

# Coming to God Like a Sheep

by Zac Poonen

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*The sermon emphasizes the importance of having a proper foundation in life, recognizing our handicap in spiritual matters, and cultivating humility for spiritual growth.*

**Duration:** 45:54

**Scripture:** Matthew 7:21-27, Matthew 11:25, Luke 15:4-7, Luke 15:11-24

**Topics:** "Repentance", "Humility"

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## Description

This sermon emphasizes the importance of humility, repentance, and a proper Christian value system, especially for young people. It warns against pride, the danger of being clever but not spiritual, and the need to constantly repent and turn from sin. The speaker highlights the significance of being like sheep, always dependent on the Shepherd, and the necessity of being part of a fellowship where repentance is a continual practice.

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## Transcript

I always like to speak to young people because you have not yet made some of the major decisions in life which you can make in a right way in the future if you understand God's plan and His ways when you are young. I don't know whether you realize the value of that. There are a lot of older people who have messed up their life and have so many regrets because they did not listen to God when they were young.

And if you were to go to some of them, what they tell you is, don't make the mistake I made. But, in spite of all the warnings we get, I found everywhere that young people are very slow in believing that they will mess up their life. Because always we think it may happen to others, but it won't happen to me.

Lots of people think like that. Lots of churches think like that. Yeah, that may have happened in other churches, but it won't happen here.

That may have happened to other young people, but it won't happen to me. You know, the people who feel like that are the ones who fall first. The people who are sometimes very bold to testify about how well it has gone with them are very often the ones who fall first.

I find with a lot of young people, particularly those who grow up in CFC, we have so much Bible knowledge. We have such a lot of fine teaching that you probably know more than all other young people in other churches. And therefore, you can think you are more spiritual.

Actually, you are not. Because if Bible knowledge makes a person spiritual, then the devil should be the most spiritual of all created beings, because he knows the Bible so well. If you can quote scripture, well, the devil could quote scripture even to Jesus.

So, it's not the ability to quote scripture or the fact that you know so much of God's ways, which you hear. That only shows that you are intelligent, and it shows that you have got a good memory. Or maybe if you can also speak, well, that shows you have got some ability to speak.

But none of these things prove that you are spiritual. And so, if we don't get a good foundation right at the beginning of our Christian life, we are never going to become the type of young man or young woman that God wants us to be. What makes a person spiritual is a proper sense of values.

See, when we grow up in the world, from childhood we acquire certain values. Those values are what we have got from our parents, whatever upbringing we got, and from the particular church we grew up in, or if you were originally a Hindu or something, and whatever values you got from that religious system. And then as you go to school and college, the values you get from the people around you, they influence us a lot, a lot more than we think.

For example, I have observed many Indian believers, even after many years of being born again, their value system is very Indian, more than Christian. I have seen that in America too. A lot of believers in America are more American than Christian.

And a lot of Indians who go to America, who think America is better than India, acquire American values, even though they are not Christian. So, if you don't understand a Christian value system, you will be influenced by your surroundings, wherever you go. And this happens to all young people, but it doesn't have to happen to you.

If you say, I am going to be guided by a Christian value system. See, I have also been your age at one time. I was converted just before I was 20 years old.

I was baptized when I was 21. And I was also surrounded by, I was in the Navy, surrounded by a lot of people my age, on the ships and in the naval base, none of whom were converted. And they had their own value system.

They were the people I worked with, they were my friends. And I had to choose whether I would let their value system become mine, or whether I was willing to be odd. It's very important, if you want to follow Jesus, that you must not be afraid of looking odd and feeling as if you are an odd person, in the midst of so many others who think they are normal.

If you are afraid of that, and you want to be accepted, I can tell you right now, no matter how many youth camps you go to, you will always be a worldly, good-for-nothing Christian, and a hypocrite. And you'll grow up like that. You may sit in a church which has got a good reputation and testimony, but it won't change you.

It's one of the first things you have to decide as a young person, is, I am willing to be different from others around me. Because Jesus said, the way to life is narrow, very few find it. And the way to destruction is broad, and a lot of people go that way.

So, we are surrounded everywhere we go, even among Christians, by people who have chosen a broad way. And in the midst of that, you decide to walk a narrow way, you are going to look odd. And if you are afraid of people making fun of you, then you will compromise.

So, it's not just a question of avoiding pornography, and avoiding the bad habits we talk about in the church. For young people, one of the most important things is to say, Lord, for your sake, I am willing to look odd and different, and to be made fun of, laughed at. I faced all that, and it just made me a stronger Christian.

So, the theme for our camp is restored relationships. So, I want you to look at Luke chapter 15. Luke's gospel chapter 15, we read of two broken relationships.

One is verse 4 to 7, of a sheep that was once in the fold, that went astray. And the other is of a son, verse 11 to 24, who was in the house, but chose to leave. There's a difference between the two.

The sheep did not choose to leave, it accidentally went astray. The sheep did not walk up to the shepherd and say, I've had enough of being with you all, I'm going off on my own. It was going along with the other sheep, but for a few moments it decided to look somewhere else, and go somewhere else on its own.

You know, it's very dangerous when you move out of fellowship, and went astray. Maybe the sheep thought, yeah, I can handle it, I don't need much fellowship, I'm pretty strong, like a lot of young believers think. I've learned through the years that there's a great value in fellowship.

It protects us from a lot of sins. And I'm very thankful in my young days, I sought fellowship, and I had fellowship. And it was not just on Sundays, I sought for fellowship whenever I could during the week.

You won't be able to do that much once you get married and have children, but when you're single, and you have more freedom, I would encourage you to seek fellowship. Remember this one sheep, he was safe as long as he was with the other 99, but when he decided to investigate something on his own, that's when he went astray. But then the shepherd went after it, and brought him back, and the relationship was restored.

The second example is different, and that is of a young man, or could be a young woman, principle is the same. He did not accidentally go astray, he rebelled against his father. Even though it was so good for him and the church, he refused to submit to authority.

He said, I want to be my own authority. Now that's okay, if you've come to a place of maturity, where you know how to take care of yourself. For example, the father in this house, he was not under anybody's authority.

He didn't have a grandfather looking after him. The father was an authority by himself, and a believer can come to the place where he is so mature, that he can be an authority by himself, like the apostle Paul. The apostle Paul did not have any authority over him except God, but Timothy, young Timothy did need Paul to be an authority over him.

Even Jesus, when he came to earth, the father kept him in a home where he had Joseph and Mary as an authority over him for 30 years, and then he moved out, and only God was his authority after that. So remember this, you may come to a place much later in life, after many many years, where if you're faithful, God may allow you to come to the place where only God is your authority above you, but that would be a

pretty high place of maturity. But until then, your safety is to be under authority.

And the problem with this young man, you know the story of the prodigal son, is that he didn't want that authority. He said, I can take care of myself. So those are warnings there, the advantage of seeking fellowship in this case of the sheep, and the advantage of being under authority in the case of the prodigal son.

So let's look at these. First of all, verses 4 to 7. Here was one of the hundred lost, and the shepherd went after the one which was lost until he found it. In the case of the prodigal son, the father did not go after the son till he found him.

That's the big difference between the two parables. The father allowed the son to suffer, and even if he heard, your son is now so poor, he doesn't have any money, he has wasted all the money he took from home. The father said, let him suffer.

Then he hears the news, your son is now so poor, he's trying to eat what the pigs are eating. Let him eat what the pigs are eating. Can you understand a love like that? A lot of people can't.

That is the love of God, which goes after a lost sheep, carries him on his shoulder, and brings him back, but does not go after a lost son or daughter, allows that son or daughter to reach the level of the pigs, and lets him suffer, and then learn his lesson, and come back on his own. So there are two types of backsliders. Those who accidentally slip away, we must go after them.

Those who rebel against authority and go away, we must never go after them. And when you hear that it is going badly with them, if you don't know God, if you're an elder brother who doesn't know God, he will go after that person, try to bring him back. I never do it, because I know God does not do it.

When he reaches the level of the pigs, he will come back on his own. If you bring him back earlier, when he's not properly repented, it's like bringing a child out of the mother's womb, when it's been there only six months. You know, a child must be in a mother's womb for nine months to be healthy when it's born, fit to live.

There are babies born at six months, but it's so difficult for them to live. They have to put them in an incubator and give them oxygen, sometimes all their life. They struggle to live normally, because they were not born properly.

It's very important that you're born properly. It's very easy to come to a church like CFC and sort of ooze into the crowd. Particularly if your parents were in CFC, you were born into the church and you don't repent, you just ooze into the young people, and you've never really repented, never really seen what sin is, and you'll have problems all your life, because you were not properly born again.

That is the problem with many people, and they don't grow spiritually. And you wonder why some people who sit in CFC for so many years don't grow spiritually, while others who come in a very short time grow so much. You've probably seen that, that some brothers who sat in CFC for 25 years are still what I call fence-sitters.

They don't know which side of the fence to belong to, here or there, Jerusalem or Babylon. They still see so many attractive things in Babylon. They sit on the fence for many years, and then one day they drop into Babylon.

I'm not surprised. That's because sometimes they were never really born again, they've never really repented, and maybe unwise people made much of them, and they thought they were wonderful brothers or sisters. They were not.

That's also possible. Sometimes unwise brothers and sisters may say nice things to you, and you think you're a pretty wholehearted person. Or maybe you get up on Wednesdays and share something, and you share regularly, and some of those things are good, and you begin to think that you're very spiritual.

No, you're not. You're just clever. There's a lot of difference between being clever and being spiritual.

World of difference. You need to understand that. So, first of all, why did the Lord call us sheep? You know, sheep are among the dumbest and stupidest of animals.

Sometimes you see on the roads in Bangalore, sheep and goats being taken to a slaughterhouse. It's very easy to keep them together. They all follow the leader.

If the leader is falling over the pit, they also fall over into a pit. Whichever way the leader goes, that's how sheep are. Well, you can't get a pack of dogs like that.

Dogs just wander off wherever they like. But sheep are dumb creatures. They're not so sharp.

They just follow. And when the Lord said that men are like sheep, what he was saying is, no matter how intelligent you are in worldly matters, and no matter how much education you got, and how clever you think you are, when it comes to spiritual matters, you are absolutely dumb. By that I mean stupid.

That's one of the first things you need to know as young people if you want to have a proper relationship with God. I'm a sheep. Why did Jesus say in Matthew 11 and verse 25, I thank you, Father, that you have hidden these things from the clever and the intelligent, and you have revealed them to babes.

Why is it so many highly educated PhDs in our churches don't have a spiritual ministry? Have you ever thought of that? We have had many PhDs in CFC through the years. Most of them have gone astray. I'll tell you that.

I know them. Most of them have gone astray. But they are, humanly speaking, the cleverest people that we've had in CFC.

I'm not saying if you're clever, it's a handicap. But if you're clever, it's a greater battle to be humble. If you fight that battle and remain humble, it can go well with you.

Paul was a clever person. I think he'd have got a PhD anywhere. He was absolutely brilliant.

But he was the greatest apostle as well. So you can be that. But yet it's, Jesus said in Matthew 11, 25, I praise you, Father, you have hidden these things from the wise, the clever and the intelligent, and revealed them to babes.

So that teaches us that when you come to scripture, when you come to the things of God, you must recognize that your cleverness and intelligence is not a help, but a handicap. You're not neutral. It's a handicap.

Have you, you know what a handicap is? Like, if you have a handicap race, for example, where everybody runs on two feet, and they tie up one of your legs up like that, and you have to run on one foot. That's handicap. What's your chance of winning? If one of your feet is tied up and you have to run on one foot against people who've got two feet.

That's what I mean by handicap. So if you happen to be clever or intelligent, like most of you are, do you realize that you have a handicap when it comes to spiritual things, but not when it comes to worldly things in your profession and in your job? You run with both feet. Good.

But you must recognize that that which is a great help to you in the world is a handicap when it comes to spiritual things. In other words, you have to take the place of a she. That's why we sometimes see in our conferences, people who can't speak a word of English or don't know much English, get up and speak in the conference in Tamil and in a very edifying way.

How is that? They're not as clever and intelligent as some of the people sitting listening to them, but they have come to know God. You remember once Jesus said, how difficult it is for the rich to enter God's kingdom. Now that doesn't mean that if you get a good salary, you can't enter God's kingdom.

It doesn't mean that if you're a beggar, you will enter God's kingdom. We've got a lot of beggars in Bangalore. I don't know any of them that's entered God's kingdom.

So obviously, Jesus was not saying, if you're a beggar, you'll enter God's kingdom, and if you're rich, you will not enter, because it doesn't seem to be true in life. And the most spiritual people we know are not beggars. In fact, I've never met a spiritual beggar.

So what does it mean when he says it's impossible for a rich man to enter God's kingdom? Very hard. It's like a camel wanting to go through the eye of a needle. The thing is, you get an understanding from what Jesus said about a camel going through the eye of a needle.

It's so difficult. And the only reason is, not because the eye of the needle is so small, but the camel is so big. That's the problem.

I remember in my younger days, when I was in my 30s, and I used to travel by train to different parts of India, and sometimes, very often, unreserved compartments. I'd get into the compartment, and I would have to sit on the floor. In some corner, somewhere near the toilet or something, the crowded, unreserved, third-class compartments those days.

And then every station, people would be piling in with their luggage, and I'd be crowded more and more to a corner. And I would sit there and think, my problem is that I'm so big. That's why I'm finding it so crowded.

And if I look down, I can see little ants quite happily crawling around there. They have no complaints that so many people are piling into the compartment. They're quite happy.

They can even run around there because they're so small. It's all got to do with size. There's a creature called the amoeba.

Amoeba is supposed to be a small, teeny-weeny creature, which you can only see under a microscope, or probably not even a microscope. But that amoeba is so small that if you ask the amoeba to go through the

eye of a needle, the amoeba says, no problem. The eye of a needle is like a huge 10-foot-wide gate to that amoeba.

He says, I can run up and down, not just go through it. Imagine someone who can run through an eye of a needle up and down easily. It's like you can run through a 10-foot gate up and down easily.

That amoeba can go through because it's small. A camel cannot because it's big. But if that camel allows God to shrink it down to the size of an amoeba, it'll always be able to go through the eye of a needle.

You know, when Jesus spoke about the narrow gate that leads to life, people say, how wide is the narrow gate? I say, I'll tell you. Jesus himself said it. It's as wide as the eye of a needle.

That's the width of the narrow gate. It's not a sort of six inches. Six inches is pretty huge.

No, no, no, that's not the size of the narrow gate. The narrow gate is as wide as the eye of a needle. That's why he said rich people can't go in through it because they're so big.

They're so proud of their wealth. And that wealth could be money, it could be intelligence, it could be the wonderful family that you are born in. You know, a lot of people, I don't know, it's as much in Tamil Nadu as it is in Kerala, people are very proud of the family they're born in.

Even in Tamil Nadu, people are proud of the caste they were born in. In Kerala, they say we are Syrian Christians. We're not low-level type.

In Tamil Nadu, they say we are Nadars or we are Brahmins. Uh-huh. You guys will never get through the narrow gate.

Not in a million years. You may think you've got through because you've got all the knowledge in your head. But that's why you don't grow spiritually, because there's some pride in you about something, not which God has done, but which you were born with.

Maybe your intelligence, maybe your family name, maybe your caste, maybe your wealth, maybe your job, maybe anything. When Jesus said babes, he was talking about humility. He once took a babe and said, here is humility.

So, it's not that rich people can't go into God's kingdom. Poor people can't go into God's kingdom either, if they are rich in pride. It's not money, it's not intelligence, it's pride that makes a person big.

And it's humility that makes a person small. And so, when we come to God, we must acknowledge that we are she. You know, there's a great lust in us to show others that we are clever and smart, especially when we are young.

We don't like to be known as, oh, that dumb person. That person is so dumb, so stupid, can't even understand a joke. It takes time for that person to understand a joke.

It's like a tube light that takes a little time to come on. Are you afraid of being called those names? And you want to prove that you're not like that? What for? To impress people that you're not so dumb and stupid like others? You find that it affects your spiritual life? I'm not surprised. Jesus said we're like sheep.

He said, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves. Wolves are clever, smart, sharp. Sheep are dumb.

Their safety is in always being with a shepherd. Even if they have been sheep for 50 years or however long a sheep lives, safety is in being with a shepherd. So, it's one of the main things I find that educated young people need, humility.

And those who, particularly in CFC, those who we are not only educated in worldly things, but spiritually, think of all the knowledge you have coming to CFC, great truths, doctrinal truths that you can explain to others, that you can lose the feeling that you're a sheep. And when you lose that feeling, you feel you can move out independently. You feel you can question the elders.

They don't know exactly. I mean, they're a bit dumb themselves. I've seen that happen in CFC.

I haven't seen it happen so much among the uneducated villagers. I've seen it happen among educated, clever people who feel that, yeah, I mean, I think some of the restrictions the elders make are a bit too stringent. They're not broad-minded like we should be.

They're too legalistic. Okay, maybe you're right, but let's see the result that comes in your life after a few years. And I've seen through many, many years in CFC, clever young people finally fall away because they don't recognize that they are sheep, that they can easily go astray.

They need the shepherd to find them, humble themselves to let the shepherd put them on their shoulders and come back. We must always be like that. And I'll tell you why.

See what it says here in Luke 15 about this 99. Who are this 99? To me, the 99 is a picture of the church. And the one person is the one who left the church.

Left the church because he thought he was very smart or went away from God. His 99 is a church. And see how Jesus describes a true and new covenant church.

In Luke 15 in verse 7, 99, the last part, 99 righteous persons who need no repentance. That is the definition of a new covenant church. 99 righteous people who do not need to repent.

How is that, you say? What does repentance mean? Repentance just means a turning around. But in the Bible, it's always a turning around from sin, sin, self, and the world. It's not just giving up some bad habits.

Turning around from living for myself. Many people haven't repented from that. Turning around from the world's value system.

Many people haven't repented from that. What many people have repented from is smoking and drinking and gambling and seeing dirty movies. Some haven't even repented from that.

But it's usually the very superficial things. You know, it's good to give up these bad external things. But when I turn around only from external sin, I will only be an external Christian, a very good hypocrite.

When I turn around from the inward sins, then I will be an inward Christian. So you need to ask yourself, first of all, whether you have turned around. You know, before Jesus came, God sent John the Baptist.

And John the Baptist was called a forerunner, who prepared the way. His message was, prepare the way of the Lord. Christ is coming.

But before you can receive Christ into Israel, listen to what I have to say. So today I feel that in the same way when we receive Christ into our heart, like Israel had to receive Christ, John the Baptist, the message of John the Baptist, has to come to us first. Prepare the way.

And what was the message of John the Baptist? Repent. Repent from seeking the kingdom of earth, because now the kingdom of heaven is near. So righteous persons who need no repentance.

What does that mean? Righteous persons who don't have a single thing in their life to repent about. Are there people like that on the earth? It doesn't mean that they've become completely like Christ, because nobody's become like Christ. But it means that where they are aware of something un-Christlike in their life, they have repented.

They have turned around, acknowledged their sin, and said, Lord, I want to give that up, which is un-Christlike in my life. And one week later, they may discover something else in their life that is un-Christlike. I mean, spiritually, they may already be way ahead of everybody else in their church.

Way ahead. It's like all the others in the church may be in second standard, and these guys are already in college. But still they're repenting.

Like the college student who is pursuing master's degree and PhD, always seeking to go on, even though the others in this church may be in second, third standard and happy with that. This college student is not happy. He wants to press on.

So he's discovering things in his life that are un-Christlike, and he's turning from them all the time. As soon as he discovers, that was very selfish of me to behave like that, or to talk like that, or to do that, or that was very proud and arrogant of me to speak like that, or to behave like that. Something un-Christlike, and immediately, without any delay, that person repents.

So a person who's doing this all the time, we can say, does not need repentance. Because he's repenting all the time. It's like people who say, you know, like a hospital where everything is kept so hygienically clean, that you can say it's a perfectly hygienic hospital.

It doesn't mean that it's always hygienic. It is always hygienic, because every day, you know, they are using disinfectants, and mopping the floor, and sterilizing the instruments. It's not that they did it once.

I mean, if you go to a surgical operating theater in a good hospital, they'll be so careful to make sure everything there is absolutely sterilized and clean, because you're opening up the human body, and it's very easy for people to get an infection. And we can say, there is an operating theater that does not need to be sterilized, because it's always sterilized. That means they're always doing it.

It's not that they did it once, and that's good enough for today. No, the gloves and the instruments that were cleansed yesterday are not good enough for today. Yeah, it was good enough for yesterday, but not good enough for today.

A constant sterilization, that's the mark of 99 sheep who are called righteous. Why are they called righteous? Because they need no repentance. Now I want to tell you myself, I want to belong to a church

like that.

I want to belong to a church of people who need no repentance. If I'm not there, I'm a wandering sheep. A lot of people sitting in many churches today who are actually wandering in the wilderness.

The church may have 2,000, 3,000 people there, but it's a wilderness, because the people there are not repenting. So what if there are 5,000 there? So what if there are 20,000 there? If they're all people who are not repenting, that's not the church that Jesus spoke about. 99 righteous people who need no repentance.

Do you want to belong to such a church? Begin your Christian life like that. It's not 99 people who have all the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Maybe some of these people don't have many gifts of the Holy Spirit, but they repent.

You remember Jesus said that many people with the gifts of the Holy Spirit cast out demons and prophesy and do miracles. Jesus will say, I never knew you because because you live in sin. You did not repent.

Turn to Matthew chapter 7. What is going to be important in the day of judgment? Who will enter the kingdom of heaven? Matthew 7, 21 to 23. Not everyone who says to me, Lord, Lord, will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my Father. And many will say to me in that day of judgment, Lord, we prophesied in your name.

We did miracles in your name. We cast out demons in your name. Many, not one or two.

Many miracles. These are people who exercise the gifts of the Holy Spirit, what we would call charismatic people. And I will say to those charismatic people, I never knew you.

Go away from me. That means go to hell because you practice sin. You practice sin means you did not repent.

We have all sinned. What is the difference between us and them? We've all practiced sin. Why does he say only to them you practice sin? They did not repent from their sin.

That is the thing that's going to be important in the day of judgment. Remember, not how many gifts of the Holy Spirit you have. I value the gifts of the Holy Spirit and I believe we should all seek for the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

No doubt about it, but don't think that the exercise of the gifts of the Spirit or any gift, natural gift, you maybe have an ability to speak or sing, it has no value. The important thing is what is your attitude to sin? So this sheep which was lost was willing to come back and be a part of this 99 righteous people who don't need no repentance. And that is what I want to ask all of you young people.

Do you want to be a part of such a fellowship of people who are always repenting? Then you have a good foundation. May God bless you. Let's pray.

Bow our heads before God, Heavenly Father. I pray that all of these young people here will have a good foundation in their life so that they can build on it a massive skyscraper in the days to come. One that will glorify you.

I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

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