But you should never stay in a church or a Christian organization and become a cause of rebellion or strife there. God will never bless you if you stay in a group and rebel against its leadership, even if the leadership is wrong. Leave the group and join another.

That is the best thing to do. We must distinguish, however, between ecclesiastical authorities appointed by men and spiritual authorities appointed by God. Today, many Christians are in leadership positions, not by virtue of their having been appointed by God and having fathered children in churches like the Apostle Paul, but on the basis of elections and appointments by human authorities.

The diocesan bishop sends a priest to a particular parish and the general superintendent sends a pastor to a particular church. Such people are not spiritual authorities but ecclesiastical authorities. Spiritual authorities are appointed by God himself.

They do not impose themselves on others like ecclesiastical authorities do. They wait for others to accept their authority voluntarily. Believers submit to such authorities because they recognize the anointing of God on them.

A spiritual leader is one who has earned the confidence of others. Submission to a godly man will not only protect us from doing many things, but will also enable us to learn a great deal of wisdom from him. He will be able to warn us about dangers that he himself has faced that we may be unaware of.

So, to be under spiritual authority is as safe for us as it is for children to be under their parents. In 1 Peter 5.5, we read that younger men should be subject to their elders because God is opposed to the proud but gives grace to the humble. Here is a great secret of obtaining spiritual authority from God.

I've known many fine brothers who were never given spiritual authority by God for just one reason. They never learned to be subject to anyone in their entire lives and so their strong will was never broken. Authority is a very dangerous thing in the hands of an unbroken man.

If you're not broken first and you try to exercise authority over people, you'll ruin them and you'll destroy yourself in the process too. God has to break the strength of our pride first before he can commit spiritual authority to any of us. Even to exercise authority in a home, in a godly way, as a husband or as a father, one has to be a broken man.

If you want your wife and children to be subject to you, you've got to first learn to be subject to spiritual authorities yourself. Only then will God back you up in what you do in your home. Let me tell you of my own experience briefly.

Between the ages of 20 and 30 in my life, God allowed me to be pushed down and publicly humiliated in more than one church by elders who were jealous of my ministry. In all those instances, the Lord told me to keep my mouth shut and to submit to those elders without questioning them. And I did.

I kept a good relationship with them when I was in their assemblies and even after leaving their assemblies. In those years, I never knew what ministry God had in store for me in the future. But God was preparing me to exercise spiritual authority by breaking me over a period of many years.

He broke me time and again and taught me in those years that he was in total control of everything that others did to me. The result was that many years later when God gave me spiritual authority over people, I could never exercise it like a dictator but with compassion. God hasn't finished with breaking me as yet.

Over the past few years, God has taken me through new and unique trials that I've never experienced before. But his purpose in my life remains the same, to break me even more so that he can commit more of his life and his authority to me. Another way in which God breaks our strength and pride is by correcting us through our leaders.

Almost all believers find it very difficult to receive correction. It's not easy for even a two-year-old child to receive correction, especially if it is given publicly. When was the last time you joyfully accepted public correction? Have you accepted it even once in your life? If not, then it's not surprising that you lack spiritual authority.

When someone who is over you in the Lord corrects you, it doesn't matter if he did it in a harsh way. You must still humble yourself under the hand of God who allowed your leader to correct you, even if you didn't deserve the correction, and even if it wasn't your fault. Jesus was publicly humiliated and falsely accused by his enemies of many things, but he never complained.

And he has given us an example to follow. Even if God allows an enemy to criticize you, just ask yourself whether there's any truth in his criticism. That's all that matters.

He's actually giving you a free checkup. Don't bother about how he did the scanning or what the motive behind the scanning was. Such matters are unimportant.

All you need to ask yourself is whether the scan revealed some unchristlikeness in your life. I get a lot of criticism from people in my ministry. I know that true servants of the Lord have always been criticized and falsely accused, so I am not disturbed by criticism.

I only ask the Lord to show me if there's any truth in what is said. Our enemies often tell us more truths about ourselves than our friends do, so we should not write off all criticism as false. If I've got a black stain on my face and an enemy points it out to me, I should be thankful to him because he has shown me something that I couldn't have seen myself.

I can then go and wash off that stain. It doesn't matter even if he said it to me with an evil motive or to humiliate me. He still helped me to cleanse myself.

This was one big difference between Peter and Judas Iscariot. When Peter told the Lord foolishly to avoid going to the cross, the Lord rebuked him sternly, saying, Get behind me, Satan. That was the strongest rebuke that Jesus ever gave any man.

Even the Pharisees were only called vipers, but Peter was called Satan. Jesus' strongest rebukes were reserved for those who were closest to him. He rebukes most those whom he loves the most.

Revelation 3.19. Soon after that, when many disciples were getting offended with the Lord's teaching and leaving him, the Lord asked his disciples if they too wanted to go away. It was Peter who then replied, saying, Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. John 6.60, 66, 68.

What were the words of eternal life that Peter had heard? Get behind me, Satan. Do we see words of correction as words meant to lead us to eternal life? That's how Peter saw correction and that's what made him the man he became. There was yet another occasion when Peter accepted correction from the Lord.

Peter had told the Lord at the last supper that even if all the other disciples denied the Lord, he wouldn't. The Lord immediately replied that Peter would deny him thrice within the next 12 hours. But Peter didn't get offended with that reply.

It was such a man that the Lord finally took up and made his chief apostle and spokesman on the day of Pentecost. Because Peter humbled himself under correction, God exalted him. Having learned from his own experience, Peter now exhorts all of us in 1 Peter 5, 5 and 6 to humble ourselves always.

We'll never lose anything by humbling ourselves. One day God will exalt us. In contrast to Peter's attitude to correction, look at Judas Iscariot's attitude to correction.

When a woman anointed Jesus with an expensive perfume, Judas said it was a waste to spend money like that when it could have been given to the poor. John 12.5, Matthew 26.10-13. Jesus corrected Judas very gently and asked him to leave the woman alone, because she had done a good work. But Judas was offended.

In the very next verse, Matthew 26.14, we read that Judas went immediately to the chief priests and agreed to betray Jesus. The timing of this is very significant. Judas was hurt because Jesus had corrected him publicly.

All that Jesus had told Judas was that his assessment of the woman's action was not correct, but that was enough to upset him. When you're not broken, one small thing will be enough to offend you. But look at the eternal consequences of Judas's reaction, and look at the eternal results of Peter's reaction.

Both of them were tested by correction. One failed while the other passed. Today we're being tested in the same way.

If public correction offends us, it only proves that we're seeking the honor of men. If so, it's good to know it now, so that we can cleanse ourselves from such honor-seeking. God may have allowed such a situation to show us how much we are slave to man's opinions.

Now we can cleanse ourselves and be free. So let's have Peter's attitude to correction at all times, whether the Lord corrects us directly by his spirit or through someone else. This is the pathway of eternal life for all of us.

If we humble ourselves, we'll receive grace from God, and he will exalt us at the right time. Unbroken people tend to be lonely people, lonely leaders, and lonely believers. They never submit to anyone.

They go where they want to go and do what they want to do. Such unbroken believers can work only with those who obey them and accept everything they say. There are lots of believers like that, who flit around from church to church and from organization to organization like butterflies going from flower to flower.

They waste their lives accomplishing nothing. They become wanderers like a cane, because like a cane, they're unwilling to accept the Lord's correction. Genesis 4.12. God can never commit spiritual authority to

such loners, because he's building a body and not a bunch of individualistic believers.

Chapter 7. Responsible for Others. A spiritual leader will keep watch over the souls in his flock, since he has to give an account to God one day for each of them. Hebrews 13.17. I've told my co-workers in our churches in India that I'll be responsible for their souls, since they look up to me as their elder brother.

And so I tell them what's good for them, even if it hurts them, just like I would to my own children at home. Every pastor and elder is answerable to God for the people under his charge. God gives his children spiritual leaders, just like he gives earthly fathers to children in homes.

I'm the father of four sons. During the years that my boys were at home, I guided them and advised them concerning many matters. They submitted to me and obeyed me.

That protected them from many dangers. Even now, after they are grown up, I still advise them now and then, because I'm their father. In the same way, we are to be spiritual fathers to those whom God lays on our hearts.

God will give you a prophetic word for your flock, only if you're willing to be like a father to them. You have to carry your flock on your heart before God, before he can give you an appropriate word for them. Paul had a word for each church he wrote to, because he carried them on his heart, as he says in Philippians 1-7, and prayed for them regularly.

If you don't have such a care and a burden for your flock, you'll only be a professional pastor working for a salary. What does it mean to give an account for people's souls? The word account is a financial word. If you're preparing a balance sheet and the income on the left side totals 5,000 rupees, and the expenditure on the right side totals only 4,999 rupees, something is wrong.

The difference may only be one rupee, but it is still a faulty statement of accounts. You have to account for that one rupee too, because accounting is a very exact science. To render account to God, therefore, means that you must know exactly how things are going spiritually with your flock.

You have to take this matter very seriously, because spiritual leadership is a more serious task than conducting a complicated surgical operation in a hospital. Lives are at stake for eternity. You are responsible for the believers in your church.

You can't make them spiritual, but you must do everything to bring them into a living relationship with the Lord. Your goal must be to present every one of them perfect in Christ. Colossians 1.28. You can't prevent them from backsliding, but you should have warned them before they do backslide.

Once, when a young brother in our church backslid, I was distressed. I asked the Lord why it happened and whether there had been some failure on my part, perhaps some lack of sensitivity in me to what was happening in his life. Was there a word of warning or encouragement that I should have given him? I judged myself, because I was answerable to God for that young life.

We must judge ourselves every time someone under our charge falls away. We don't have to feel condemned about it, but we must ask the Lord if he has something to tell us through it. We should not allow Satan to take us on a guilt trip, but we must learn lessons from our mistakes for the future.

God can show us things that our human reasoning can never show us. If we are sensitive to God's voice, he will prompt us in advance to help people who are slipping up. He may one day, for no apparent reason, ask us to go and visit someone.

I've had some experiences like that. Usually, I have no clue as to why I have to visit the person, because God does not reveal the sins and problems of others to me. I'm thankful for that, because I don't want to pollute my mind with the knowledge of other people's sins.

The Lord prompts me then to share something with that brother. What I tell him may help him, without my even knowing what his problem was. And usually, I won't even know that I've helped him.

If we have the habit of listening to God, he will arrange our circumstances such that we come in touch with people who are in need, and with whom we can share the very word that will meet their need. That was how Jesus lived, as we read in Isaiah 54. The Father spoke to him every day and gave him words to speak to the weary.

That is the type of leader we should all become. When I was in the Navy, the shift system on the ships used to be called watches. These were four-hour shifts, during which one officer would keep watch and be responsible for everything that happened on the ship.

If I was on watch at sea from midnight to four in the morning, I would have to stand on the bridge, the top part of the ship, with two or three sailors. All the others on the ship would be asleep. I would have to look out for other ships crossing our path, and ensure that my ship was going in the right direction.

I had to make course corrections due to the drift caused by the wind and the waves. The safety of the ship and the direction the ship was going in were all my responsibility during those four hours. I could not afford to sleep for even a minute during my watch.

So, when the Bible speaks about our keeping watch over others, this is a very serious matter. It requires alertness on the part of a spiritual leader to keep watch over people's lives to ensure that they don't go astray, or drift away, or get lost. Every good hospital has what they call daily rounds, when the doctors go around and check the condition of the patients.

Those doctors don't just look out over all the wards in a general sort of way and decide that all the patients look healthy. No, they examine each patient individually. But what do many pastors do? They just look out at all their church members on Sunday mornings and decide that everyone appears to be doing fine spiritually.

But there are a lot people who look very healthy on the outside who are actually very sick on the inside, both in hospitals and in churches. Some who look very healthy may be having cancer eating away their insides. It could be that some of those happy looking people in your church who clap and shout hallelujah may be having serious problems in their family lives.

As a doctor checks up each patient individually, a spiritual leader must also check up, keep watch over, each individual soul. The Bible exhorts all shepherds to know well the condition of their flocks. Proverbs 27 23.

When the numbers in a church increase, the only way for a leader to continue to keep watch over the souls under his charge is by delegating this responsibility to other faithful men who have been trained to

do the same thing. It is impossible for any one man to take individual care of people beyond a certain number. I personally think that number is only 12 because that was the number that Jesus disciplined.

No doctor can look after many, many hospital wards no matter how good a doctor he is. We all have our physical limitations. Those who have an apostolic ministry, who have responsibility for many churches, should know the condition of the elders in all their churches.

Only if the elders are spiritual will their churches be spiritual. Unfortunately, most pastors and elders are like doctors who treat patients in an outpatient clinic where they just write prescriptions and send the patients away never knowing or caring whether their patients lived or died. A spiritual leader, however, takes the responsibility of the souls under his charge very seriously.

Chapter 8. Ministering from Life A spiritual leader ministers to others from his life and not from his intellect. Under the old covenant, God used men even when their private lives were immoral. Samson could deliver the Israelites even when he was living in sin.

The Spirit of God didn't leave him even when he committed adultery. God's anointing left him only when he cut his hair and broke his covenant with God. David had many wives, yet the anointing of God remained upon him and he even wrote scripture.

But ministry in the new covenant is totally different. 2 Corinthians 3 contrasts service under the old covenant with service under the new. The difference is basically this.

Under the old covenant, the priests studied the law carefully and taught the people what God had said in his word. But in the new covenant, we follow Jesus who spoke God's word from out of his inner life and walk with his Father. There's a lot of difference between preaching from our life and preaching from our knowledge.

If there is shallowness in the lives of most believers in India today, it is because the lives of their leaders are shallow. The people's lives are carnal because the leader's life, his thought, life, his relationship with his wife and children and fellow workers is carnal. The ministry of such leaders is only the dissemination of information.

This is an old covenant ministry. Any preacher who communicates only information is an old covenant preacher. All the information he gives out may be accurate, but if he is not communicating life, he is not a servant of the new covenant.

The old covenant was a covenant of the letter, whereas the new covenant is a covenant of life. The letter kills, but the spirit gives life. In the old covenant, God gave Israel laws to keep, but in the new covenant, God has given us an example in the person of Jesus.

His life is a light of men. The light today is not a doctrine or a teaching, but Jesus's own life manifested through us. Anything other than this is darkness, even if it be evangelical doctrine.

In the Old Testament, God's written law was the light, as we read in Psalm 119, 105. But then the word became flesh and Jesus himself became the light of the world, John 8, 12. His life was the light of men, John 1, 4. But Jesus told his disciples that he could be the light of the world only as long as he was here on earth, John 9, 5. Now that he has gone to heaven, he has left us in this world to be its light, Matthew 5, 14.

So, our responsibility is very great to show forth that light by our lives. A church invariably becomes like its leader. In Revelation 2 and 3, we see that in each of the seven cases, the Lord spoke the same message to the church as he did to its messenger.

Each message concluded with the statement that the Spirit was saying the same thing to that church. Where five messengers, elders, were carnal, their churches were carnal. And where two messengers were spiritual, their churches were spiritual too.

The messenger in Laodicea was lukewarm, and so was his church. The messenger in Philadelphia was faithful, and so was his church. In Genesis 1, a phrase that occurs frequently is, after their kind.

We read there of fruit trees bearing fruit after their kind, plants yielding seed after their kind, the fish and the birds after their kind, and beasts, creeping things, and cattle after their kind, verses 11, 12, 21, 25. In creation, everything produces after its own kind. God created Adam in the likeness of God, Genesis 5, 1. But Adam produced a son according to his own image, verse 3. He could not produce a son in the likeness of God.

He could produce one only after his own kind. Spiritually too, we will all produce children according to our own likeness and after our own kind. If we are the intellectual type, we will produce intellectually minded people through our ministry.

If we are misers, we will produce misers. And if we're haughty and proud, we will produce haughty people through our ministry. On the other hand, if we have the spirit of a servant, our spiritual children will have a servant spirit too.

It is possible, however, that a rare brother may break out of his leader's mold and seek God for himself and become spiritual in spite of his leader's carnality. But such a case is rare. Generally speaking, most believers are like sheep who blindly follow their leader wherever he goes.

Like preacher, like people. And when both sheep and leader are blind, they both fall into the ditch. Remember that the believers in your church will go out and reproduce others after their kind too.

And then you'll have grandchildren after your kind. So you had better be careful right now what type of children you're going to produce because this process will continue until Jesus returns. It's important right at the beginning, therefore, to ensure that you make disciples in your church and not just converts.

To do that, you must be a disciple yourself. You must have a life that you can pass on to others. Converts will go out and make other converts who in turn will go out and make still more converts.

Such converts may understand the message of salvation, but they will have no desire to follow the Lord. They will have knowledge, but no life. But if you make disciples, they will go out and make more disciples.

So transmitting life to others is fundamental. The tabernacle in the Old Testament was a picture of the church. That tabernacle, as you know, had three parts, an outer court, a holy place, and a most holy place where God dwelt.

The people in the outer court symbolize believers who just have their sins forgiven. They don't take any responsibility in their local church. They come to the meetings, listen to the messages, give their offerings, break bread, and go home.

The people in the holy place are those who seek to serve in the church in some way, like the Levites who lit the lampstand and put incense on the altar. But those in the most holy place are the ones who enter the new covenant, seek fellowship with God, and are united with the other disciples as one body. They minister from their life and constitute the real church, the functioning church, the ones who battle Satan and keep the body of Christ pure.

In many churches, however, there is no such central core. In every church, in the best and in the worst, those sitting in the outer court will be of the same type, half-hearted, worldly, seeking their own, lovers of money, and lovers of ease and pleasure. But a good church will have a strong inner core of leaders who are godly.

This core determines which way the church is going to go. The central core will usually begin with two men who have become one with each other. God will be with them, and the core will begin to grow in size and unity.

A human body too begins with two dissimilar units becoming one in a mother's womb. As that little embryo begins to grow bigger, the cells all remain united. But if at any time those cells break away from each other, that will be the end of that baby.

It's the same with the building of a local church as an expression of Christ's body. If the core splits up, that will be the end of the real church, even if the external structure continues to remain as an institution. Hebrews is one book in the New Testament that contrasts the New Covenant with the Old.

Unfortunately, Hebrews is not a popular book with many Christians. Romans, Ephesians, and Philippians are popular books, but not Hebrews. That's because Hebrews is full of meat, not milk, and most believers haven't got their teeth as yet.

They're still babes. The very first sentence in Hebrews says that in past times God spoke through the prophets, but now he has spoken through his Son. The Old Covenant was mostly a communication of commandments from God, with their thou shalt's and thou shalt not's.

But the New Covenant is a communication of life from God through his Son. That was why the Father sent Jesus to earth as a baby. It would have been no problem for God to send Jesus to earth as a full-grown man, but he came as a baby so that he could have the same experiences that we have and face the same temptations that we face from childhood onwards.

But most Christians think of only in terms of his three and a half years of ministry and his death on Calvary. I think it would be right to say that 99% of believers never think of how Jesus lived during the 30 years he was in Nazareth. They think of his birth that is celebrated every year.

They think of his death and resurrection that too is celebrated every year. And they think of the miracles he did. That's about all.

Hardly anyone thinks of the major part of Jesus's life. His ministry was only 10% of his earthly life, three and a half years out of his 33 and a half years. And his birth and his death were just one day events.

The major part of his life was the 30 years he spent in Nazareth. His whole ministry was based on those 30 years. It took him 30 years to prepare the sermons he preached during his ministry.

He didn't preach the Sermon on the Mount the way preachers prepare their sermons these days, sitting down in their study and consulting books and concordances and writing down their notes and preparing three neat little points that all begin with the same letter of the alphabet. No. That sermon came out of his life.

He took 30 years to prepare it. That's why it was so powerful and that's why the people marveled at the authority with which he spoke. Matthew 7 28 29.

In the old covenant we read that God spoke to Jeremiah only on certain days. Jeremiah dictated what God spoke to his scribe Baruch who wrote down exactly what Jeremiah dictated. In the same way God spoke to Ezekiel only at certain times and told him what to say to the people of Judah.

And Ezekiel went and told the people exactly that. That was good. Even if we had preaching like that today it would be great.

But new covenant ministry is even better. God didn't speak to Jesus only on certain days as he had done to those Old Testament prophets. God spoke to Jesus every day and Jesus spoke to people every day from his life.

His ministry flowed out of his life. That's the meaning of rivers of living water flowing out from our innermost being. John 7 38.

In the light of this it is good to ask yourself whether you're producing new covenant disciples or old covenant converts in your church. The answer to that depends on whether you are a new covenant servant or an old covenant one yourself. The Old Testament prophet was only a messenger.

To pass on a message all you need is a good memory. But in the new covenant God doesn't give us messages to pass on to others but his life. Then what you need is not a good memory but a good life.

The divine life. Let me illustrate the difference. If you collect some water from a tap get a message from God and pour it out that would be a picture of old covenant ministry.

Then you could go back and collect some more water from the tap get another message from God and pour that out too. But in the new covenant we are given a spring of water the life of Jesus himself within us and that flows out from within us constantly. So we don't have to keep going to God each time to get a message.

He makes us the message. Our life itself is the message and we speak from that. Most people have a pouring ministry.

Some have nothing to give when they pour out while others have something to give. But both are still pouring and then both of them run dry. But Jesus told the woman in Samaria that he would put a spring of eternal life within her that would flow out of her constantly.

Eternal life means the life of God himself. This life is what the Lord desires should flow out from within us too. Not just a message.

This is new covenantry ministry. Chapter 9. Serving by God's power. A spiritual leader does all of his work in the will of God by the power of God and for the glory of God.

Therefore it will come through the final fire of testing as gold silver and precious stones. 1st Corinthians 3 12 through 15. In 2nd Corinthians 3 5 and 6 Paul says that we can never become servants of the new covenant unless God equips us and makes us adequate.

Since a spiritual leader serves with the adequacy that God gives him, he cannot take any credit for his labors. If it's really God's life that is flowing through us and blessing others, then we can't take any credit for it ourselves because we can't take the credit for what we've never produced. For example, if I brought a cake here that someone else had baked and I pass it around and all of you appreciate it and say, brother Zach that was a fantastic cake, I won't even be tempted to be proud because I didn't bake it.

I was only distributing what someone else had baked. But if I had baked it myself, then I could become proud thinking I'd done a good job. But how can I take credit for what someone else made? This is one way by which we can know whether what we are passing on to others was what God produced within us or what we produced ourselves.

Are we proud of our ministry, the cake? Then we must have produced that ministry, the cake, ourselves. God had nothing to do with it. If God had produced it, we could not possibly be proud of it.

Do you think Jesus' disciples could have taken any credit for the loaves and the fishes that they passed out to the multitude? No. Not even the boy who gave his lunch packet to Jesus could have taken the credit for that. The disciples only distributed what Jesus produced.

Praise God that we are only in the distribution business and not in the production business. That's why we can be at perfect rest at all times. The strain comes only when we have to produce, not when we have to distribute.

It's true that we may get tired in the distribution business, but there is no strain. Our adequacy is from God. We know we can't produce anything worthwhile ourselves, so we don't even try.

Remember that everything that you accomplish without the help of the Holy Spirit is human and has no eternal value. You can preach and accomplish a lot without prayer, without seeking God's help, and without the power of the Holy Spirit. You may have great human abilities and with them you can do a great deal, but one day you'll discover that it was all wood, hay, and straw in God's eyes.

You may think you're a great communicator because you can stir people up emotionally, but look at how rock music stars stir people up. They can stir people up better than any preacher can, but it's all empty emotion. Or you may be a great intellectual who can tickle people's brains and hold them gripped for hours when you speak.

That's human soul power too. There may be no communication of divine life there. Whatever you accomplish in your ministry without the help of the Holy Spirit will perish with this world.

You can be absolutely sure of that. I don't know if you believe me, but if you do, you won't waste your time anymore adopting human methods. I don't want to waste my time building something that is going to perish in eternity.

I want to serve with the power that God gives. Our adequacy is from God. The Pharisees were the great Bible scholars of Jesus' time.

They were fundamental in their doctrine, unlike the liberal Sadducees. We know that because Jesus himself endorsed the correctness of their doctrines by telling his disciples to do all that the Pharisees taught. Matthew 23 3. Those Pharisees were the leading professors in the Bible seminaries of those days.

Gamaliel was the principal of the Bible seminary that Saul of Tarsus attended in Jerusalem. Many of those Pharisees were great mission leaders too. Jesus spoke of them as men who crossed land and sea to make proselytes.

Matthew 23 15. That would have involved sacrifice and dedication. Yet we see that a major part of Jesus' ministry was spent confronting those fundamentalist seminary professors and mission leaders.

We must find out why, because if we don't we can be like them too. And then the Lord will be confronting us continually. Those leaders were always questioning Jesus as to why he and his disciples did this or did not do that.

They were always quoting their traditions to Jesus and pointing out where he and his disciples had violated them. I've seen so much of this attitude in the believers who criticize me too. They question me about some little expression I used here or some word I used there.

They love to have disputes about words. 1 Timothy 6 4. The very thing Paul told Timothy to avoid. But they don't seem to be bothered about their own lack of divine life.

They remind me of people counting the fingers on a dead man's hand to see that all the fingers are there. And if even one fingernail is missing, they create a big uproar. I'd rather have a living man with five fingers missing than a dead man who has all his fingers and fingernails intact.

A lot of theologians may be dead right in their doctrines, but they are both dead and right. I'd rather work with a brother whose doctrine on baptism is wrong but who is filled with the Holy Spirit than someone who has been baptized the right way but who is as dead as a doornail. Now, don't get me wrong here.

I've always been very strong on doctrine all my Christian life. I've left a lot of Christian groups because they didn't preach the whole counsel of God. So, I'm not devaluing doctrine.

But what I'm trying to say is that life and spirituality are far more important. One day after Jesus had rebuked and corrected the Pharisees, his disciples came to him and told him, do you know that the Pharisees were offended by what you said? Jesus told them not to bother about those Pharisees because they were blind leaders of the blind and every plant that God has not planted will be rooted out one day. Matthew 15, 12, 13.

I want you to think of that last statement for a moment. Whenever you preach, you're planting a seed. If what you're planting is not from God, it will be pulled out one day.

Our work will remain for eternity if we do it with the adequacy supplied by the Holy Spirit. But if we do our work for God without prayer, without leaning on God in helpless dependence on him and without his Spirit's help, then it will certainly be rooted out one day. There are many aspects of Christian work for which we don't need the power of the Holy Spirit, but only plenty of money and a good administrator.

For example, if you're arranging a Christian conference, a lot of work is involved. A hall has to be hired, invitations have to be sent out, accommodation has to be arranged, food arrangements have to be made,

etc. But all of this can be done by any good administrator who is not even a Christian.

In fact, many worldly conferences are organized in a far better way than most Christian conferences. But the part of a Christian conference that is going to remain for all eternity is the ministry of the Word, and that part must be done under the Spirit's anointing. I'm not devaluing the necessity of making good arrangements.

They're needed for the success of any conference. But remember that what's eternal will only be that which was done in the power of the Holy Spirit. Let's apply this to our own ministry.

Let's ask ourselves what part of our ministry can be explained away as being merely the result of having human training and human resources. We may be surprised to discover the answer if we are honest with ourselves. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever.

His conflict, even today, is with Bible seminary professors and mission leaders who have knowledge without life and who transmit information without the anointing of the Holy Spirit. The apostles had a conflict with such people in their day, and we will also be in conflict with such people in our day, if we walk in Jesus's footsteps. I'd rather walk with the Lord and be in conflict with such people than please them and displease the Lord.

In fact, I'm prepared to be in conflict with the whole world if necessary, if that is the price I have to pay to please God. If we seek to please men, we can never be servants of Christ. Galatians 1.10. Let us walk then in helpless dependence on God for our ministry, always longing for the anointing of the Spirit to be upon us.

Chapter 10 Exercising Spiritual Authority A spiritual leader will minister with spiritual authority. The multitudes were amazed at Jesus's preaching because they saw a difference between the way he taught and the way the Pharisees had taught them for so many years. The Pharisees had a lot of knowledge.

Jesus had even more knowledge than they had, but it was his authority that impressed his hearers, not his knowledge. Matthew 7.29. If we have knowledge but no spiritual authority in our ministry, we will be like the Pharisees. God backed up the words that Jesus spoke.

This is what it means to speak with spiritual authority. Jesus told his disciples, in John 15.26.27, that the Holy Spirit would bear witness along with them. This meant that whenever they preached, the Holy Spirit would back up what they said.

That's certainly how I want my ministry to be at all times. As I bear witness to Jesus, the Holy Spirit must also bear witness to what I say. He must also speak to the hearts of my listeners saying, listen to that.

That's from God. Then I'll be speaking with divine authority. But if I merely give a very accurate testimony about Jesus, and the Holy Spirit doesn't back up what I say, I won't be called a heretic because my doctrines are all evangelical, but I will still be ministering death and not life.

There are many ways in which we can exercise authority over people. There are human ways, religious ways, and spiritual ways. And there's a lot of difference between these three.

Jesus' authority was not human or religious. He never spoke or acted like an earthly king or like the religious leaders of Israel. His authority was divine and spiritual.

A good example of human authority would be the authority that film stars and rock musicians exercise. Look at the way people worship them and go crazy over them. People stand for hours in the rain and the sun to get a glimpse of them.

They have great authority over people. They use their human abilities to rule over people's minds and emotions, and then get the people to pay them money too. This type of authority is found among many preachers in Christendom too.

It is the power of the human soul and not of the Holy Spirit. Another way to exercise human authority would be through money. The world is controlled today not by those who have weapons, but by those who have money.

Money is a very important factor in wars and in elections too. The business community in every country has to please the political leaders in order to thrive. And the political leaders, in turn, have to please the business community in order to get money to get power.

So money has tremendous power. And this power is being used extensively in Christendom too. Money can certainly do a lot of good, but because money is powerful, it does a lot of damage too.

If Christian work anywhere is controlled by financial power, it can never be a spiritual work. Jesus placed money in direct opposition to God. He said that God and mammon, material wealth, were the only two masters in the world competing for the attention of men.

Luke 16 13. The authority that a Christian leader has through giving money to others is not spiritual authority. Both in the world and in Christendom, it is the one who has the money who pulls the strings.

People will bow down to anyone who has money. They will agree to anything you say and do everything you tell them to if only you pay them. This is true in secular companies and in Christian organizations as well.

Almost every pastor is controlled by the board members of his church because the board determines his salary. Such a pastor dare not say anything that will offend those board members. Churches usually have their richest men on their boards, and these rich men are usually the ones who need to be rebuked the most.

But how can a pastor rebuke them if his mouth is full of the money they have stuffed into it? He can't. So he has to tickle those rich men's ears and say exactly what they want to hear. If he displeases them, they won't give him his annual increment and that'll be enough to make him change.

He'll think of his poor family that will have to struggle. He'll have to vacate his convenient pastoral house and he'll have to take his children out of that good school. Such thoughts will make him quickly submit to the board and toe the official line quietly.

This is the main reason why we have hardly any prophets in India today. Almost every preacher has fallen a prey to the lure of money. How can such preachers ever exercise spiritual authority? I want to say to those of you brothers who are in authority over others that if you control anyone through money, what you are exercising will not be spiritual authority.

Jesus never controlled anyone through money. Not one of his disciples followed him for money, for he had no wealth to give them. He offered them no retirement benefits in this world, but only tribulation and suffering.

He taught them to seek the kingdom of God and his righteousness first and told them that the material things they needed, the bare minimum of food and clothing, would be added to them by their heavenly father. Jesus sent out his apostles to evangelize the world without any money so that those apostles would never be able to draw anyone or control anyone through money. Yet they did a much better job of evangelizing the then known world than we have done with all our money and gadgets and our many conferences on evangelism.

Financial power is something that we have to be very careful about in God's work, for it can rob us of spiritual authority. Music power is another power that we have to beware of. Rock music can sway people to the point where they even commit suicide.

There are many forms of power like that in the world today. We have to be careful that we don't mistake these for spiritual power. If we are unable to distinguish between spiritual power and soul power, it will be easy to deceive ourselves about the success of our ministry.

With some of us, the power we're using may not be money power or music power, but intellectual power. That too is the power of the soul and that is very different from having spiritual authority. We can try and impress people with our qualifications in order to get them to listen to us.

Maybe you're so theologically qualified that you can explain the root meanings of the Greek words that Peter used in his epistles, meanings that Peter himself did not know. But a spiritual man will teach the Bible in an entirely different way and the results will be different too. The Bible can be taught by the power of the human intellect or by the power of the Holy Spirit and there is a vast difference between these two ways of teaching and their results.

One of the greatest needs in the church today is for a demonstration of spiritual authority in the ministry of its leaders. Spiritual authority is very different from religious authority. What we commonly see in Christendom today is religious authority, where strong leaders dominate their flock.

A local church was never meant by God to be run as a democracy where everybody is given a vote to choose its leader. Neither did God intend it to be run as a dictatorship by a strong leader who rules the poor believers and makes them bow down and obey him. It's easy when we preach God's word to have power over people.

People appreciate our ministry because it helps them. Then it becomes easy for us to become like little gods to our admirers. We must always live in fear of that.

We must never take advantage of the authority we have over others through our gift. We must never try to run other people's lives. If we find them clinging to us, we must gently cast them on the Lord for their own good and their spiritual growth.

Our calling is to build the body of Christ and not our own little empires. This is the way of spiritual authority. Paul has such spiritual authority given him by God that he could even deliver a person in the church at Corinth to Satan for the destruction of his flesh so that the man could be saved.

First Corinthians 5 5. The man was saved later and came back to the church in repentance. Paul was the founding father of that church and such fathers have a spiritual authority that no one else can exercise. Those apostles had divine authority given them by the Lord to build people up.

This is the type of loving authority that we need too. We see many manifestations of such spiritual authority in the life of the apostle Paul that are a tremendous challenge to us. When the disciples observed Jesus for three and a half years, they saw that he was totally different from the leaders and preachers they had seen in their synagogues.

They had never met anyone who lived like him or who spoke like him. He had authority in his life and in his ministry. Until they met Jesus, they had thought that spiritual ministry was what they had seen in their priests and their bishops in the synagogues.

And if they had never met Jesus, they would have made those priests and bishops their role models. But now they have a new role model they can follow. What our young people need are better role models to follow.

It is our responsibility to be those role models as men with spiritual authority. Chapter 11. Freed from all fears.

A spiritual leader will not take decisions based on the fear of men or of circumstances. I have a large verse hanging in the front room of my house that reads, If you fear God, you need fear nothing else. That's the Living Bible paraphrase of Isaiah 8, 12, and 13.

That verse has been of tremendous help to me in the last 25 years. Let me share with you some of the truths that I've learned from the Lord on this matter of fear. First of all, I've learned that fear is one of the main weapons in Satan's armory.

Secondly, I've learned that I don't need to feel condemned if feelings of fear come to me at times, because I'm still in the flesh. We must be realistic and honest about this. The apostle Paul was quite honest and admitted that he had fears within him at certain times.

Second Corinthians 7, 5. The third thing I've learned, and this is the most important, is that even if I do have fears, I must never take a decision based on fear. My decisions must always be based on faith in God, the very opposite of fear. And that's how I've sought to live for many years now, and God has helped me and encouraged me tremendously.

I now understand why Jesus so frequently said, fear not, fear not, fear not. This is as important as the other emphasis in the New Testament, sin not, sin not, sin not. Jesus was always against sin, and he was always against fear.

He told us to fear only God and no one else, Matthew 10, 28. This is a very important lesson for us to learn, because a spiritual leader must never take any decision based on fear. Another verse that I've had hanging in my sitting room for many years is Galatians 1, 10.

If I seek to please men, I cannot be the servant of Christ. If you seek to please men, you can never be a servant of the Lord. And I'll tell you, it's not easy to break free from seeking to please men.

Many reports of Christian work sent from India to the West are basically meant to impress people there, so that they will support a work here financially. You have to be very careful about your motives when you write a report about your work. A lot of sermons, likewise, are prepared with the motive of impressing men and pleasing them, but those who preach with such motives can never be servants of Christ.

It's easy to fool an undiscerning group of immature believers in your church that you're a great man of God, but you can't fool God and you can't fool the devil. Both God and the devil know exactly what type of person you are. If you've a fear in your heart that someone will harm you in some way if you displease him, then you'll always try to please him.

Then you can never be a servant of God. If ever you act on the basis of fear, you can be sure that it is the devil who is guiding you and not God. If we look back over our lives, we'll find that we've taken many decisions in the past on the basis of fear.

In all those decisions, we were not led by God. The consequences of some of those decisions may not have been serious, but we missed God's best. We should act differently in the future.

It's natural for us to feel fear because we're human. For example, if you suddenly saw a cobra in front of you where you're sitting right now, you'd naturally get a shock and jump up and adrenaline would rush into your bloodstream. That's natural, but you don't live in fear of finding a cobra under every chair everywhere you go.

We must not live in fear of anyone either. We must never take a decision based on the fear of men or Satan. Every decision we take must be based on the fear of God and in total faith in our Heavenly Father.

Only then can we be sure that we're being led by the Holy Spirit. Hebrews 13.6 is a very important verse for all of us who serve the Lord. It says there, we boldly say that the Lord is our helper and we will not be afraid.

What can any man do to us? We must distinguish, however, between being cautious and being afraid. We must be wise, as wise as serpents in this world, but we don't have to fear any man or woman or demon or even Satan himself. Jesus was cautious.

When he heard that people were wanting to kill him in Judea, he didn't go there. John 7.1. That was sensible. That was wise, but Jesus was never afraid of anyone.

If you were to go into a forest at night, you'd take a torch light with you. That's caution, not fear. If people are trying to kill you somewhere, you shouldn't go there unless God himself tells you to go.

Jesus did finally go to Jerusalem when the Holy Spirit led him to and he was killed, but that was in God's will and in God's time. We're not afraid of any man. What harm can any man do to us if we're doing the will of God and living in the shadow of the Almighty? Psalm 91.1. The Bible asks, Who can harm you? 1 Peter 3.13. God is able to make all that people do to us work together for our good.

Romans 8.28. Since that is true, why should we ever fear? If we believe this, it will bring such tremendous authority into our lives. A lot of our spiritual authority is taken away from us by Satan because we fear men, or seek to please them, or impress them, or justify ourselves before them. We must get rid of these attitudes totally.

But this is not easy. It's a constant battle. Once you've decided to stop trying to please A, B, and C in one group, you may imagine that you've finished with seeking to please men.

But very soon, you'll find that you're trying to please D, E, and F in some other group. And this is endless. We've got to fight this battle faithfully until the very end if we want to break free from all men.

We must be constantly on the alert against this sin and battle it. We must never seek for the approval of any man. There are some believers who haughtily say that they don't care for anybody's opinion.

But such people are not spiritual. They're just arrogant. The opinion of a godly elder brother can be very valuable.

He will be able to tell us things that he sees in us that we can't see ourselves. To respect and honor such a man, and to be submissive to his authority, can actually help us a lot. The important thing is to learn how to submit to a godly man without becoming his slave.

If we want our church members to fear only God, and to be free from the fear of men and demons, then we must be like that ourselves first. It is because God is in control of everything on this earth that we don't fear anyone or anything. Once when I was planning to go to a certain country where preaching the gospel is forbidden, the Lord reminded me of Matthew 28 18 to 19.

I saw then that it was because the Lord has all authority in heaven and on earth that he has commanded us to go to every nation and make disciples. If we don't go forth on that basis, we'll face problems wherever we go. The word therefore is the most important word in the Great Commission in Matthew 28.

Most preachers emphasize the word go. That's good. But on what basis are we to go? On the basis of our Lord having total authority over all people on this earth and over all demons as well.

If you don't really believe that, then it's better that you don't go anywhere. This verse in Matthew 28 came to me as a new revelation at that time. Then I realized that I could go to that country without any hesitation.

There were fears within me naturally when I entered that country, but I didn't take my decision on the basis of those fears. If you think there's some nation in this world where the Lord Jesus does not have total authority, then I advise you not to go there. I would not go there myself.

I'd be scared. But thank God there's no such place anywhere on this earth. Every corner of this earth is under the authority of our Lord.

In the same way, if you think there's some man somewhere, however powerful he may be, over whom our Lord doesn't have authority, then you'll have to live in fear of him always. But thank God there's no such person anywhere. Our Lord has authority over every single human being.

Even King Nebuchadnezzar understood this, as we read in Daniel 4.35. If there's some demon somewhere who was not conquered by our Lord on Calvary, but who somehow escaped defeat, then we must live in fear of that demon always. But there's no demon like that who was not defeated on the cross. Satan himself was defeated there permanently.

That's what delivers us from all fear of Satan and his demons and gives us great boldness in our ministry. So, we go wherever God calls us to go. There may be risks in some places, but to the best of our knowledge, if we feel the Lord is leading us there, then we need not fear to go.

The question is not whether there is persecution of Christians in a particular place or not. The only question is whether the Lord has asked us to go there or not. If he has, then his authority will back us up totally.

We need have no fear whatsoever. But if God has not called us to go somewhere, then we should not go, no matter how much men may try and persuade us to go, or how much the spirit of adventure within us makes us want to go. We must ask ourselves why we're going to a particular place.

If we're going because we want to make disciples and have no other ambition, then we can be certain that the Lord will be with us always, even until the end of the age as he promised. But we may have other motives. The Lord examines our heart's attitude, Jeremiah 12, 3, and tests our motives.

The Lord won't commit himself to everyone who calls himself a believer. We read that in John 2, 24. But if you can honestly say to the Lord, Lord, I am going to this place only because I feel you've called me to go there, and I'm going there only to make disciples, to baptize them in the name of the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit, and to teach them to do everything that you have commanded.

I'm not going there to make money, or to get a name for myself, or for any other personal reason. If you can say that honestly, then you'll certainly have the Lord's authority backing you always. And then you won't have to live in fear, wondering what will happen to your wife and children, or how your financial needs will be met.

The only question that is important is, has God called you or not? Is God sending you there, or is some man sending you there? Or is it the spirit of adventure that's driving you? If you've got some program other than God's program, then I can't offer you a single promise from scripture to comfort you. But if your program is the same as God's program, to make disciples, baptize them in the name of the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit, and teach them to do everything Jesus commanded, then I can assure you, you don't have to fear men or demons. Every servant of God must know how to deliver those who are possessed by demons, by exercising the authority there is in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Demons aren't afraid of you or me. They're only afraid of the Lord, who defeated them on the cross. That's why it's important to know clearly that Jesus Christ took away all of Satan's power on the cross, Colossians 2, 14 and 15.

This is the good news of the gospel that we must experience first of all, and then proclaim it to all men. If we believe it, we can deliver others from Satan's power. We should not be afraid of what demons may try and do to us, because they cannot touch a hair on our heads without God's permission.

But many believers in India are afraid that someone may do some witchcraft on them someday. Why do they have such fears? Because they do not know that Satan was defeated on the cross. I remember meeting a pastor once who had been sick for a long time, who blamed his sickness on witchcraft that his enemies had done on him.

How could that be? Is the Lord less powerful than the power of black magic and witchcraft? No, it was that pastor's unbelief that made him feel that way. No demonic power can stand against the authority and power of our Lord, either on earth or in the heavenlies where the demons operate from. Ephesians 6, 12.

If you don't believe that, I suggest that you stop serving the Lord and go and do something else. Stop being a preacher because you'll transmit your fear and unbelief to others. Fear is Satan's weapon.

Don't let him ever use it on you. Demons may at times be permitted to harass a believer under the permissive will of God, as in the case of Job. God permitted a messenger of Satan to trouble even the apostle Paul, 2 Corinthians 12, 7. That was as irritating to Paul as a thorn in his body.

It may have been a sickness or a person who troubled Paul continuously wherever he went. If we have a thorn in our flesh and we can't pull it out ourselves, we should ask God to remove it. But God may at times say no, as he said to Paul, if he sees that that thorn is accomplishing the greater purpose of keeping us humble.

Satan was even permitted to hinder Paul from traveling to Thessalonica once. But Timothy could go instead and God's purposes were still fulfilled there, 1 Thessalonians 2, 18, 3, 2. Let me emphasize this, however, that as a born-again Christian can never be possessed by a demon. Unfortunately, many preachers these days are preaching the unscriptural doctrine that believers can be demonized and thus bringing many believers under fear and condemnation.

Such preachers cannot quote a single scripture to justify their teaching, but they say that they've come across such cases in their experience. Thus, they exalt their experience above the Word of God. This itself proves that they are wrong.

Christ and a demon can never dwell together in the same heart. Light and darkness cannot coexist in one place. It is true that some of the demons in the synagogues where Jesus preached were demon-possessed, but we don't read of a single case of a born-again believer after Acts 2 being demon-possessed.

A Christian may be harassed from outside by demons, as Paul and Job were, but that too only with God's permission. And if God permits such harassment, you can be absolutely sure, as in the cases of Job and Paul, that it will work for your spiritual benefit. If ever you're in doubt as to whether someone is demon-possessed or not, just ask him to make these three confessions with his whole heart.

1. Jesus Christ is my Lord. 2. Jesus Christ came in the flesh and overcame sin. 3. Satan, you were defeated by the Lord Jesus Christ on the cross.

I don't belong to you anymore. Demon-possessed people will not be able to make these three confessions with their spirit. Every time we're sick, we should pray to be healed, but we can tell the Lord that if he plans to bring some spiritual prophet to us through the sickness and thus glorify his name, then we will accept it joyfully.

Under the old covenant, God promised a long healthy life to all those who honored their parents. What did that involve? It meant that God would watch over such children as they grew up, ensuring that no fatal accident or sickness came upon them. Did God keep a special watch over those children who honored their parents? Yes.

It was a real and meaningful promise that God kept. God controlled circumstances so that a child who honored his parents lived long on the earth. In the same way, God can control the circumstances of our lives too so that we don't die before we have finished doing God's will, whether that be at the age of 33 or at the age of 90.

Under the new covenant, we know that long life is not the greatest thing, but a life spent in doing the will of God, whether it be short or long. Jesus himself lived only up to the age of 33, but he finished the task his

father gave him. David Brainerd lived to the age of 29, and Watchman Nee to the age of 70.

The important thing, however, was that as far as we know, each of them completed the task God had assigned them before they left this earth, and God sovereignly controlled all the circumstances of their lives until then so that no sickness or accident shortened their lives until their task on earth was done. There are many germs and bacteria on this earth that invade our bodies. Some of them even have the potential to kill us, but God is powerful enough to control those germs so that they don't kill us.

God is powerful enough to control the drunken drivers on the roads so that they don't run us down and kill us either. He watches over us every moment and never slumbers or sleeps. If we believe that, we'll be free from the fear of circumstances, fear of sickness, fear of accidents, and from every other type of fear.

If you fear God, you really need fear nothing else. Chapter 12. Freeing Others from Fear A spiritual leader will never use fear as a means to get people to submit to him.

On the contrary, he will seek to deliver people from fear. Fear is a weapon found only in Satan's armory. Jesus came to deliver man from fear.

Every spiritual leader has the same task. It says in Hebrews 2.14 that Jesus took flesh and blood so that he might deliver those who through the fear of death were subject to bondage and slavery all their life. Romans 8.15 tells us that we have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but the spirit of adoption as sons.

Here, Paul contrasts the Holy Spirit who makes us sons of God with the spirit of slavery that makes us fear. Fear always brings slavery. People all over the world live in fear.

Unfortunately, believers also live in fear. If a man can frighten you sufficiently, you will be his slave. This is the principle on which all cults operate.

People with strong soul power use the weapon of fear on people, threatening them that if ever they leave their group, something terrible will happen to them or to their families. This is sheer nonsense. But when people hear such threats again and again over a period of time, they begin to believe it and are scared to leave the cult.

Even if they find everything wrong in their group, they will still stay on through fear. The leader may even be living in adultery, but cult members will not dare to speak against him out of fear. Such fear brings them into slavery.

Whenever a Christian leader uses the weapon of fear to frighten believers into submission to his authority or to pay their tithes or to do anything, he is using Satan's weapon. We must never use the weapon of fear to make people do what we want them to do. If anyone uses this weapon, then any group he builds will only be a cult.

In the true church of God, every brother and sister must be left totally free to make his own choices. We certainly need to discipline people in the church if they live in sin, but they must not be threatened with curses and judgment. There are pastors who tell their congregations that if they don't pay their tithes to the church, they will end up spending that money on doctors and hospital bills.

This is sheer nonsense. We are called to deliver people from such fears. People must give their money joyfully and cheerfully, not under threat of punishment or judgment.

God doesn't want any money from anyone that is extracted like that, and pastors who force money out of people will come under the judgment of God sooner or later. Under the old covenant, people served God out of fear. In Deuteronomy 28, the Israelites were warned that if they didn't obey God's commandments, they'd be punished with poverty, sickness, madness, and other evils.

So they obeyed God out of fear. Malachi told the Israelites that they would be cursed if they didn't pay their tithes, Malachi 3.10, but that was under the law. Jesus came to deliver us from such legalistic obedience.

Zechariah, the father of John the Baptist, prophesied of the new covenant age and said that we could now serve God without fear, Luke 1.74, in true reverence. Is there anything in your life that you do out of fear? Do you read the Bible each morning because you fear that some calamity may strike you if you don't read it? That is plain and simple superstition. And God certainly does not want you to read the Bible in that superstitious way.

He wants you to know his intense love for you and to be free from all fear. The reason why God has cleansed us in the blood of Jesus and justified us too is so that we might never feel condemned by Satan at any time. Any ministry that brings God's people under condemnation can never be from God.

The Lord has come to set people free, not bring them into more bondage. Most believers are already suffering so much with their many problems. We don't have to give them more problems with condemnation when they come to the church meetings.

They come to be delivered and helped, not scolded and condemned and sent home depressed. The Lord rejoices over his people with shouts of joy and that's what we must proclaim to God's people. The whole purpose of praising the Lord in the meetings of the church is to celebrate his love for us and to rejoice in the fact that he delights in us and is happy with us.

God forgave us not because we were good, but because he loved us. He chose us in Christ when there was nothing good in us. How much more he will love us now that we have repented.

Yet Satan has succeeded in producing more condemnation among God's children than among his own children. Actually, it is Satan's children who should feel condemned, not us. But they live in a world of deception and live happily.

But most of God's children, who should be among the happiest people in the world, live under feelings of condemnation and unworthiness. This is not humility, but unbelief. Many believers claim to be filled with the Holy Spirit, but they are still slaves to fear.

How can a person be filled with the Holy Spirit and still be a slave to fear? Some false prophet comes along and tells them that some calamity will come upon them and they are immediately filled with fear. Then the false prophet collects money from them to pray for God's protection over them and then moves on to visit some other family to deceive them. We must beware of such false prophets.

There are many false prophets roaming around the world today, producing fear in people's minds. Ten thousand false prophets may prophesy evil against us, but no evil can touch us. It will only rebound on them.

We must teach our congregations this truth and make them bold. We can never have confidence before God or boldness before Satan if we have any type of fear. If we fear God, we need never fear anything else.

Fear is the devil's weapon. Anyone who uses fear in his ministry is in fellowship with Satan. Jesus warned people about hell, but he never frightened them with scary stories and gruesome details of the place.

And he didn't threaten his disciples who left him with dire consequences. The Bible commands masters never to threaten their servants. Ephesians 6.9. If fear is a weapon of the devil, how can we as servants of God ever use it? Yet there are multitudes of Christian leaders who use fear to control their flock.

Even if people call us by bad names, we must not pronounce judgment on them or threaten them with God's wrath. The Pharisees called Jesus the prince of devils. But in reply, Jesus did not threaten them, but forgave them.

Matthew 12.32. Let us follow his example. When we speak to people, we give forth a spirit with our words too. We may not be not aware of it, but it is there.

If bad breath comes forth from our mouths, others can detect it each time we open our mouths, but we may not be aware of it ourselves. It is exactly the same with the odor that comes forth from our spirits. We may preach on holiness, but the spirit coming forth from us may not be holy.

We may speak on humility, but the spirit coming forth from us may not be humble. Two brothers may preach the same sermon on humility. One may have a humble spirit and communicate that spirit to his hearers.

The other may have an arrogant spirit, and he will communicate that, even though both sermons are the same. There's a lot of difference between these two preachers, and we must discern that. In the same way, we can transmit a spirit of fear to others, if we have fear within ourselves.

We can also bring believers under condemnation by the way we preach God's Word to them. We may be sincere, but the spirit coming forth from us may be a spirit that brings people into bondage. The effectiveness of our message depends on the spirit that comes forth from our hearts, and not just the knowledge that comes forth from our understanding.

We are communicating a life to others, and not just a message. If you are a slave to any type of fear, that spirit of fear will come forth from you and defile others to whom you speak, and they will also be bound by that spirit of fear. That's just like it is in the human body.

If you are a carrier of sickness in your bloodstream, you will transmit that sickness to your children. That's why it is important that we eliminate every fear from our lives, fear of men, fear of Satan, fear of sickness, fear of death, fear of evil circumstances, fear of road accidents, fear of poverty. In a poor country like ours, that can be a very real fear.

Fear that our children may not get a good education or good jobs, and many other fears like that. The only thing that can drive out such fears from us is the fear of God and faith in him. If we fear God, we will not fear anything or anyone else.

If we trust in God, we know that he is a rewarder of those who diligently seek him, and that he honors all who honor him. When faith dwells in our hearts, fear cannot dwell there, even though we may have occasional moments of fear. The important question is what dominates our thinking.

Is it fear or faith? We must also ask ourselves if we ever try to dominate others using the weapon of fear. Chapter 13 Humbling Oneself A spiritual leader will always be ready to humble himself. God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble.

If we humble ourselves under the mighty hand of God, he will exalt us at the proper time. 1 Peter 5, 5, 6 To be exalted does not mean that we become great men in this world or in Christendom and get the honor of men. It refers to spiritual exaltation, where we are given spiritual authority to fulfill all the will of God in our life and ministry.

But such exaltation depends on our humbling ourselves. We all know that the world is full of people who want to become bigger and bigger in the eyes of others. Every politician and every businessman wants to become bigger.

Unfortunately, those who call themselves servants of Christ also want to become bigger and bigger. They aspire to have grand titles like Reverend Doctor and to hold positions like Chairman of their organizations. Sadly, today's Christendom is no different from any corporation in the world.

Young believers today see their leaders standing in the spotlight like film stars on large platforms in public meetings, living in expensive hotels and houses, and driving expensive cars. Not knowing much about God's ways, they admire such leaders and look forward to the day when they too will reach those heights. They feel that such preachers must have been faithful for many years for God to reward them in this way.

And they imagine that by being faithful, they too will one day stand on such platforms with a spotlight on them. When young men see preachers making lots of money with the gifts they receive from America and the Gulf countries, they look forward to the day when they too can be rich like them. The role model for these young men is not Jesus Christ, but these wealthy film star type preachers.

This is the tragedy in Christendom today. We need to demonstrate to our young people by our lives and teach them by our words that if we follow the Lord, we will not become wealthy or famous, but godly. At the same time, we'll be misunderstood, rejected, and persecuted, but we'll be able to love those who hate us and bless those who curse us.

This is what we need to demonstrate to the next generation. If we don't do that, they will follow another Jesus, the one they see in today's carnal preachers. If we don't do that, they will follow another Jesus, the one they see in today's carnal preachers.

To humble ourselves under God's mighty hand means to accept joyfully all the circumstances that God sends into our lives. We allow those circumstances to humble us so that we become smaller and God becomes greater. When we become smaller in people's eyes, then they won't live in dependence on us, but on the Lord.

As a servant of the Lord, I'm more afraid of those who respect me highly than of those who criticize me. I find that some people respect me so much that they expect me to find God's will for them. I always answer no.

I tell them that it was only under the old covenant that people went to the prophets to find the will of God for them. Under the new covenant, every child of God including the youngest can go to God directly and know his will personally. In Hebrews 8.11, this is specifically mentioned as one of the privileges that we have under the new covenant.

Now we can all receive the Holy Spirit and he is our guide. So I tell my brothers that I can advise them, but I will never find the will of God for them. I've emphasized this from the very beginning of my ministry.

The result is that today people in our churches know the Lord themselves and do not lean on me. They are connected directly to Christ their head. Thus the body of Christ has been built in our midst through many years.

This is the first principle of building Christ's body. We must connect people to the head and make them independent of us as soon as possible. We need to humble ourselves and repent deeply of our failure in this area in the past.

We must long that Christ will increase in us and that we will decrease. God leads us through many circumstances in our life to reduce us so that Christ might increase in us. If we humble ourselves under those circumstances, then God's purpose will be fulfilled in us.

Humbling ourselves involves apologizing to all whom we've wronged. As servants of the Lord, we are to be servants of all people and must be willing to go under all of them to bless them. When we make mistakes, we must be quick to acknowledge them and to apologize where necessary.

The only one who never makes a mistake is God. I have told the Lord that I am willing to apologize to anyone under the sun, children, servants, beggars, or anyone, and that I would never stand on my dignity or prestige in this matter. And I've done that, and God has blessed me.

Don't ever stand on a false sense of prestige and dignity before your flock. If you've done something wrong, apologize to them and say that you were wrong and that you're sorry for what you did. Their esteem and respect for you will only grow thereby and not become any less.

Why should you pretend that you never make any mistakes? I heard of a college student once who asked his professor a very difficult question. The professor said he could answer that in three words, I don't know. The student's esteem for the professor shot up that day, not only because he saw the professor's humility, but also because he saw his integrity in not teaching anything that he did not know.

I've said it publicly to the people in my church that I'll be making mistakes until the end of my life because of one simple reason. I'm not God. As long as I live on this earth, I'm going to make mistakes.

Hopefully those mistakes won't be as foolish as the ones I made 10 or 20 years ago because I've learned some lessons from those earlier mistakes. I've acquired some wisdom from my blunders, but I'm still not perfect. Many of you here are married.

You know how easy it is for you to hurt your wives accidentally, even when you don't intend to. You may say something with a good intention, but your wife may misunderstand what you meant. It could be the other way around too, where you misunderstand something your wife said.

What must you do in such cases? Let me just say this. Peace can be restored much quicker in your home through an apology than through a labored explanation of your motives or through an analysis of whose fault it was. Suppose you find yourself in a situation where your colleagues misunderstand you.

It may be no use explaining matters to them because they may not be willing to listen. What should you do in such a case, especially when you're perfectly innocent? Should you feel sorry for yourself? Not at all. Just make sure your conscience is clear before God and men and leave the matter with him.

That's all you've got to do. That is the policy I follow for many years now, and I've been really blessed. I would recommend it to you too.

Anyone who serves the Lord is going to be the target of Satan's attacks. The more useful we are to God, the more we will be attacked by the enemy. We won't be able to avoid that.

Satan will attack us through slander, false accusations, and fabricated stories, and he will attack our wives and children too. Just think of the evil things that people said about Jesus in his lifetime and that they say about him even today. They called him a glutton and a drunkard, Luke 734.

A madman, Mark 321. Demon-possessed, John 848. And the ruler of demons, Matthew 1224.

And many such wicked names. They said he was a heretic, preaching doctrines contrary to what the Bible and Moses taught, John 929. That's how they drove people away from listening to the Lord.

But he never bothered to reply to such people. He never answered a single personal accusation. We shouldn't either.

Jesus answered only doctrinal questions. Today, people say even immoral things about our Lord, but God does not come down in judgment on them. They called Paul a deceiver and a false prophet who belonged to a sect that was evil, spoken of everywhere, Acts 24 14 28 22.

Thus they kept people away from listening to Paul too. It has been the same story throughout church history with every great man of God. With John Wesley, Charles Finney, William Booth, Watchman Nee, and with every other true prophet of God.

Henry Souza was a man of God who lived in Germany a few hundred years ago. He was a saintly man and a bachelor. He prayed often that the Lord would make him broken and humble like Jesus himself was.

This was how God answered his prayer. One day Souza heard a knock at his door. When he opened the door, he saw a strange woman standing there with a baby in her arms.

He had never seen her before. She was an evil woman who was wanting to get rid of her newborn baby and decided that the best man to dump it on was Henry Souza. So she told him in a voice loud enough for everyone in the street to hear, here is the fruit of your sin, and left the baby in Souza's arms and walked off.

Souza was stunned. His reputation in the town had been shattered in a moment. He took the baby inside, knelt down, and told the Lord, Lord, you know I'm innocent.

What must I do now? The Lord replied, do what I did, suffer for the sins of others. Souza accepted the word of the Lord and never justified himself before anyone. He brought up that child as his own.

He was content that God knew the truth and he was willing for everyone else to misunderstand him. Many years later, the woman was convicted of her sin and came back to Souza's house and proclaimed to all the neighbors that Souza was innocent and that she had told a lie. But what had happened in the intervening years? Henry Souza's prayer had been answered.

He had become broken and humble like his master. God had been able to accomplish a work of sanctification in Souza's life, freeing him from man's opinion so that God's opinion alone mattered to him thereafter. Are we willing to pay such a price in order to become like Jesus, or do we still seek the honor of men? God breaks us by allowing us to be misunderstood, misjudged, falsely accused, and publicly humiliated.

In all such circumstances, we must refuse to see the men who are harassing us. They may be our brothers or our enemies. It doesn't matter.

Behind the hand of every Judas Iscariot is our Heavenly Father giving us a cup to drink. If we see the Father's hand in such situations, we'll drink the cup joyfully, however bitter and painful it may be. But if we see only Judas, then we'll take out our sword as Peter did and cut off people's ears or their reputations or whatever.

When we are attacked or falsely accused, God wants us to humble ourselves under his mighty hand. It's easy to do that once we see that it is God's hand there and not man's. During the past years, I've heard believers say all sorts of evil things about me and my teachings.

They have also made false accusations against me and my family members and written articles and books against me. But the Lord has always told me never to reply to them, so I've kept quiet. As a result, the Lord has done a great work of sanctification both in me and in my family members.

God makes evil to work for our good. In the Lord's own time, I know he will clear away the clouds and make the sun to shine. But he is the one who determines that time, not I, as we read in Acts 1-7.

Until then, my task is to humble myself under his mighty hand. It is not my task to justify myself before anyone. Once I start doing that, I won't have time to do anything else.

As Paul said about Alexander the coppersmith, the Lord himself will repay our enemies one day according to their deeds. 2 Timothy 4.14 So we can safely leave such matters of vengeance in his hands. Romans 12.19 It is best to leave all matters with God.

He knows what he is doing, and he's got everything under his control. He's chiseling away at the rock to sculpture the likeness of Jesus in us. Some parts of the rock are very hard, and he has to use false accusations and persecution to chisel out those parts.

If we submit to his chiseling, we'll come forth in the end as Christ-like men with spiritual authority. When Judas betrayed Jesus, Jesus could call him friend because he saw his father's hand clearly. If we see the sovereignty of God in all our circumstances, it'll be easy to humble ourselves, and it'll be easy for God to exalt us at the proper time.

God knows the right time to lift a pressure from our shoulders and to give us his authority. So let's wait for him. No one who waits for him will ever be disappointed or put to shame.

Isaiah 49.23 To be exalted, as I said earlier, doesn't mean that God will promote us in this world. It won't make us head up big Christian organizations either. Personally, I'm not interested in being the head of any organization, leave alone a big one.

I just want to be a servant of the Lord and of people, doing exactly what the Lord tells me to do, and taking responsibility for those whom he commits to me, whether that be ten people or ten thousand. God decides that number, not I. And I'm certainly not interested in having a title or position in Christendom. I'm also not interested in exercising control over people or money or property.

I want to stick to proclaiming the word and serving others in this needy world. Let us follow in Jesus' footsteps. Let people say whatever evil they want to about us.

If we honor God, he will one day honor us. If we're serious about following the Lord, we will find that God takes us through many painful experiences, but his purpose in all of them will be to free us from the opinions of men and from the chains that tie us down to earth, so that we can mount up with wings like eagles. Isaiah 40 31.

God will order our circumstances to so humble us before men that we finally come to the place where we care only for his opinion. Then our spiritual authority will be really powerful. May it be so for all of us.

Chapter 14. The Priesthood of Melchizedek. A spiritual leader will be a priest according to the order of Melchizedek as his master was before him.

Hebrews 6 20 to 27 and 7. The priesthood of Melchizedek is very different from the priesthood of Levi. See Hebrews 7. The Levitical priesthood consisted of many rituals and external matters. The sons of Aaron were even told what type of underclothes to wear when they ministered before God.

Leviticus 6 10 16 4. But the priesthood of Melchizedek has nothing to do with clothes or rituals. Melchizedek appears in only three verses in the entire Bible, and yet our Lord is called a high priest after his name. Genesis 14 18 20.

What did Melchizedek do that was so wonderful? Abraham was returning from a battle where he had just defeated 14 kings and their armies and rescued his nephew Lot and his family whom those kings had captured. Abraham was undoubtedly exhausted and certainly proud of his victory, because he had won the battle with just his 318 servants, none of whom were soldiers. He had also acquired a large amount of booty, which it was customary in those days for the victors in battle to share among themselves.

No doubt his 318 servants were looking forward to becoming rich thereby. So Abraham stood there that day physically exhausted and facing the twin dangers of pride and covetousness. But he didn't have anyone to warn him about these dangers.

He had only his 318 servants. Abraham was no doubt a great man of God, but he was a lonely man too. He was as lonely as a lot of Christian leaders are today, who sit on top of organizational pyramids with only yes men under them and no one to correct them or challenge them.

Such men are easy targets for Satan who picks them off one by one. But God cared for Abraham and spoke to another servant of his to help him. Melchizedek met all three of Abraham's needs without knowing anything about those needs because he did what God told him to do.

First of all, he took some food for Abraham. Melchizedek was a sensible man. He wasn't one of those super spiritual types who feel that spiritual people must be ascetics.

He didn't tell Abraham to fast and pray, but gave him a good meal. Many years later, God did the same thing for Elijah when he was exhausted and depressed. God sent an angel to him, not with an exhortation, but with some nourishing food.

1 Kings 19 5-8. That's a good example for us to follow. To take a meal for some tired, exhausted brother or sister.

When a believer is depressed or discouraged, what he needs may be just some good food and not an exhortation. For he is not only spirit and soul, but body too. We mustn't forget that.

After giving him the food, Melchizedek helped Abraham spiritually too, not by preaching to him, but by praising God for Abraham's victory in two brief sentences. He said, blessed be Abram of God most high, possessor of heaven and earth, and blessed be God most high who has delivered your enemies into your hand. Genesis 14 19 and 20.

Melchizedek probably spent two hours feeding Abraham and his servants, and then spent 15 seconds praising God. But in Melchizedek's brief expression of praise, Abraham realized two things. First of all, Abraham realized that he belonged to a God who owned the heavens and the earth, that delivered him from coveting the goods of the king of Sodom that he had just recovered.

Even though Sodom's riches must have been considerable, since Sodom was a very wealthy place, Abraham now saw that all that booty was like worthless garbage compared to the heaven and earth that his God owned. Melchizedek helped Abraham to see clearly whom he belonged to. Notice Melchizedek's wisdom here.

He didn't preach to Abraham saying, the Lord has told me that you're getting covetous, and I've come with a word from him to warn you. No. Beware of self-appointed prophets who always claim to have a word from the Lord for you.

Such prophets are false prophets. Melchizedek just turned Abraham's attention away from the booty to God, and the things of the earth grew strangely dim in Abraham's eyes. That is the way to help people.

We can learn a lot from Melchizedek's gracious, indirect approach that delivered Abraham from a serious spiritual danger that he was facing. Secondly, Abraham saw clearly that it was not he and his 318 servants who had defeated those kings, but God. That was another revelation, and that saved Abraham from pride.

Again, Melchizedek succeeded in turning Abraham's attention away from his victory to God. The best preacher is the one who can turn our attention away from ourselves and our accomplishments to the Lord himself. Melchizedek stands in stark contrast to Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar, the three self-righteous preachers who preached to Job.

Those three were the ancestors of the Pharisees. Today, we have many descendants of the Pharisees in Christendom. What we need, however, are more Melchizedeks.

And now we come to the best part of this story. Melchizedek disappeared after blessing Abraham. We never read of him again in the Bible.

His name appears only as a type of Christ. Melchizedek must have been praying in his tent that morning when God spoke to him and told him what to do. He didn't know Abraham, but he knew God.

And that was enough. God told him what to do and made him a blessing to many. What a ministry we priests of Melchizedek's order are called to.

We are to bless people, physically and spiritually, and then disappear before we are even thanked. Do you want people to think you are a great man of God or do you want them to know that you have a great God? Therein lies the difference between a religious ministry and a spiritual one. Therein lies the difference between the priesthood of Aaron and the priesthood of Melchizedek.

Aaron constantly appeared before people and got honor from them. Melchizedek served people and disappeared. This is how Jesus himself ministered during his earthly days.

He went around meeting the spiritual and the physical needs of people who were beaten in life's battles. And he never wanted anyone to advertise his healings. He never wanted to be known as a healer.

He never wanted to be a king. He came to serve others and to lay down his life for them. He didn't want to be famous.

He didn't even want to prove to Herod or Pilate or Annas or Caiaphas that he was the Son of God by appearing to any of them after his resurrection. He never appeared to a single one of the Pharisees or Sadducees after his resurrection because he didn't want to justify himself before men. He knew that the opinions of men were fit only for the garbage bin.

Alas, where shall we find such preachers and leaders in Christendom today? Just think what would happen if we began to live like Melchizedek, listening to God and seeking to know from him what we should do each day. It would be the most useful way any of us could live on this earth. The psalmist says, goodness and mercy will follow me all the days of my life.

Psalms 23 6. That is the way to live. Wherever we go, we must leave behind us some act or word of forgiveness and goodness. When Peter described the life and ministry of Jesus to Cornelius, he summed it up in one sentence in Acts 10 38.

Jesus was anointed with the Holy Spirit and he went about doing good and delivering those who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him. This is the result of being genuinely anointed with the Holy Spirit. God will be with us and we will go around blessing people and setting them free.

You couldn't come in contact with Jesus in his earthly days without some good emanating from him to you that would bless you both spiritually and physically. The woman who had a hemorrhage for 12 years discovered that when she touched the hem of his garment. Aren't we too called to live such a life where those who come in touch with us are blessed physically and spiritually? We are all called to be priests according to the order of Melchizedek.

Chapter 15. An example. A spiritual leader will be such an example to others that he will be able to say to them, follow me as I follow Christ.

He will seek to lead others to be connected to Christ alone as their head. Many Christian leaders, however, seek to attach believers to themselves. And they are happy when those believers are more

attached to them than to other leaders.

Such leaders then become like little gods to their flock. They misuse the scriptural teaching on submission to elders for their own benefit. The Bible says that the Antichrist will one set in the temple of God and present himself to people as God.

2 Thessalonians 2.4 The church is the temple of God and the apostle John said that there were people with the spirit of the Antichrist in the churches even in his days. 1 John 2.18-19 There are many more like that today. Sin came into this universe when a created being wanted to go up and become bigger and more visible in the eyes of others and become like God.

That's how Lucifer became Satan. We should never forget that. If ever we see that spirit within ourselves, we should recognize it for what it is, the spirit of Satan.

Salvation, on the other hand, came when the Son of God humbled himself and became as invisible as possible. We shouldn't forget that either. Sin came through the pride of Lucifer and salvation came through the humility of Jesus.

When people see the way today's Christian leaders advertise themselves on public platforms and in their magazines, do you think they get a true picture of the self-effacing humble Jesus? Not at all. The examples that today's younger believers need to see are humble self-effacing men who seek to hide themselves and to be unknown, who don't want to be highly spoken of, and who do their work quietly and disappear. This is the ministry we should all covet.

Supposing you did a piece of work for the Lord and no one knew that you had done it. That should excite you. On top of that, if someone else got the credit for what you did, that should excite you even more.

If you're like that, you're truly a priest after the order of Melchizedek. I remember as a young Christian looking around at the Christian leaders and elders in the churches that I moved about in in those days. I'm sorry to say that I didn't see this spirit of Jesus in any of them.

I'm not judging them because I'm not their judge. I'm only saying that I couldn't respect them as godly examples for me to follow. We don't have to judge anyone, but we must be able to discern people.

Immediately after Jesus spoke about not judging others, he told his disciples to be careful to discern the pigs, the dogs, and the false prophets from others. Compare Matthew 7 1 with verses 6 and 15. If we don't have discernment, we'll certainly be led astray by the dogs and the false prophets.

See Philippians 3 2. So, I didn't judge my elders, but I didn't see them as worthy examples to follow because they didn't have the spirit of a servant like Jesus had. They were not people who wanted to wash at the feet of the saints. It was then that I decided that I would look at Jesus alone until I saw a Christian leader whose example also I could follow.

We have a very great responsibility to demonstrate to the next generation what Christ's likeness really means. People who look at us the way we live, preach, and serve should be able to see in us what it means to be a true servant of the Lord in the style of the apostles and prophets of old and not in the style of 20th century film star like evangelists. Whether we realize it or not, we're leaving behind us an image wherever we go.

An image that's going to remain in people's minds long after we've gone away and long after they have forgotten the messages that we preached to them. When Paul called the elders of the church in Ephesias to bid farewell to them, notice what he told them in Acts 20 17 to 35. He reminded them that he had been with them for three years, verse 31, and that he had preached to them night and day.

Three years is more than a thousand days. And so if Paul actually preached twice every day, as it seems to imply here, he must have preached over 2,000 sermons there. Ephesias was the place where they had once had a great revival and where Christians had burnt their old books of magic and witchcraft costing nearly half a million rupees.

It was also the place where handkerchiefs that had touched Paul's body were used to heal the sick and deliver the demon possessed. God did some amazing miracles through Paul in Ephesias on a scale that hadn't been seen anywhere else. See Acts 19 11 12 19.

At the end of all this, what does Paul remind the elders of? Does he remind them of his sermons or the miracles? No. He tells them to remember the humble way he had lived among them from the first day they had seen him, verse 19. Even if they forgot his sermons, they could never forget how he lived among them.

His life had made a permanent impact on them. They could never forget his compassion and his simplicity. They'd remember that he had worked hard with his own hands as a tent maker to support himself and his co-workers so that he would not be a burden to them and also to be an example to other Christian workers, verses 34 and 35.

They would never forget that during all those three years, Paul never desired money or gifts or even a new set of clothes from any of them, verse 33. Paul also reminded them how he had proclaimed the whole counsel of God to them uncompromisingly, Acts 20 27. He hadn't been a man pleaser seeking popularity for himself.

He had preached repentance and every other unpopular subject if it was profitable for his hearers, even if some got offended thereby, Acts 20 20 and 21. These are the things Paul pointed out to them. If you pastor a church for three years like Paul did at Ephesias and then leave, what will your flock remember you for? Will they remember you as an impressive preacher or as a humble man of God who showed them by your life what Jesus was like? Will they think of you as one who drew them closer to God and challenged them to be more Christ-like or as one who taught them how to distribute tracts? Whatever our gift or calling may be, it must flow from the inner spring of a Christ-like life.

One who has the gift of healing must exercise it the way Jesus exercised it. Jesus was a humble man who lived simply, mingled freely with all people, had great compassion for the sick, and didn't take any money from anyone either before or after healing them. He healed people freely.

But I have never met even one healer like that in my entire life. If you come across someone like that, please let me know because I'd love to meet him. But I haven't met such a man yet.

Instead, I've met a lot of money-loving preachers who pretend to have the gift of healing and who deceive people with psychological tricks. The sad thing in all this is that undiscerning young men follow these deceivers and begin to seek for such a ministry themselves. And thus the next generation is led astray too.

This is what saddens me. If we're called to an apostolic ministry or a prophetic ministry or an evangelistic ministry or a shepherding ministry or a teaching ministry, whatever ministry it be, we must exercise it in a Christ-like way. The Spirit of Christ must motivate us in every calling.

If you feel you're called of God to pastor a church, then do it the way Jesus would do it. And may the lasting impression you form on your flock be of a man who was radiant with the glory of Jesus. Let me finally share a word about our past failures.

We cannot change our past. That part of our lives is over. We have all failed and we can only repent of our failures, confess them, and ask the Lord to cleanse away our sins in his precious blood.

I have made many mistakes in my life, but I've also learned many lessons from my mistakes. So all those failures of mine were not useless to me. I've also learned many valuable lessons by studying the mistakes of others.

Thus, I can avoid committing those mistakes myself. We may be ashamed of many things that we did in the past, but once we have repented and made restitution where necessary, we can learn lessons from our past failures and put our past behind us forever. We must never allow Satan to take us on a guilt trip or a condemnation trip because of our past failures.

There is no condemnation for anyone who is in Christ. When God justifies us through Christ's blood, Romans 5:9, he looks at us thereafter as if we had never sinned in our entire lives. We too must then see ourselves as God sees us.

So don't let Satan or anyone else tell you that you're useless just because you failed in the past. You are a valuable vessel in God's hand because you have repented. You can live the rest of your life for the glory of God.

It is a tremendous privilege that we elders have to disciple young people because they have their whole lives ahead of them. Think of the tremendous potential there is in each of the young people in our churches. Remember that Satan is out to get them.

Before he gets them, we must get them for God and his kingdom. In the hearts of those young people, a struggle is going on. If the devil can't prevent them from being saved, he will want them at least to compromise.

But God has placed you over them as a shepherd to ensure that they become radical disciples of the Lord and not compromisers. So let me urge you to take your calling seriously. May the Lord help us all to fall on our faces in repentance and ask for his forgiveness for the dishonor we have brought on his name in the past by being such poor examples to the next generation of believers.

May he help us to become humble, godly leaders of his people in the days to come. Amen. He who has ears to hear, let him hear.

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