

Brokenness Through Failure

by Zac Poonen

God uses failure to humble us and prepare us for leadership and ministry, and it is through brokenness that we can become effective leaders and servants.

Duration: 1:14:44

Scripture: Acts 17:30

Topics: "Spiritual Maturity", "Faithfulness To God"

Description

This sermon emphasizes the qualities and characteristics of a true man or woman of God who is dedicated to serving Christ wholeheartedly. It highlights the importance of seeking God's will, being rooted in love and humility, and prioritizing God's glory above all else. The message encourages individuals to be uncompromising in their faith, to seek spiritual authority and dignity, and to be willing to stand alone for God if needed.

Transcript

I want to say a few words, this is now concluding session, about a lot of things when we hear, we feel guilty because we have failed so much in our life, all of us. There is such a thing called guilt trip preaching. It's very easy.

Young, immature Christians always indulge in it. You know, say something so impossible to attain and make everybody feel guilty and everybody goes home feeling convicted and guilty and this young preacher thinks he's a prophet who's rubbish. He's been an agent of the devil to put people on a guilt trip.

Don't ever let somebody put you on a guilt trip. Jesus never preached like that. The apostles never preached like that.

We must preach what we have done, what we have practiced, not, when I share with my fellow elders, I say guilt trip preaching is like a surgeon who's trying to remove a cancer from somebody. There is a cancer. So he wheels the patient into the theater, cuts the fellow's stomach open, exposes the cancer, and so he says, there it is, wheel him out.

That's what a lot of preachers do. Make a person feel all guilty, expose his sin, and say, okay, take him out. That's not the way you should go home.

I say that's not the way you should finish a sermon. You must expose the cancer definitely, take it out, and stitch it up, and then give him a painkiller, and speak some nice words to him. He goes home encouraged.

And it was all done in secret. You know, people never saw the cancer being taken out. And so that's how it must be.

So when we have failed in our life, what shall we do? God uses failure. That's what I've discovered. To humble us.

The example of the disciples who went fishing and caught nothing was to teach them you can't do anything without me. I believe one of the greatest lessons the Lord has to teach us in any area is without me you can do nothing. But with Christ you can do all things.

If you can learn these two lessons, these are very important lessons of Christian life. John 15, 5, without me you can do nothing. And the other side of the coin, Philippians 4, 13, with Christ I can do all things that he has commanded me to do.

So when we have failed in our life, we must see it as part of God's preparation for the ministry. Think of the apostle Peter. God wanted to use him to be the leader to build the first church that was ever built in Jerusalem.

And how did he prepare this leader to build that church? By allowing him to go through failure. You know, he was allowed to deny the Lord three times. And some of us may think denying the Lord is not such a serious sin.

But you remember that place where Jesus said, if you deny me before men, I will deny you before my father. He never said if you commit adultery, I'll deny you before my father. You can repent of that.

If you commit murder, I'll deny you before my father. No, he forgave adulterers, adulteresses, he forgave thieves on the cross. He only said, if you deny me before men, I will deny you before my father.

So that must be one of the most serious sins. And imagine he knew that Peter was going to be tempted in that area. Now what would you do if you know that your son or daughter is going to be tempted this evening in a particular area? Oh, you'd pray hard.

Lord, please protect my son, my daughter, that they don't fall. Do you know Jesus never prayed that Peter didn't fall. He warned him, it's going to happen.

It's going to happen tonight before tomorrow morning. Turn with me to Luke chapter 22. You learn something there about the wisdom of God, which is not like the wisdom of men.

Which always looks at the long-term good for us and not the short-term good. Our human wisdom always thinks of the short-term good. What is good for us right now? But the Lord says, like He told Peter when He was washing his feet, what I'm doing right now you won't understand.

You'll understand later on. That's how it is. The one mark of the difference between God's wisdom and our wisdom is we think of the short-term good, the Lord thinks of the long-term good.

And that's why He doesn't always do it the way we think He should do it. He doesn't always deliver us from some trials which He thinks He should deliver us from. Etc, etc.

He's always thinking of our long-term good and not the temporary comfort we can get out of being relieved out of some trial. So, the short-term good would have been for Peter to be protected that he didn't fall. It's very simple for God to do that.

We read that Peter went to the high priest's palace or house and he couldn't get in because the gatekeeper wouldn't let him in. But John knew the high priest so he got admission in. And you know, you read that in the Gospels, I don't have time to show it to you.

John came and spoke to the gatekeeper to let Peter in. Have you ever thought what would have happened if John had not done that? Peter would never have got into the courtyard. He'd never have met those people who asked him, do you belong to Jesus? He would not have denied the Lord three times.

On a small little thing like John speaking to the gatekeeper and letting Peter in, that's how he got tempted there. God could have stopped it. He could have prevented Peter from entering that courtyard.

He was stopped there. He could have just stopped John from knowing about it and going there and Peter would have stayed outside. He was tempted because he was in that courtyard.

God allowed it. See all the circumstances that led to God allowing him to fall. It says in Luke 22, Let's look at Luke 22.

Simon, Simon, verse 31. Satan has demanded permission to sift you like wheat. What is that? He's going to be denied three times.

Verse 34. I say to you Peter, this is the sifting. Before the cock crows today, you will deny me three times that you've even known me.

And verse 32. When I'm praying for you, not that you will not deny me. That's not what I'm praying.

I'm praying that after you've denied me, once, twice, thrice and you've hit rock bottom, that when you hit rock bottom there, your faith won't give up. And faith means at that point to say, Oh God doesn't love me anymore. I've failed.

I've finished. God's finished with me. I've committed the worst possible sin.

I've denied my Lord three times. After all his goodness to me, I can't be an apostle anymore. He says, I'm praying that when you hit rock bottom, you'll remember that your father in heaven still loves you.

That's what I want to say to anyone who has failed and messed up and feel there's no hope for me. I've done so many wrong things and some of those things I cannot even rectify now. It's a pretty miserable state I put myself in because I was careless a few years ago or something that I did which cannot be rectified now.

It's okay. God says, I'm praying that your faith will not fail. I'm praying that you'll still believe that God loves you despite where you are today.

So the church must be a place where people have hope. What type of church is Christ looking for? Not a church full of perfect people who never made mistakes in their life. You won't find such a church.

That would be a bunch of hypocrites. But a church where the people have made a mess of their life can have hope. Like it says in Acts 17.30, God ignores your times of ignorance.

Now commands you to repent and come back to him. So that's what the type of church we want to build where people have made a mess of their life can come and have hope. And who can know when they've hit rock bottom and the father still loves them.

Like the story of the prodigal son. He'll come running to meet you when you come back. He'll wait for you to come back.

He'll wait for you to really repent. And then he'll welcome you. So that's what Peter needed to know and that was his preparation for leadership.

Because imagine if he had not gone through that and here was this great strong man who was always boldly saying even if everybody denies you, I won't deny you. So self-confident, proud in his ability, etc. And known to be the leader.

And then he gets up on the day of Pentecost and preaches for 15 minutes. And 3,000 Jews, remember Jews, get converted. And are baptized in water.

Baptized in the Holy Spirit the same day. Can you imagine what would happen to you if you preached a 15-minute sermon somewhere and 3,000 hard-hearted Jews got converted and got baptized and baptized in the Holy Spirit. I don't think your head would be the same size after that.

No. It would be difficult for any of us to bear. It would have been difficult for Peter to bear.

You know, when you read these things in the Bible, put yourself in that person's place and say, How would I feel if I was the preacher on the day of Pentecost? And if people came up to Peter and slapped him on the back and say, one of the apostles say, Andrew, or somebody say, Hey, Peter, that's fantastic, man. Think what you accomplished. You know what he just said? You know what I did six weeks ago? I denied my Lord three times.

He never forgot that till the end of his life. He never forgot that he was one who had sunk so low. And that memory kept him humble.

So that failure was necessary for him to be prepared for Pentecost. So that he would not despise others. He would not get puffed up.

So think of the failures you've gone through in your life as a preparation for something God has for you, provided those failures have produced the right result in you. If the failure can make you a hypocrite, that's the other danger. But you pretend that you've never failed.

There are people like that. There are many Christian leaders who talk as if they've never made a mistake in their life, who never failed. I decided long ago that when God anointed me with the Holy Spirit and began to lift me up from the rock bottom that I had hit nearly 40 years ago, I decided that I would be bold to tell people that I had backslidden as a preacher.

God lifted me up. I'm not ashamed to say it. I'm ashamed of my failures and my hypocrisy, but I want to give hope to people.

Yeah. Don't pretend that you had a perfect marriage from day one when you know it's not true. I'm not asking you to confess your sins to people, but don't bluff people.

Don't pretend. That's the sin of Ananias and Sapphira. And a lot of people like Ananias and Sapphira sitting in churches today who pretend, act as if they never made a mistake.

They just confess all these wonderful things up there and they don't give hope to people who have messed up their life. We want the church, Christ wants to, is looking for a church where people give hope to those whose lives are messed up. Because most people in the world have messed up their lives.

There are very few people who from childhood who were brought up in a very good way with God-fearing parents. And some of these people who are brought up in that good way I find are some of the biggest Pharisees on earth today. Because, you know, they were protected from the gross sins that worldly people fell into.

And so they always look down on anybody who's got any mistake in their life or failed in some way. Are you like that? I doubt whether God will ever use you to build this church. Not in a hundred years.

Not because you're not good enough. But because you're too proud. And you're a hypocrite.

You're acting as though you never made any mistakes in your life. You're covering up things. As I said, we don't confess our sins in public.

But we must be honest to acknowledge that we've slipped up and messed up our lives without giving any details. You remember that psalm which we sing Remember not the sins of my youth. It's one of the psalms that David, remember not the sins of my youth.

Well, you know, we always thought that David was such a pure boy. When the Lord found him and he anointed him and he killed Goliath and he lived a wonderful life, he wrote psalms. But he says in the psalm, Lord, remember not the sins of my youth.

And I say, wow, David had sins in his youth? I thought he sinned only later on when he was 52 years old with Bathsheba. But he had sins in his youth. Are you curious to know what those sins were? The Holy Spirit says, no, I won't tell you.

I did not inspire David to make a list of those sins. Just the sins of my youth. You know, to quench the curiosity of people.

We are sometimes curious because we got a little bit of the devil inside us. Whenever you are curious about things about other people's private lives, you know you got a little bit of the devil inside you there. Get rid of it.

Don't be curious about other people's private lives. When Paul says, God was merciful to me, the chief of sinners, to show that Christ Jesus came into the world, not for righteous, but for sinful people. He's honest.

He doesn't give all the details about how many people he imprisoned or killed or whatever else he did. I don't know. I don't want to know.

I'm not curious. But I know his life was not perfect. He messed up quite a bit in the first 30 years of his life.

And he's very honest about it in a general way. That's important because that's how we gave hope to people. I'm not saying that you should artificially say something that's not true.

Speak what's true. I mean, if you happen to have the good fortune of having grown up in a very godly home and you never made any mistake and come, fine. I hope God will humble you in some other way then.

Whichever way. I mean, God has different ways of humbling us, but he can't give us grace if he can't humble us. In Peter's case, he had to be humbled through failure and brought down to zero, to the rock bottom.

And then, you know, it says in John 21 that Peter says in verse 3, I am going fishing. Now, you've got to understand that. What he's saying is, I want to expand on his words.

I'm a failure as an apostle. I tried it for three and a half years. I'm not qualified for that.

I made the biggest failure any human being could do. The one who loved me so much and did everything for me, I denied him. I denied that I even knew him.

And I swore that I did not know him. No, I can't be an apostle. The last person on earth whom God would choose to be an apostle is someone who swore that he didn't know Jesus.

So, there's one thing I can do. I've been good at fishing all my life. I'll go back to fishing.

It's as if the Lord says, OK, try. See if you can fish like you did once. You can't.

Once you're called to be an apostle, Peter, you can't go back to fishing. Sorry. And he goes and the Lord allows him to fail and fail and fail and fail and fail.

And then he comes and encourages him by filling his whole boat with fish. He caught a catch that he's never caught before. And all of a sudden, he sees these huge fish, 153 fish there that he had caught.

And he looks at it and says, wow. And he's calculating in his mind how much all these, maybe a ton of fish that he's caught, how much money he can make. Imagine, I can't be an apostle, but I can give my tithes to God and catch fish like this every day.

It'll be great. And that's when the Lord comes to him and says, Peter, Simon, do you love me more than these fish? Do you love me more than all the money you can make by being a Christian businessman and giving your tithes for my work? Do you really love me more than anything else? This is not the old Peter. And it doesn't come out very clearly in the English because Peter says, Lord, I love you.

Because in the Greek, there are two different words he uses. Let me translate it. Simon, son of Jonas, verse 15.

Do you love me with that supreme love which a man should have for God where God means more to him than anything on this earth or anyone on this earth? And Peter uses a lower word. Lord, I love you as my friend. Again, the Lord says, Do you love me with that supreme love with which a man should love God where he means everything, God means everything more than anything else on this earth, your job, your fishing, your wife, family, everything.

Peter says, Lord, I love you as a friend. He's honest. He's not the old Peter who says, Yes, if everybody else doesn't love you, I love you.

He's not the old Peter. He's broken already. He'll never say that again.

Because he's learned something about himself. It's a great lesson to learn. What does Jesus look for in a church? Such people.

And the wonderful thing, the graciousness of the Lord, the third time, Jesus comes down to his level. Okay, Simon, son of Jonas. Do you love me as a friend? We'll start at that level.

See the humility of Jesus. You know, he'll accept you where you are. You come as a prodigal son to him.

He doesn't ask you to go and have a shower first before he embraces you. The Father embraces that dirty son just as he is. Come just as you are.

Like that little chorus we sing. Jesus, take me as I am. I can come no other way.

Take me as I am. I can come no other way. And he takes us.

He embraces us with all the filth, with the smell of the pigs on our clothing. The Father is not hesitant to embrace his son. He doesn't wait for him to take a shower.

And he says, feed my lambs, shepherd my sheep, tend my sheep, take care of my lambs, take care of my sheep. Peter, you're not to be a fisherman. But Lord, I failed.

It doesn't matter. That was part of your education. Your failure was part of your education.

You were not broken before. Now you are. Satan tried to sift you.

But all he succeeded was getting rid of the chaff from your life. The wheat remains. Now you're going to be an apostle.

You're going to be the leader. You're going to shepherd my sheep. You're going to take care of my lambs.

You'll have a tenderness with the lambs now. Which you would not have had before. You would have been a hard person.

If the lambs slipped up somewhere, you would have judged them severely. There's a Jewish tradition. It's not a true story.

You know, they like to say good things about their leaders. Moses. There's a Jewish tradition about Moses that when Moses was shepherding the sheep of Jethro, his father-in-law, in the days before God called him, he was taking care of the sheep and one little lamb ran away from his flock.

He didn't notice it. Went towards a stream nearby to drink water. And as soon as Moses saw it, he ran and picked up that lamb and said, Oh, if I knew that you wanted water, I would have taken you to the stream myself.

And a voice from heaven said, You are fit to lead Israel. The one who can take care of the lambs when they are thirsty. Many years ago, when the Lord called me for His service, it was from Isaiah 49.

I was sitting in a railway station in 1964. Ready to serve the Lord full time if He called me, but would not leave until the Lord called me. I was a naval officer with my ambition to become the admiral.

But I said, Lord, if you call me, I'll go. And as I was sitting in that railway station platform waiting for my train to Bangalore, of all places, in 1964, the Lord, this is my daily portion. I used to go through chapter by chapter and that day it was Isaiah 49.

And I read it and I saw the Lord called me from my mother's womb and has made my mouth, verse 2, like a sharp sword. It was as if the Lord told me that He was calling me to serve Him. This was the call.

And then, this verse, this is how you are going to be a leader. Verse 10, the middle of verse 10. He who has compassion on the people will be able to lead them.

Only one who has compassion on people is fit to lead them. And that comes through brokenness and that is how Peter was prepared. And I want to say to all of you, my dear brothers and sisters, it doesn't matter if you have failed.

If you are going to be wholehearted today and you decide before God, Lord, I'm willing to pay the price. You know why Moses had to be broken? At the age of 40, he thought he was pretty smart. We read about, not in Exodus, but we read in Acts chapter 7 that how Moses was at the age of 40.

I want to read this verse to you. Stephen talks about him. Acts 7, 22.

Moses was educated in all the learning of the Egyptians. Remember, Egypt was the one superpower in the world today. It was like studying in Harvard University for Moses, the son of the Pharaoh, as they thought.

Studying in the top academies and military academies and studying in Harvard and West Point all together. In the one superpower on earth, the latest technologies. Those are the days people built pyramids which today's engineers are wondering how in the world they built it even today.

Moses studied that. He was educated in all the learning of the Egyptians. Acts 7, 22.

And he was a man of power in words. He was an eloquent speaker. And he was mighty in deeds.

Capable man. And you know the story how when he saw one of the Israelites being treated unjustly. Verse 24.

He smote the Egyptian and killed him. Listen to this. Verse 25.

He thought that his brothers the Israelites would recognize I am the man, brothers and sisters, whom God has called to be your leader to deliver you from Egypt. I've got influence. I've got eloquence.

I'm strong. See how I could kill one man with one blow? I've got all the qualifications to be your leader. Verse 25.

But they did not understand. He had to run for his life to 40 years in the wilderness where God had to break the strength of this man who felt he was so capable because he was so educated and intelligent and capable. And God took him to another academy.

He was living with his father-in-law for 40 years. I mean to live with your father-in-law for one year is enough to break anyone. But 40 years.

And on top of that to be employed by your father-in-law. Imagine that. The great prince of Egypt.

Living in one tent and given by his father-in-law employed by him, paid by the father-in-law. And at the end of 40 years. I don't have time to show you all that in Exodus.

God says, Okay, now you're ready. He says, No Lord. Please send somebody else.

I'm not the man. And you know what he says? I've never been eloquent. Really Moses? Have you forgotten what you were 40 years ago? Completely forgotten.

I can't speak. God had done his work. In breaking that man.

And he wasn't acting humble, you know, like some people when you ask them to be an elder, they say, Oh no, no, no, no. Please ask somebody else. All humbug.

The guy wants to be an elder in his heart but he's pretending that he doesn't want to be. It wasn't that type of hypocrisy. He was really felt.

I'm not the man. That's why when the Lord presses him, he says, No Lord. No Lord.

Not me. Not me. Not me.

God got angry with him. And says, Okay, let Aaron speak for you. If you say you can't speak.

But that wasn't God's first choice. Anyway, you could see that the man was thoroughly broken. And then he goes out and leads Israel.

When he was 40, he could kill one Egyptian. When he was 80, he lifted up his rod and the whole Egyptian army was buried under the Red Sea. That's the power of a broken man.

An unbroken man, there's a lot of difference. Through many years of Christian service, what I've learned in 50 years of Christian service, as you saw on the screen, one of the main things is God can never use an unbroken man. And most Christian leaders I have met in my life are not broken people.

They are gifted. But you can be gifted and go to hell. You can stand before Jesus.

And I did this. I did this. I preached sermons.

I cast out demons. And God says, I never knew you'd get away from me. Go to hell.

It's lack of brokenness. Jesus was a broken person. He was, God allowed him to be despised and rejected by men from childhood.

He was considered to be an illegitimate child. Can you imagine how you feel when you're going to school? In a village like Nazareth, everybody knew how Mary got pregnant. Yeah.

Some Roman soldier raped her or she gave herself to a Roman soldier and got a kid and says that God gave her a kid. Who's going to believe that? And as Jesus walks to school with the other boys, the old people say, you see that boy there? That's Jesus. We don't know who his father is.

That's the stigma with which he lived from childhood. Imagine if your child had to live like that and had to grow up always being pointed out. That's the child whose father nobody knows.

He's illegitimate, illegitimate, illegitimate. God the Father allowed him to go through that because he had to be the savior of a lot of illegitimate children. He identified himself so thoroughly with the human race.

You look at his genealogy in Matthew chapter 1. Have you noticed it? There are only 3 women mentioned there. Sorry, 4 women. Who are these 4 women? In a list of men, why are 4 women's names mentioned in Matthew 1? Number 1, Matthew 1.3 Tamar.

Sorry, the woman's name is Zerah. The child's name is Tamar. Sorry, I got it wrong.

Tamar is the woman. To Judah was born Perez. Perez, that's the son.

You know who Tamar was? Judah's daughter-in-law. Her husband had died and the father-in-law committed incest with Tamar and got a child. And the child's name was Perez.

Incest. And from heaven, Jesus was in heaven then and says, that's the line I'm going to choose. See, you and I didn't have a choice about our ancestry.

One man was born on this earth who had a choice of his ancestry, Jesus Christ. He sees that incest and says, I'm going to come through that line because I'm going to be the savior of a lot of people who were born of incest. You go down the line, you come to Salmon was born Boaz by Rahab, verse 5. Rahab, that's the second woman mentioned there.

You know who Rahab was? Everybody in Jericho knew the well-known town prostitute. Not even a Jew. One of the Canaanites.

And a prostitute. She marries one of the Jewish people called Salmon. And Jesus says, ah, that line.

Because I'm going to be the savior of prostitutes. And there's going to be the savior of non-Jews who are despised by others. Well-known prostitutes.

How many of you would boast about a well-known prostitute that was one of your ancestors? Would you make a in your biography, would you list that in the very first page? Then the third woman mentioned here is in the verse 5 again. Ruth. Do you know who Ruth was? A Moabite.

Do you know who Moab was? Born out of lot committing incest with his own daughters. You read that in Genesis 19. Moab.

And the Moabites. From there comes Ruth. And then the fourth one.

Her name is not even mentioned. Verse 6, the last part. To David was born Solomon by him who had been the wife of Uriah Bathsheba.

David commits adultery with somebody's wife. Murders the husband. And the first child dies.

The next one is Solomon. God says, Jesus says, okay. So that was not the physical genealogy of Jesus.

The physical genealogy of Jesus up to the first three women. But this was the one through whom Joseph came. So my point is this.

You see Christ's complete identification with the sinful human race. And we try to avoid any association thinking we are such pure people. A lot of, I've seen people who glory in the purity of their ancestry and race.

We have a lot of it in India. Glory in the family they come from. I'm from such and such a pure family.

Particularly the part of India where I come from. And they ask me which family I came from. I say, I came from the family that was kicked out of Eden for sin.

But Jesus came for us. That's how I got saved. You glory in something which is something human which has got no value before God.

I tell you the only thing valuable brother and sister in your life is how much you have become like Christ. That's all. All the rest is things that you glory in are earthly.

Your education, your family. Let God break you. If you really want to be used by God, you have to be broken.

That's God's way. And if you love him, remember that when the Lord after Peter had failed, he asked him only one question. Do you love me? That's the most important condition for serving the Lord and building his church.

Do you love Jesus? Do you love him more than everything else on earth? And everything and every person on earth? I'm thankful that I understood this when I was 20 years old. When I got my first Bible. When I bought my first Bible.

On the front page inside opposite the cover I drew a little heart. And I wrote in it Lord Jesus Christ and Zach Poonen. And underneath I wrote Psalm 73:25 Lord whom am I in heaven but thee.

And I desire no one and nothing on earth but thee. And I have tried to stick to that all these years. Through failure and defeat and rock bottom experiences everything Lord.

It's true I failed but I still want only you. And it's from there that the Lord picked me up and I say even today 55 years after I was converted I say Lord I only want you. You're first in my life.

My wife is second. But you're first. You'll always be first.

No one will ever take that place in my heart. And if you can that's all that the Lord expected from Peter. That's all he expects from you.

Do you love me? You get a right answer to that I appoint you to feed my sheep. To build my church. You don't love me all your Bible knowledge is useless.

Even your self denial and your care for others is useless if you don't love me. Dear brothers and sisters preserve one thing in your life. A fervent love for Jesus Christ.

Turn with me to 2nd Corinthians in chapter 11. 2nd Corinthians 11 and verse 3. Verse 2 first. Paul says I'm jealous over you with a godly jealousy.

There's a godly jealousy where you want to preserve people in purity. Paul had that tremendous burden to preserve the Corinthians in purity for Christ. And he says I betrothed you to a husband and I want to

present you one day as a pure virgin to Christ but I'm afraid listen to this verse I'm afraid like the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness your mind should be led astray from that simple pure devotion to Christ.

That's how it is in the NASB. From simple pure devotion to Christ. Now meditate on that.

Don't read through scripture fast. Tragedy today is people read verses too quickly and go on to the next verse. Many times when I read scripture I found a red light.

I can't move. Stop. Off an hour.

Red light is still there. I can't move from that verse. Ok.

I finish my Bible reading for the day. I open the Bible next day. Red light is still there.

The same verse. The Lord wants me to stick to that verse until it has sunk into my heart. I don't want to go through the Bible 50 times.

I want the Bible to go through me once. That's enough. There's a lot of difference.

Me going through the Bible 50 times is all going to be in the head. The Bible go through me once it will fill my heart. What do you want? You want to be known as one who knows the Bible? Bible knowledge? So he says here I'm afraid like the devil deceived Eve.

Now think about when you read a verse like that you must stop and think how did the devil deceive Eve? Here was the option she had. Tree of life tree of knowledge and the devil said don't go to the tree of life go to the tree of knowledge. And she took that.

What is the tree of life? Here it says simple pure devotion to Christ. She was led astray from that. So what is the tree of life for me today? Simple pure devotion to Christ.

And instead of that the devil could lead me astray to Bible knowledge. To share clever thoughts from the Bible when I get up to share. It's a big temptation for young people when they are asked to share in the church.

We do that in our church. I encourage them. I say don't get discouraged.

But I want to tell you this. The devil will always try to lead you astray from simple devotion to Christ to knowledge. You read the Bible and you get a bright idea.

You say wow! I can share that in the meeting. It doesn't help you one bit. It's not revelation.

It's just a bright idea. How do you differentiate between revelation of the Holy Spirit and a bright idea? If it has changed your life it's revelation. If it is just something clever you can share in the meeting.

It's just a bright idea. That's the tree of knowledge. It doesn't lead people to devotion to Christ.

You share that in the meeting and people say wow! How did he get that bright idea from scripture? And you encourage a lot of other people to get bright ideas from scripture. And the church remains carnal hypocritical. Brother, you know when Paul wrote to the Ephesians he didn't say I hope you get bright ideas from the book of Letter to Ephesians.

He said I pray that the eyes of your heart will be enlightened. That you'll get the spirit of revelation. Pray for that.

He didn't say read through this episode ten times and try and get some thoughts from it. No! Pray for the spirit of revelation which will always lead you to devotion to Christ. If you got something from scripture, if it is from God it will lead you to devotion to Christ.

That's the tree of life. Anything else is knowledge. And it brought death to Adam and Eve and it will bring death to you and it will bring death to everybody you share it with.

Let the scripture lead you to devotion to Christ. That's what I get from this verse. What the tree of life is.

I never understood what the tree of life was till I read that verse and connected it. What this devil took Eve away from. See John chapter 5. So that's been my passion since I understood that.

When I read the Bible or think about it I say Lord everything in the Bible must lead me to devotion to Christ. Love is thou me. Do you love me? Do you love me? That's the question he's asking.

Not do you understand can you explain the scriptures. Do you love me? Then I'll give you the right words. I'll give you the right understanding.

And it won't be for your honor that you get an honor as a Bible teacher. You will build a church and the glory will all be Christ's not yours. John chapter 5 look what Jesus told the Pharisees you search the scriptures and ask yourself whether the Lord says that to you also.

Because you think eternal life is there. You think the words are there. But these scriptures bear witness about me.

And when you read the scriptures instead of coming to me through the scriptures you don't come to me. You go to the scriptures. If you had come to me you would have got life.

But you don't come to me. You come to get glory from men. Verse 41 but I don't receive glory from men.

You go to the scriptures to get knowledge to get glory from men. I don't receive glory from men. The scriptures testify of me.

And if you really are reading the scriptures properly it will bring you to me it says in verse 40. But you don't want to come to me. You just want some nice thought to share in the meeting.

What's Christ looking for when you read the Bible? That you will come to him. I want to share something with you that I wrote in 1986. It's a little I personally feel it's the finest article that God ever enabled me to write in my whole life up to today.

And I wrote that 28 years ago. It's called God Needs Men. I was in a hospital.

I was I had a little problem for which God could have healed me but he didn't and I had to be admitted in a hospital for a very minor operation. And I lay there in bed and I said Lord why didn't you heal me? Why waste my time? I want to do something for you. Why don't you let me heal me? And the Lord said I could have healed you but you're running around so much that I hardly get time to talk to you.

So I want to make you lie down in bed and I want to talk to you. And I lay down there in bed for 10 days. I said okay Lord talk to me.

And that's what he began to say to me and I wrote it down. It's the closest that I've ever experienced in my life to dictation. A little bit I understood how the prophets and the people wrote the scriptures.

The other articles I mean are just like mostly sermons that I preach that are converted into articles and other books but this was different. I lay there in bed and God spoke to me day by day and as he spoke in 10 days I wrote down these 50 things that God said to me primarily for myself. This is the type of man I want and it includes men and women.

It's generic when it says men. God needs men. Men who will stand before his face and hear his voice daily.

Man shall not live by bread alone but by every voice, every word that comes from God daily. The habit of listening daily even if you don't have a bible, if you're in prison, stand before his face and hear his voice daily. Secondly, men who have no desire in their heart for anyone or anything other than God himself.

Not a house, not a car, not even health. If you're unmarried, not even marriage if it's not God's will. If it is God's will I accept it.

Third, men who fear him so greatly that they hate sin and that hatred will increase in time. In every form and who love righteousness and truth in every way. Money matters and everything to be totally righteous.

Men who have overcome anger and sexually sinful thoughts with a baffle may not come overnight but are determined to get to the end and would rather die than sin even in thought or attitude. And then number five, men whose daily lifestyle is one of taking up the cross. That means today I have to say no to myself from morning till night.

I put myself to death daily lifestyle and pressing on to perfection to become more like Jesus and who are constantly working out their own salvation with fear and trembling. Lord whatever you work in me I have to work it out today. Then next men full of the Holy Spirit who surrendered everything to God and opened their lives and asked God to fill them who are so rooted and grounded in love.

The Holy Spirit roots us and grounds us in love. Like a tree that cannot be uprooted. Like a building that cannot be shaken.

That's why nothing can move them into an unloving attitude towards another human being however great the provocation by the power of the Holy Spirit. Men who are so rooted and grounded in humility because they look at Jesus so that neither human praise nor spiritual growth nor a divinely endorsed ministry nor anything else will be able to make them lose the awareness of their being less than the least of all the saints. That's how Paul felt.

Men who have an understanding of God's nature and purpose number 8 through His word and who tremble at that word so that they will not disobey even the smallest commandment or neglect to teach it to others. A lot of people say, oh that's a small commandment. Well, God is not looking for such men, I'll tell you that.

Or explain it away and say, oh that's only for those people who lived then not for us today. If you say that once in your life you got to allow these other people who give up marriage and start living together and say your Bible about marriage and all is for then not for today. Once you take that stand about something in scripture saying that was for the first century or people who lived in Corinth or somewhere else, not for today.

You have to give people the freedom to say marriage, that was for those days, not today. Today we can live together. For those days it was man and woman.

Today it's alright if it's man and man. Who opened the door for them? You! Because you said some other part of scripture was only for that time. Something written in the New Testament was for that time.

How can you object to that person saying something else is for that time? Men who tremble at His word and will not disobey even the smallest commandment or neglect to teach it to others. Men who will proclaim the whole counsel of God expose religious harlotry and unscriptural human traditions. There are plenty of them in Christendom today.

Men who have the revelation of the Holy Spirit on the secret of godliness, 1 Timothy 3.16 that Christ came in the flesh, that means He was tempted like us and opened a new and living way, overcame temptation through the flesh. Hebrews 10.20 Men who are diligent and hardworking you can't, the Lord told Adam by the sweat of your brow you earn your bread and that's how we are to work hard even as Christians. There's no place for laziness in the church.

God doesn't want lazy people in the church. I told the Lord, Lord I'm nearly 75 now if I live up to a hundred, you give me grace and strength I'll be just as hardworking, travel just as much to build your church. That's the only thing I want to live for on this earth.

Men who are hardworking diligent, who have a sense of humor, that's very important by the way, very very important. You remember how people think Jesus didn't have a sense of humor. He came to the, in John 21 to the shore and He knew these fellows haven't caught any fish and He says, hey boys, have you caught any fish? You don't see a sense of humor there? He knows the answer.

A sense of humor is the test whether you have a good relationship with another person. You know, you can pray with your wife, you can study the Bible with your wife and have sex with your wife, but if you can't joke with your wife something is wrong in that relationship. And with a brother, if you can pray with him and study the Bible with him, work with him, but you can't joke with him it's a test of a good relationship.

I've seen that through 55 years. And you can test it out and see it's true. So, men who have a sense of humor and who know how to relax and play with children.

If you can't play with children, you're not like Jesus Christ. Let me tell you that. If you only talk to adults, you're a Pharisee.

If you can learn to play with children and enjoy God's goods, gifts, and nature, you can enjoy an ice cream without pretending to be spiritual and saying, no, no, no, I don't eat all that. Or, you know, clean enjoyment, clean entertainment. There's nothing wrong in that.

Men who are not ascetics, that means who don't sort of have artificial rules like hermits, but at the same time live a disciplined life and who are not afraid of hardships. Men who have no interest in expensive

clothing because it's a waste of money or sightseeing if there are more important things to do and who will not waste their time in unprofitable activities or their money in unnecessary purchases. These are all for tourists who've got plenty of money to waste.

I remember once I was in Australia in one of those cities there and I was there just a couple of days and they said, Brother Zach, there's a tourist attraction here called the Three Rocks, which are called Three Sisters. Would you like to go and see it? I said, I'd rather spend my time with three brothers and talk to them. Talk to them during that time.

I said, why don't I go and see rocks? I've seen enough rocks in my life and buildings and all that. Let me spend my time with some brothers. I'm here only for three days and I don't know when I'll come again.

Life is not, we can enjoy ourselves but if there's something better you can do, all things are lawful, it's perfectly lawful to go sightseeing but in some situations something else may be more profitable. And the godly man is the one who chooses the profitable above the lawful. So men who have mastered their desire for fancy foods and who are not enslaved to music, there's nothing wrong in music, nothing wrong in watching sport, but who are not enslaved to it or any other legitimate activity.

I've got nothing against a person watching a football game or baseball or anything, but if you're enslaved to it and if your mind is always on that who won today you may not be able to hear what god is trying to say to you or any other legitimate activity. Men who have been disciplined successfully by god in the fires of affliction, abuse, tribulations, false accusation, physical sickness, financial hardships, opposition from relatives and from religious leaders. You got some of that? You're on the right track.

Men full of mercy, who can sympathize with the worst of sinners and the worst of believers and have hope for them because they consider themselves to be the chiefest of all sinners, whom Jesus saved. Men who are so deeply rooted in the security of the love of their heavenly father, number 17, that they are never anxious about anything because they got a father in heaven who cares. They're not afraid of Satan or evil men or difficult situations or anything.

For that you have to be rooted in your father's love. Men who have entered into god's rest, believing in the sovereign working of god in all matters for their best. Romans 8.28. And who therefore give thanks always for all the men who did harm to them.

Many people have done harm to me but they didn't succeed in harming me. It all worked for my good. They made me a better Christian.

For all things and in all circumstances. If you believe in Romans 8.28, that's easy. Men who find their joy in god alone.

In his presence there is fullness of joy. Every other joy is lesser and temporary. Who find their joy in god and who are therefore full of the joy of the lord having overcome all bad moods.

When I was a young Christian I saw that, not young Christian, when I began to come into this life of victory after I was 36 I began to see that Jesus never had a bad mood. I said lord I want that life. If it takes me 10 years to get there, I'm going to get there.

You know some things you won't get overnight but determined to get there. Say lord Jesus never had a bad mood. If it takes me 20 years to get there, I'm going to get there.

The place where I'm never have bad mood. Morning, noon or night. Men of living faith who have no confidence in themselves or their natural abilities but complete confidence that god is their unfailing helper in all situations.

Men who live not by the promptings of their reason but by the leading of the holy spirit. Who have learned to listen to the voice of the spirit. Men who have been genuinely baptized in the holy spirit and fire by Christ himself.

Not thrilled by some emotional counterfeit that they got in some Pentecostal meeting or convinced by some theological argument that they got from the Plymouth brethren. But who really experienced the baptism in the holy spirit and fire and who are sure god has met with them. Men who live constantly under this anointing of the spirit endowed with the supernatural gifts that god has given them and that may not be healing.

There are many gifts mentioned in 1 Corinthians 12 and one of the gifts is helps. In Romans 12 it speaks of the gift of generosity to give money to people for god's work. Not many people seek for that gift but that is one of the gifts.

There are many, many supernatural gifts. Men who have revelation of the church as the body of Christ and not a congregation or a denomination or a preaching center. But who give all their energies, their material wealth and spiritual gifts to build that church just like Noah gave himself to build the ark.

Men who have learned to control and bridle their tongues through the help of the holy spirit and whose tongues are now aflame with the divine word. Men who have forsaken all who are not attracted anymore to money or material things and who desire no gifts from others. What do I mean by forsaken all? Jesus said we got to forsake all our possessions.

Possessions are things that possess you. Supposing these are all your earthly possessions. Possession is holding it like this.

I won't let anybody have it. This is mine. Having it is like this.

The house is still in your name. The car is still in your name. All that money is still in your bank account but you're not holding it like this anymore.

It's in the open palm. Lord it's in my name but it's yours. I have forsaken my possessions but I still have them.

It's like Abraham possessed Isaac for so long. God said to kill him. He opened his palm.

He still had Isaac at the end of it all in his house but he didn't possess him anymore. That's the meaning of forsaking your possessions. So that's the other thing.

Men who have forsaken their possessions and no more attracted to money or material things who desire no gifts from others. You know initially you are attracted to money. You battle it, battle it, battle it, battle it, battle it till time comes.

It doesn't attract you anymore. You use it. Money is under your feet as your servant not a master.

Money is a wonderful servant. If you have plenty of money it's like having 25 servants. Good.

But don't let any of them become your master. Fire is a good servant. Keep it in the gas stove.

Control it. If it becomes your master it will burn up your house. Money is like that.

Wonderful servant but a terrible master. And who desire no gifts from others. If you get it, praise the Lord and take it but you don't go around looking for it and eager for it.

Men who can trust God for all their earthly needs. Who never hint about their material needs or boast about their labors either in their conversation or through letters and reports. I remember when I came out for Christian work.

One of the things the Lord taught me was even in times when you have nothing act as though you have plenty when people meet you. Then they will never give you money out of charity. You won't be treated like a beggar.

You're a dignified servant of God. And then their gifts will be prompted by the Lord and not out of charity. But you should never give a hint you know with a torn collar on your shirt or something like that.

There's so many ways in which if you're not careful use those torn collared shirts at home but put on your best shirt when you go and meet other believers so they think you have plenty. By the way I'm not like that now. God has given me plenty right now so I'm not trying to hint anything here.

It was like that about little over 40 years ago but God's been good to me. My circle is quite huge now. Men who are not stubborn but gentle and open to criticism and eager for correction from older and wiser brothers.

28. Eager for correction. Not just I remember a brother once came to me and said, Brother Zach will you give me a spiritual checkup? I said, sure you want it? He said yes.

So I told him what I thought about him. A few weeks later he got offended and left the church. So he didn't really mean it.

He was trying to act spiritual. So, okay. Men who have no desire to dominate or advise others you know this is another thing.

I've seen sometimes older brothers and older sisters want to just go around giving advice to people. I think you should do this. And you know some young people they say, oh he's coming.

I better run away. He's going to come give me some advice now. Don't be that type of person.

Be that type of person where young people will run to your house and say, Brother tell me. I need some advice here. Not those who have a great desire to dominate or advise others but ready to get advice when asked for.

And who have no longing to be considered as elder brothers or leaders. And who only desire to be ordinary brothers and servants of all. Men who are easy to get along with.

Willing to be inconvenienced, taken advantage of by others. I've met some brothers who are so easy to get along with. I want to be a brother like that.

You know you go to a house and you have no demands on anyone. You're happy with whatever there is. You meet with people and you have no demands on them.

You're happy. No. You must be a brother.

If you're a Christian Jesus was very easy to get along with. And you must be easy to get along with. And willing to be inconvenienced and taken advantage of by others.

Like I heard someone say Jesus gave us his bread to eat saying this is my body. Eat. And this person said we must be willing to be eaten by others.

Like Jesus was. Are you willing? It's a price to pay, to build a church. Men who will make no distinction between the millionaire and the beggar.

The white skinned and the dark skinned. The intellectual and the idiot. The cultured and the barbarian.

Who will treat them all alike. I tell you this really requires grace. That in a church you make no difference between the millionaire and that poverty stricken homeless man who came to your church.

You treat them exactly the same. You really have to be like Jesus to do that. And the intellectual person and the dumb person you treat them exactly the same because it's love for Jesus that you look for.

This is how we build a church. The cultured and the barbarian. Barbarians have some bad habits but you are willing to bear with them because they love Jesus.

It's ok. You work in the villages of India you will find some crude behavior on the part of people who are not cultured. But they love Jesus and that's all that matters.

And men will never be influenced by their wife, children, relatives, friends or other believers to cool off even slightly in their devotion to Christ or their obedience to God's commandments. Make sure that Christ is first. Men who can never be bribed to compromise by any reward that Satan offers whether money or a doctorate or whatever.

I remember a college in America sent me a letter once Dear Mr. Poonen, Brother Poonen we'd like to, it was a secular college but a Christian college, we'd like to give you a doctorate for your service for the Lord for so many years in the books you've written. I said no thank you I just threw it in the trash can. I replied to them courteously I said no thank you very much.

I said to the end of my life I want to be known as Brother Zach. I'm not Dr. Zach, I'm not Reverend Zach, not Dr. Reverend or any of these useless titles that people take. I said you know what I am? I'm a brother of Jesus Christ.

Try and find a better title than that. Younger brother of Jesus Christ, that's what I am. Call me brother.

When I call you sister I'm calling you sister of Jesus Christ. It's an honored title. So don't look for all these earthly titles.

Men who are fearless witnesses for Christ, fearing neither religious heads nor secular, religious heads or secular heads. You know kings or bishops or popes. Men who desire to please no human being on the face of the earth.

No human being, not even people in your church and who are willing to offend all men if necessary, not going out of the way to offend them in order to please God alone. In my seeking to please God alone if some people get offended, well what can I do? Men for whom God's glory, God's will and God's kingdom you know, thine is the kingdom, thine is the power, thine is the glory forever and ever. Always take priority over mere human need and their own comfort.

Jesus never operated on the basis of human need. If I were to operate on the basis of human need in a poverty stricken country like India, I will never have time to build a church. I'd be going around feeding all the beggars in the streets of India if I move on the basis of need.

The need is not the call. We must look at the need but we must see what God calls me to do. There were many, many social problems in Paul's day but he didn't spend his life trying to solve those social problems.

There were slaves, he didn't even try to get the slaves liberated. He knew that would have to wait for a future time. He built the church.

Even Jesus, he didn't you know, organize lepers, colonies to put all the healed lepers or the blind people and all in. He came to make disciples and he told us to make disciples and there are many others who are doing those other things but if you want to build a church, just make sure you don't get sidetracked into other things. Men who cannot be pressurized by others or by their own reason.

Verse number 37 into doing dead works. Dead works are works that come out of our own reason or good works done with a wrong motive or something like that but who are eager and content to do the revealed will of God for their lives alone. It doesn't matter if people say to me, Brother Zach, why don't you do this? Why don't you do that? Why don't you do the other thing? I say because God hasn't called me to do it.

I'm not the whole body of Christ. I'm just one teeny weeny member. I can only do what God's called me to do.

You know, you don't go to the hand and say, why don't you see? Why don't you hear? Why don't you pump blood? I say there are other parts of the body doing all that. I'm supposed to pick up things put it in the foot and the mouth. That's what I'm going to do.

I've got one job to do. I'm going to do it. Imagine if the hand tried to do everything.

It would never do what it's supposed to do. That's the trouble with a lot of Christians because some people pressurize them. Why aren't you doing this? Why isn't your church doing this? Why isn't your church doing that? You can say what you like.

We listen to God and we do what he tells us to do. I remember reading a poem when I was a young Christian where the Lord says, I'm seeking for one who will wait and watch for my beckoning hand and my eye who will work in my manner, the work I give and the work I don't give pass by. And the Lord says, and all the joy that is brought to me when one such as this I can find a man who will do all my will, who will study his master's mind.

And I said, Lord, that's what I want to do. That's why I have a very look back over a very fulfilled life in the last 40 years because I didn't do what men told me to do. I didn't get pressurized by guilt trips people tried to send me on.

I tried to listen to God. It would be dead works otherwise. Men who have the discernment of the spirit to distinguish between the soulish and spiritual, that which merely comes out of emotion and cleverness and spiritual, that was prompted by the Holy Spirit.

Men who look at things from a heavenly viewpoint and are not an earthly one, who look at things the way God looks at them. Men who will refuse all earthly honors and titles offered them for their labors for God. Men who know how to pray without seizing.

And by that mean, I don't mean on my knees 24 hours, but having an attitude of dependence upon God all the time. Like that hymn says, prayer is the soul's sincere desire uttered or unexpressed. A burden in my heart all the time.

Lord, I want your name to be honored. I want the name of Jesus to be glorified in India. That's my primary burden.

Hallowed be your name, hallowed be your name, hallowed be your name. You have that burden. That's a prayer.

Even if you don't say it with your lips all the time. This is pray without seizing. And you know how to fast and pray when needed.

There is a place for that when the burden is grave. Men who have learned to give generously, cheerfully, secretly, and with wisdom. Very important, with wisdom.

Men who are willing to be all things for all men so that by all means they might save some. Men who have a longing to see others not only saved, but made disciples of Christ and brought into the knowledge of the truth and to obedience to all of God's commandments which means to become a part of a church, a local church. Men who have a longing to see a pure testimony established for God in every place.

That's my burden. It's been my burden for nearly 40 years. I invited to huge conferences and I say, I don't want to go there.

I want to build a church in each place. That's what I'm called for. Men who have a burning passion to see Christ glorified in the church.

I remember years ago the Lord said to me from Colossians 1.18 where it says in all things Christ might have the preeminence and the Lord said to me, if in your life your passion is that all things Christ should have the preeminence, God said I'll support you all your life. My power will back you up. Make that your goal that in everything Christ will have the preeminence in your life, in your home and in your church and I assure you God's power will back you up till the end of your life.

Men who do not seek their own in any matter, men with spiritual authority and spiritual dignity, a man of God must be a man with spiritual dignity. He's not a beggar cow towing to the rich and the influential. I've seen enough pastors like that who are afraid of the influential people leaving their church.

I say let them go. Be a prophet in the pulpit. We have too many managers in the pulpit.

We have too many entertainers. We have too many people who are cow towing to the rich and the mighty. We need prophets with spiritual authority and spiritual dignity.

Men who will stand alone for God in the world if needed. Totally uncompromising men like the apostles and prophets of old. God's work in the world suffers today because such men are few in number.

Determine with all your heart my brother sister that you'll be such a man for God in the midst of a sinful and adulterous generation and a compromising Christendom. Since there is no partiality with God it is possible for you to be such a man provided you yourself earnestly desire to be one. And since God demands, this is very important, commitment and obedience only in the conscious area of your life and your conscious area may be very small, mine may be ten times that size, only in that small area where you're conscious, that's all the area He demands commitment and obedience from you.

Though the conscious area of your life is limited, it'll keep increasing as you walk in the light and you press on to perfection. There's no excuse then why you, you, you, you, you, you cannot be such a man or woman. Since nothing good dwells in our flesh, we are to seek for grace from above to have these virtues listed.

So cry out to God daily that He'll give you grace to be such a man, a woman, in these the closing days of the age before Christ comes again. Let's pray. There is no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus.

No word has been spoken from this pulpit to condemn anybody here but to challenge you to God's highest and to encourage you to believe that even for you that is possible no matter what your failures have been in the past right up to this day. Acts 17.30 says God ignores, forgets, overlooks the times of ignorance. Now He commands you to repent.

To repent means turn around and say Lord this is the life I want to live. I want to count for you in the one life I have on this earth, man or woman. God wants to use you in some particular function in the body.

God will show you as the days go by what that function will be. Say Lord I want to be what you want me to be. Thank you Father for arranging this conference.

No man can explain what Christ looks for in the church. I've tried Lord but I know that I can't do it perfectly. I pray that your Holy Spirit will take home to every heart whatever you know they need to hear individually.

How you can use everyone here to raise up a pure testimony. They have the humility and brokenness to acknowledge that without you they can do nothing. If they can submit to men who know more than them submit to authority delivered from the lust for honor and position.

Build churches that will glorify your name throughout the world. We pray in Jesus name. Amen.

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