

Destination Christlikeness

by Zac Poonen

The sermon emphasizes the importance of being part of the body of Christ and recognizing the value of every member, regardless of their gifts or abilities.

Duration: 1:09:21

Scripture: Psalm 139:13-16, John 17:3, Romans 6:22-23, Romans 8:28-29, 1 Peter 5:6

Topics: "Spiritual Growth", "Christlikeness"

Description

This sermon emphasizes the importance of understanding God's specific calling for each individual in the body of Christ. It highlights the need to focus on becoming more like Jesus rather than seeking worldly success or recognition. The speaker encourages humility, balance in ministry, and the pursuit of holiness as the ultimate goal, with a reminder that God's definition of 'good' in Romans 8:28 is conforming us to the image of Christ.

Transcript

One of the great truths that I've seen, we were speaking about New Covenant servants this morning, is that the Lord works through a body. That's another big difference in the Old Covenant and New Covenant. If you look at the Old Covenant, you see these outstanding men, Abraham, Noah, David, Samuel, Jeremiah, all the way up to John the Baptist.

They were lone men. I was once looking at the timeline in the Old Testament and found there were certain prophets that worked around the same time, like Jeremiah, and Habakkuk, and Zephaniah, and even a prophetess, Huldah. But they never seemed to work together.

They functioned in different places. And they were lone individuals. But as soon as Jesus came, he was the first person who started sending out people, two by two.

And in the Acts of the Apostles, you see that right at the beginning, Peter and John going to the temple, and later Paul and Barnabas. It's always two by two. And when Barnabas left, then Paul and Silas.

This was a new age. It was the age of the body of Christ. It is not the age of great and outstanding individuals.

People who want to be great, outstanding individuals must go back to BC, before Christ. If you want to function as a New Covenant servant, you must be willing to be a part of the body. And therefore, you may

not be able to do what somebody else can do.

And you must be humble enough to acknowledge it. We probably heard a lot about balance in the Christian life. We must be balanced in terms of our character.

The glory of God was seen in Jesus Christ, we read in John 1, 14, full of grace and truth. And that must be seen in our lives. We must not be only grace or only truth.

If we grow, we have to grow in grace and truth. And all of us are imbalanced in this area when we begin, because of our natural temperament. Some who are more leaning towards being very strict and legalistic, and some naturally very gracious and overlooking things.

But the balance is what makes us spiritual. I think of it like a human body. There's such a perfect balance between the left side and the right side.

If one side of the body was not proportionate to the left side, even if you had two ears and one was bigger than the other, you'd look ugly. Or one eye was bigger than the other. So balance is what we must pursue, and that's what the Holy Spirit keeps showing us areas in our life, if we are honest, where we are imbalanced or where we need to listen to his voice of correction, where Jesus himself is our example.

But when it comes to our, now that's as far as our life is concerned, but when it comes to our ministry, it is impossible for any of us to be balanced, completely out of the question, because we are one part of the body of Christ. Christ himself was the only person who was the total body of Christ. There was only one person who walked the earth who could say, I am the body of Christ.

I am the body of Christ. That was Jesus Christ. And he was apostle, prophet, evangelist, shepherd, teacher, and a miracle worker, and healer, and everything.

But after the day of Pentecost, Jesus got another body, a spiritual body. And the reason why the church is called the body of Christ is because it's got to carry on the ministry which was begun with the first body of Christ in Israel. And that's why when Luke writes the Acts of the Apostles, he begins with these words, that which, the former account of Theophilus, the first account, and he's referring to the Gospel of Luke.

He's saying this Gospel of Luke that I first composed, and which I wrote to you, Theophilus, is all about what Jesus began to do and teach. So if you were to ask Luke himself, can you give a title for your Gospel? He would say, this is the title, all that Jesus began to do and teach. And that's the first verse in the Acts of the Apostles.

And there are two things we learn from that verse. If you read the Bible slowly and carefully, we learn a lot that we miss if we read through quickly. The first is that Jesus never taught what he never did.

He did not practice what he preached. He preached what he had already practiced. That's in this verse.

He did and taught. He did not teach and do later on. He did and taught.

It's a pattern for all of us to follow, never to teach what we have not done, or at least what we are not attempting to do. So if you were to ask Luke now, what's your title for the Acts of the Apostles? Oh, it's very simple. The first verse indicates it.

What would you say? All that Jesus continued to do and teach. That's the title for Acts of the Apostles. Because he refers to the first one, the first book, the Gospel, as what he began to do and teach.

So this is what he continued to do and teach. That's what he began to do and teach in his physical body. And this is what he continued to do and teach through his spiritual body.

All that he did in his physical body, he did because he was filled with the Holy Spirit of God as a man. And all that he would continue to do and teach in the Acts of the Apostles would be through being filled with the Holy Spirit, through his body being filled with the Holy Spirit. And that's why the New Covenant begins with the Day of Pentecost, where they are filled with the Holy Spirit.

So, when it comes to our ministry, it's really impossible to fulfill our ministry without being filled with the Holy Spirit. And not just being filled with the Holy Spirit, being full of the Holy Spirit, which is more than being filled. Filled is an act of a moment.

Being full of the Holy Spirit means continuously full. I mean, you can say you filled the gas tank in your car, but it may not be full right now. But to be continuously full.

And that's why you read in Acts chapter 6, you know, there was a time when there was a little problem in the early church, because there was some partiality in the distribution of food to the widows. And the Greek widows had a complaint, verse 1, that the Hebrew widows were being shown partiality by the other Jewish believers. And so, the twelve apostles called the congregation of the disciples, said in verse 2, see, we can't waste our time serving food, because that's not our calling.

We are called to preach God's word. But what type of people do you need to serve food? What would you say? The apostles said, they need to be men of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit. Do you need to be full of the Holy Spirit to serve food? Who ever thought of that? Every ministry, and this is perhaps the most earthly of all ministries, distributing food to the poor widows.

See, in the body of Christ, there are certain ministries, which some of you may be doing, which look very earthly. I mean, you're not necessarily actually leading a soul to Christ, or building a church. You're contributing towards the overall building of the church, but what you're actually doing every day may be something very earthly, very close to serving food.

How shall you do it? You need to be full of the Holy Spirit. Not filled once, but full of the Holy Spirit. Now, if everybody, now some people say, well, every believer, as soon as they're born again, they're filled with the Holy Spirit.

Then they would have said, listen, just select seven believers. Why didn't they say that? Why didn't they say that? They said, yeah, there are lots of believers, but not everyone is full of the Holy Spirit. So when you select people, just make sure that that's a person full of the Holy Spirit, which means a person who is consistently filled.

So that's very important if we are to fulfill our function in the body of Christ, even the most earthly of functions like serving food or anything else. It's not just to preach or heal. Those are different functions.

The Bible speaks about gifts like helps. In 1 Corinthians 12, among the gifts of the Spirit, we're told about apostles, prophets. 1 Corinthians 12, 28.

God has appointed in the church, apostles, first of all. Those are the ones who plant churches, guide the elders of churches. Prophets who prophetically proclaim, not foretelling the future like it was in the Old Testament.

Even in the Old Testament, not all prophets foretold the future. That was one function of some Old Testament prophets, but not all. The greatest prophet of all, Jesus said, was John the Baptist, and he foretold nothing about the future.

His message was repent, repent, repent. That was common of all the prophets. Every prophet in the Old Testament, his primary message was repent, to bring God's people back to his original purpose for them.

I would say that is the function of a prophet. And if they went astray to the right, the prophet's ministry was to turn them to the left. If they went astray to the left, the prophet's ministry was to steer them towards the right.

And so the prophets in the Old Testament did not try to have a balanced ministry. You know, speak on all subjects and expound verses. They were not expository.

Many people think expository preaching is the best preaching of all, but I'll tell you none of the prophets were expository preachers. They preached one thing, what God burdened them, and they kept on preaching that again and again and again and again. Because that's what the people needed.

A lot of preachers are, I find today, are so afraid to speak on the same thing again, lest they lose their reputation as preachers. I know preachers who say that when they go, you know, these traveling preachers, when they travel around they have a notebook where they write down the sermon they preached, the subject they preached in each place, so that when they come back again there next year, they don't preach the same thing, lest people think they've got nothing else to say. Well, no Old Testament prophet was like that.

These are only people seeking honor. They don't know God. Well, the Old Testament prophets, they sought God, said, Lord, what is your word for your people? And it didn't matter if they had already preached that ten times, they'd preach it again, if God was in it.

So, in the New Testament, it's not foretelling, but like this, bringing God's people back to his original purpose for them, for the church, prophets, teachers, to expound God's word, miracle workers, healings, and here's this gift I was talking about, helps. Isn't it interesting that in the same verse as apostles and prophets and miracle workers, there's a little gift called helps. And if an apostle needs to be filled with the Holy Spirit, and you certainly believe that no one can do miracles without being full of the Holy Spirit, what about helps? I mean, if your gift is just helps, do you need to be full of the Holy Spirit to do that? A lot of people in the world can help, but there's a lot of difference between a man full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom helping.

Tremendous difference. The reason I say that is because some people can think, that's such a low, I mean, I don't have such an outstanding gift in the body of Christ. I'm not an apostle or a prophet or teacher.

Like the human body, it's wonderful that the Lord uses the example of the human body as a picture of his church. And you know, there are ministries in the human body which are very prominent, more visible. The tongue, for example, we could say the tongue is like a preacher, a prophet, who speaks, a teacher.

But behind that tongue, there are so many ministries in the body, you know that, that makes the tongue speak. I mean, primarily the heart, which is pumping, pumping, pumping the blood. If it stops, the tongue would stop speaking.

I mean, being in the speaking ministry myself now for nearly 50 years, I'm very conscious of one thing, that there are a lot of people who pray for me. Wherever I go, I always send an email out to a lot of people in all of our churches, say, this is where I'm going, please pray for me. If the heart stops pumping the lifeblood, the tongue cannot speak.

And I know it's made the world of difference in my life, and I know that that's the reason I see why Paul, in his letters, if you read Paul's letters, he'd tell people, pray for me, that I might open my mouth with boldness. One would think that Paul, why does Paul need prayer, that he's such a bold man as it is? Why does he need prayer that he'll open his mouth with boldness? He needs it. He's one member of the body.

He was an outstanding member, no doubt, but very dependent on other members. So, a gift like helps, you know, a lot of parts of the body which are not visible inside our human body. How many of you believe those are less important than the visible ones? Almost every internal organ is much more important than fingers and toes.

You can live without your fingers and toes. One of those internal organs, if it's removed, you wouldn't be able to live. So, I've heard of a lot of people talking about a balanced ministry.

There is no person who has a balanced ministry. A person has got to be a conceited snob to think that his ministry is a balanced ministry. Not at all.

I've often publicly said, I'm a thoroughly imbalanced person, my ministry. In my life, as I said, I want to grow full of grace and truth, sure. I want to have love.

I want to have joy, fullness of all of this, peace. I want to have long suffering with people. I want to be gentle with people.

I want to be good. I want to have meekness, self-control, the fruit of the Spirit. I want all of it.

But when it comes to the gifts of the Holy Spirit, it says here in 1 Corinthians 12, the Holy Spirit distributes them severally, distributing verse 11 individually, just as He wills. He decides this fellow is going to be an apostle. This one's going to be a prophet.

This one's going to be a help. And I can't choose that. I have to accept what the Holy Spirit gives, and I have to recognize humbly my dependence on that other member of the body of Christ who doesn't appear to have such an outstanding gift as I have.

In fact, if you read in 1 Corinthians 12, it goes on to say that there are members that don't appear to be very attractive, but it says in verse 24, the last part, 1 Corinthians 12, 24, God has so composed the body of Christ, giving more honor, now listen to this, it's almost unbelievable, giving more abundant honor to that member which lacked. And the whole purpose of this, why does God give more abundant honor to a member which lacks apparent prominence, let's say, or who's not so famous, or not so known, or whose gift is not so spectacular? I mean, the healer and the prophet, their ministries are spectacular, even the evangelist. People like Billy Graham, Mother Teresa, they're all very famous people who've got a fantastic ministry.

But they are rare, one in a million. What about the multitudes of believers whose names nobody ever knows? God has given more abundant honor. And if you feel you're one of those who lack the gifts that other people have, well, you're not one of those spectacular, outstanding servants of God.

Maybe you're just a wee teeny weeny help. You know, a blood vessel, perhaps. There are thousands of miles of blood vessels in our body, in one human body.

So, to be one blood vessel is not a great thing. But it's a very important part of the body. So, God has given more abundant honor to some of those small, teeny weeny things, and maybe thousands of blood vessels, and you're one of them.

Which blood vessel is there in the body which is unnecessary? Would you be willing to do without one of them? I'd be willing to do without a finger, sure. But not one of those internal organs. So, we must never despise what God has made us.

And I want to say the way God prepares you for a ministry in the body of Christ is by training us, first of all, gifting us from birth. We have certain natural gifts, all of us, which we didn't create. God gave it to us when we were born.

Say, intelligence, not all are equally intelligent. You never have to complain before God, Lord, why do you make me less intelligent than that person? It's because he has a particular ministry for you. You know, Paul was an outstandingly intelligent person.

I think he would have been a success as a businessman, as a software engineer, as a president of a country, or anything, he would have been a success anywhere. He decided to use his gift for the Lord. Peter was not that intelligent.

He was spiritual, just as spiritual as Paul. But God could not use Peter to write the letters that Paul wrote. So, in the body of Christ, there are different people with different measures of intelligence according to the gift, according to the function in the body.

So, when we are born itself, God has equipped us with certain abilities, which prepare us before we are converted. You know these verses in Psalm 139, where David says, You formed me in my mother's womb. And how God tells Jeremiah in Jeremiah chapter 1, Before you were conceived, I had prepared you to be a prophet.

Imagine, when he was conceived, John the Baptist prepared in his mother's womb to be a prophet and a forerunner. So, you must believe that too. The least in the kingdom of God, kingdom of heaven, Jesus said in Matthew 11, is greater than John the Baptist.

And if John the Baptist was prepared in his mother's womb to be a prophet and fulfill a certain function, you must believe, according to your faith, don't let the devil rob you of the joy and excitement of believing that in your mother's womb, God prepared you with certain abilities, even the country you were born in. I have no doubt that God made no mistake in allowing me to be born in India. That was their purpose.

And allowed you to be born wherever you were. One of the great truths that changed my life years ago was when I recognized that God loved me as he loved Jesus. If there's one truth that completely revolutionized my life, it was this.

Let me just turn you to that verse, John 17, 23. John 17, 23. There are many verses in the Bible that tell us that God loves us.

But this is one of the only verses that tell us that we were loved as much as Jesus Christ. John 17 and verse 23. That the world may know, the last part, that you loved them even as you love me.

So if I were to ask you two questions. Do you know God loves you? Yes. How much does he love you? Now many would say, well, to the depth of the cross.

Yeah, it's true. But according to this verse, I would say, He loves me as much as he loved his only begotten son. I'll tell you why this truth revolutionized my thinking.

And changed my whole attitude to my life and ministry. Brought a security into my life which I never had for years as an insecure believer, always feeling inferior to others. I was like that, I'll tell you honestly.

I mean, if you, I mean, today you look at me, you wouldn't believe it, but it's true. The thing that changed my life was when I recognized that my heavenly father loved me as much as he loved Jesus. I wouldn't dare to believe that if it was not written in Scripture.

If Jesus himself had not said it, he's the one who knows the father better than anybody else. He says in Matthew 11, no one knows the father but the son. We have our own ideas about God, but they could all be wrong.

All the religions in the world have come out of people expressing their own ideas about God. There's only one idea of God that's right. And that's what Jesus said.

Because he's the only one who came from heaven. And he tells me that the father loves me as much as he loved him. That must be right.

And I don't want to bring my foolish mind into that and question it. I believe it's right. And I wish all of you would believe it.

And if you're one of those insecure types like me, it'd make you totally secure. I'll tell you the results that came in my life as a part of that. It delivered me completely from jealousy.

I can honestly say before God, for years since I understood that truth, I've never been jealous of anybody else of their ministry. I've never wanted anybody else's ministry. Never been in competition with anybody.

There's so much of competition in the body of Christ. Competition in the church, where one wants to show that they can speak better than another, or do better things, or secretly proud, that I'm doing so much for God, and I must be better than that guy. All of that disappears.

You stop comparing yourself with people when you recognize that God loves you as he loved Jesus. You're special in his eyes. And so is that other brother, sister.

Special in God's eyes. You don't think of yourself as more special. If Jesus was special, so am I. And so are you.

It's a wonderful truth. It's not some type of psychology to get people to feel secure. No.

It's not a technique. It's not playing mind games. It's believing what Jesus said.

And from that truth, I learned wonderful things, and what God did for Jesus, he would do for me. The reason I say that is because of another verse in Romans 2, I think it's verse 14, which says, there's no partiality with God. How many of us read through that verse and say, there's no partiality with God? Yeah, I understand that.

But I want to suggest to you, my brothers and sisters, when you read scripture, don't just read it. Romans 2, 11. Meditate on it.

What does it mean when it says there is no partiality with God? Jesus often used human examples to illustrate divine truths. He would say, if you earthly fathers know how to give good things to your children, how much more your heavenly father will give good things to those who ask him. So I used to think of myself as an earthly father with four sons.

And whatever I did for my eldest son, I sought with all my heart to do it for the other three. To the best of my ability, I would try to give to the other three the same opportunities I could give to the first one. And to the best of my knowledge, I had no partiality among my four sons.

They were all equal to me. And not all fathers are like that. I strove to be like that because I saw God was not partial.

And I knew that as a father, I had to be a representative of God to my children. So any true father must be like God, totally impartial. So if I, as a very weak and poor father, would be so careful to make sure that everything I did for my eldest son, I would do for the others.

I multiply that by millions and say, God's much more than that. Whatever he did for his eldest son, he would do for me, one of the younger sons. Have you noticed in Scripture that up to the resurrection of Jesus Christ, he is called the only begotten son? And thereafter, he is never called the only begotten son.

He is called the firstborn. What's the difference between the only begotten and the firstborn? You all know. When I only had one son, he was my only begotten son.

The moment I had a second one, he was my firstborn. And that's why on the day of resurrection, you see the little, little things there. When Mary Magdalene met Jesus, Jesus used a title for God that he had never used before.

He said, go and tell my brothers that I ascend to my father and your father. He combined the two. You take a concordance and look through, it's very interesting.

Before that, he would very often speak about my father, my father, my father, sometimes about your heavenly father, your heavenly father, but he never combined the two. Never. But the day of his resurrection, he said, my father and your father.

It's the same. And that's the first time that he actually called those disciples, tell my brothers. There was an earlier occasion where he had said, my brothers are those who hear the word of God and do it, but he never specified who they were.

This is the first time he calls them brothers. Now, just three days earlier, you read in John 15, that Jesus says, so far I have called you servants, but now I raise you to a higher level and I call you friends. Even three days before, on the night before his crucifixion, they were only friends.

They were servants and they were friends, but the moment he rose from the dead, he said, they're not servants and friends now. They are brothers. They are my brothers.

That includes sisters too. And so, he became the firstborn from the day of resurrection. And I'm one of the younger brothers.

And we read that also in Romans 8, verse 29, that God's, you know, there's a lot of controversy in Christendom about the word predestination. It comes here in Romans 8, 29. Whom he foreknew, that's you and me, he predestined to become conformed to the image of his son.

Just by the way, let me say this here. There is not a single verse in the entire scripture that teaches that anybody is predestined to go to heaven or to hell. That word predestined to go to heaven or predestined to go to hell is never found in scripture.

Whatever any theologian may say. You won't find it. We are predestined, according to this verse, to become like Jesus Christ.

And predestination is a very simple word. If you split it up into two, you know what destination is. Everybody knows that.

You know what pre is? Pre means beforehand. A destination determined beforehand. That's all predestination is.

Every time you get an air ticket, you've got a predestination. It's written there where you're going to go. And when you go to the airport, you check on the board, where is my flight? Predestination, it's written there.

I've got to go to New York. There are hundreds of flights. I don't want to take any of them.

I want to take the one that's taking me to New York. So God has given me a ticket, as it were, with a destination written on it. It's predestination.

And that destination, this is what I love to tell God's people, is not heaven. Sorry to disappoint anyone who is expecting heaven to be his destination. It's not heaven.

And for the comfort of a lot of others, they're not predestined to hell either. The destination is becoming totally like Jesus Christ. It's so clear here.

He predestined us to be conformed to the image of Jesus Christ. Because every part of the body must have the same life as the head. Not a different life.

It must be as healthy as the head. Now, this was not possible in the Old Testament, because Jehovah God could not be the head of Israel as a body. There are many titles given to Israel, which are also given to the Church, like Kingdom of Priests.

You read Israel was also called the Kingdom of Priests in Exodus. The Bride of Jehovah. You read that in Isaiah.

Like the Church is the Bride. But there's one title given to the Church which is never given to Israel. The Body.

Israel was not the body of Jehovah. They could not be. They could be the Bride, they could be the family of God, they could be kings and priests, all that, but they could not be the body.

Because they could not have that inward, you know, the body. And a king in this kingdom, they don't have an inward connection. It's external.

Even a bride in the bridegroom, it's an external connection. But head and body, that's inward. A man and his wife don't have an inward connection with each other.

There was no word used to describe Israel which described an inward connection. That's unique to the New Testament, the body. Where Christ is the head, it's an inward connection to every single weakest member of the body, even if you're a help.

And we are predestined to become like Jesus Christ in every area of our life. And like I said, you go to the airport and you look for the flight that's written on your ticket. And how do you know you've gotten to the right flight? Well, every hour, you should be getting closer to your destination.

If New York is written on your ticket, every hour you should be getting closer to New York. If you're not moving at all or you're moving in some other direction, you're on the wrong plane, you better get off. That's not, you got on the wrong flight.

Now apply this to predestination here. There's a destination God has for me, it's not heaven. A lot of people say, my sins are all forgiven, I'm on my way to heaven.

I say, I'm on my way to become like Jesus Christ. That's my destination. And how do I know I'm on that narrow path going there? Every year, I should have become a little more like Jesus Christ.

A little humbler, a little gentler, a little purer, a little more gracious in my speech, more controlled, more self-control, more free from the love of money this year than I was last year. And ten times more free than I was ten years ago. That's how I know I'm getting towards my destination.

I can look with purer eyes at women, more like the way Jesus would look at women. But is that true of a lot of people who call themselves believers? Is it true of your life? A lot of people who are very busy in the Lord's work, they're not going in the right direction. You hear of pastors who've been outstanding preachers, fantastic ministry, building mega-churches, and all of a sudden you discover the guy was living in adultery or homosexuality with somebody for years, and they don't even acknowledge it until they're caught.

Some people, not even after they're caught. They get the best lawyers in town to tell a whole lot of lies and protect their testimony. Are these people servants of God? No.

Agents of Satan disguising themselves as angels of light and ministers of righteousness. How does that happen? Do you think that pastor was like that the day he was first converted? No. And I think if some of you were to examine your lives, you may discover that you were more devoted to Christ the day you were converted.

Can you think back to the day you were converted? Can you think back to the day you first joined this office? With what zeal and eagerness? You never wanted to be anybody here. You were nobody the first day you came. But maybe through the years, you've built up a reputation.

You're somebody now, recognized. People know your name. And you're no longer the same humble, gentle person, willing to be unknown, quietly serving the Lord, that you were the day you came.

You've become a big shot. Are you moving towards your destination? I see my Savior, the last day of His life, He was washing His disciples' feet. He was not the director of a huge organization on the last day of His life.

He was washing the disciples' feet. And I've often looked at that and said, Lord, that's the direction I want to go. After I've served you 60, 70 years perhaps, come to the end of my life, the height of maturity and the height of usefulness to God, I want to be found at the feet of simple, humble, poor, maybe illiterate villagers.

A lot of my work is among illiterate villagers. Washing their feet. Serving them.

That's how I know I'm going towards my destination. Not that I've become a very gifted speaker or respected and known. These things mean nothing to God.

That's the spirit of the world. In the world, you know, people become famous scientists and famous businessmen and famous politicians. Their name comes in the cover of Time magazine and different things like that.

But to be unknown, dead to the world and its applause, to all the customs and fashions and laws of those who hate the humbling cross, so dead that no desire may arise to appear good or great or wise in any but my Savior's eyes. That's a little poem I wrote in my Bible, the first Bible I got, 51 years ago. I repeated it to myself many times through the years.

Dead to the world and its applause, to all the customs, fashions, laws of those who hate the humbling cross, so dead that no desire may arise to appear good or great or wise in any but my Savior's eyes. Keep that before you, brothers and sisters. It's helped me tremendously in my life.

I know times when God has spoken to me and said, Don't ever evaluate your life by how much you serve me. How many sermons you preach, how gifted you are, how many places you've gone, how many books you've written, how many people have been blessed through you, or how many messages or CDs. It means nothing.

Can you consciously eliminate all of that from your mind, everything that's called ministry, and look at your life? Have you become more like Jesus? That's the only thing that'll matter in the final day. If you see that, it'll make a tremendous difference in our life. He conformed us to the image of his Son so that he might be the firstborn among many brothers, it says in Romans 8, 29.

That's where I get the verse that I'm the younger brother of Jesus. But I'm a younger brother who is to become like my elder brother every day. Just like we would want our children at the end of the year.

We don't check up whether they got a promotion to the next grade every day, but at least every year, as my son got promoted to the next class in school, it's good for all of us to check at least once a year, whether it's on New Year's Day or your birthday, to ask yourself, how am I getting closer to my destination? Which is not heaven. I'm not on my way to heaven, I'm on my way to become like Jesus. Predestination.

What's written on your ticket? Is it heaven? Not on mine. My ticket is written totally like Jesus Christ. It's the goal we're working towards.

The thing is, if you've got heaven written on your ticket, you can relax and say, well, my sins are all forgiven, I'm on my way to heaven. I just sit back on my couch and do nothing. Maybe out of a little gratitude, I do something for the Lord, and I congratulate myself that I'm serving God, doing this, that, and the other for Him.

Sacrificing. It means nothing, if you're not becoming more and more like Christ. What is the fruit of our service? A lot of people would count the fruit of their service in terms of thousands of souls blessed, countries reached, different ways.

Let me show you what scripture says. Many years ago, the Lord showed me this verse, as to how I was to evaluate my ministry and my service. What was the fruit I was to look for in my service? Fruit, is it soul saved? I'm not an evangelist, primarily.

And so, I can't count in terms of soul saved. Maybe soul sanctified, who were brought to Christ by somebody else. But, this is the verse that the Lord spoke to me from.

Romans 6, verse 22. Now, most of us know Romans 6, 23. Very well known verse.

The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life. A lot of false teaching comes out of an imbalanced understanding of scripture, where we try to get doctrine out of one verse. A lot of wrong understanding of eternal life has come from Romans 6, 23.

The gift of God is eternal life. We tell people, just receive it, brother. What do you do with a gift? Just say thank you and take it.

This is the result of using logic when we come to scripture. Like someone has said, a text taken out of context is a pretext. You know what pretext means.

It's not really the truth. So, when you look at Romans 6, 23, eternal life, look at Romans 6, 22. It also speaks of eternal life.

How do we get eternal life according to Romans 6, 22? And that comes before Romans 6, 23. Okay, let's look at eternal life in Romans 6, 22. Step number one.

Being made free from sin. Not forgiven. That's in Romans 3. Not justified.

That's Romans 4 and 5. Here he is speaking about sin not having dominion over us, Romans 6, 14. That's the context. And being made free from sin.

We become servants of God. How do I become a servant of the new covenant? In the old covenant, you could be a servant without being free from sin. But here it says, being free from sin, you become a servant of God.

I've often preached on this. Do you know brothers and sisters, if you want to be a servant of God, you've got to be free from sin? In the Roman Catholic Church, they say you've got to be free from marriage if you want to be a servant of God in the Roman Catholic Church. In Evangelical Christianity, they say to be a full-time worker, you must be free from a secular job.

But the Bible says, not free from marriage or free from secular job, free from sin. And that's a lot more difficult. Being made free from sin, not just you've given up your job and you've given up marriage, but you've given up sin.

You've given up your anger. You've stopped lusting. You don't watch internet pornography.

Being free from sin, I can be a servant of God. And, as a servant of God, I get some fruit in my life. If you have an NASB margin, it says fruit, and I think the King James Version says fruit.

Your fruit is not souls. Not souls saved or souls sanctified. Your fruit is sanctification in your own life.

Have you seen that? When I serve God, the fruit I get is greater holiness in my own life. If I'm not getting greater holiness in my own life, I am not serving God, even if a million people think I'm a servant of God. God doesn't think so.

Or, you're a pretty pathetic, useless servant of God, if you're not becoming increasingly holy. If your service for God is not making you more holy, you're not serving God. A lot of people who think they're serving God are only serving themselves.

Many people don't realize that, just like there's a lust for sex in man, and a lust for money, do you know that in all human beings, there's a lust to be religious? It's there in Muslims, it's there in Hindus, it's there in Christians, it's there in born-again Christians. It's expressed in different ways. The Muslim young man, his lust may manifest itself in being a suicide bomber for the cause of Islam.

In the Hindu, it may be in becoming a sadhu or devoting oneself to religious functions. In a Christian, it's the same lust for religion found in all human beings. It may be, I want to serve God full-time.

And we think we're serving God. Now, if you are really serving God, you'll be holier. And if you've served God for ten years, and you have not become holier and holier and holier and holier in ten years, I'm sorry to tell you the truth, but you've not been serving God.

You've been serving yourself. And a lot of outstanding Christian workers have spent their lives serving themselves. They were not like that when they first started.

I think of some fine young people I have met. I know whom I knew as a young man myself. Devoted, wanted to serve God.

I really believe they were sincere, devoted, and even called to serve Him. But I see them today, after many years, 30, 40 years, I knew them when they were young servants of God. They followed the way of the great preachers.

You know, wanting the limelight and wanting all the perks and advantages that come by being a famous preacher. Gone astray completely. No longer approachable.

There's no smell of humility in them at all. Are they serving God? No, I don't think so. And I don't have any respect for them.

I respect a man who is godly, even if he has no gift. I respect a man who is Christ-like, not a man who has accomplished a lot in Christian circles. If he's a real servant of God, his fruit will be holiness.

And the end, the final outcome, eternal life. A lot of people can't understand that. Because they say, you mean I get eternal life only at the end? I don't get it now? It's because of a misunderstanding of eternal life.

We are mathematical in our thinking. We've got to get rid of that. Eternal life does not mean life that never ends.

Even mathematically that's not correct. Eternity is that which had no beginning and has no end. So eternal life is a life which had no beginning and has no end.

What life is that? It's only the life of God. When God created man, he may have created him as an eternal soul who never dies, but he doesn't have a life that had no beginning. All of us had a life that had a beginning.

Eternal life is the life of God. And that's why Jesus defined eternal life in John 17.3 as, it's not living forever. Those who go to hell live forever too.

Do they have eternal life? No. Jesus said eternal life is to know God. And Jesus Christ to me has said, John 17.3. And that is the result of serving God.

That means we get to know God better and better and better. That I know God a lot better today. I know his ways.

In the Old Testament in Psalm 103 and verse Psalm 103 and verse 7 you see this very significant statement. God made known his ways to Moses but his actions to the sons of Israel. The sons of Israel were like immature kids.

Moses was this mature broken broken in 40 years. A truly mature man is always a broken man. Broken man of God.

He knew God. And God would reveal his ways. Moses, I'll tell you why I do it like this.

Whereas the children of Israel could only see his actions. Oh, the manna that came from heaven. The Red Sea split open.

And the quails that fall when we need it. And the healing from the bite of the poisonous serpents. And the water that comes out of the rock.

These are the actions of God. People are excited about miracles and actions. What God has done.

What God has done here and what God has done through my ministry. And how he saved this person and blessed that person and the other person. Well, it's good.

Praise the Lord for the manna that comes from heaven. And for the Red Seas that are split. And all the wonderful things that God does.

But how much do you know the ways of God? Not his gifts. It's a mark of a mature son of God. Not a child of God.

To know God's ways. God made known his ways to Moses. So that is eternal life.

The fruit of our services. I get closer and closer to my destination. To become like Christ.

I was speaking about balance. God has given each of us a particular ministry. I remember when I started out in the Navy.

I was converted when I was 19 and a half. I was baptized when I was 21. And immediately I started serving the Lord.

I started studying scripture. I couldn't teach the word because I didn't know the word. But I was saved.

I knew how to be born again. So I spent those early years doing the only thing I knew to do. Evangelism.

I would go to so many street corners. I remember I was in the naval base at Cochin. And every Wednesday was a half day for us.

And Saturday was a half day. I would skip my lunch. Fast and pray with another brother for a couple of hours.

Every Wednesday and Saturday. And go out on my scooter. Stand in the street corner.

And sing a few songs. And five or ten people would gather around. Wondering who these crazy fellows are standing here.

And I'd get an opportunity to preach the gospel to them. Give out a few tracts. Five minutes.

Go to the next street corner. And in two years we covered the whole city. Every single street in that city.

And traveled in buses. I'd be witnessing to people. Traveled in trains.

It's the only thing I knew. And I longed to be an evangelist. I said, Lord if you call me I'll go anywhere.

I'll go to Rajasthan. I'll go anywhere. You call me and gift me.

I can't do it. I wouldn't dream of trying to serve you if you don't gift me. I mean you can't go into an operating theater if you're not a surgeon.

You'd kill people. I wouldn't dream of constructing buildings if I were not an engineer. The building would collapse.

So I wouldn't dream of going to serve God in any sphere without God gifting me for that. That's the foolishness of some people. So I longed to be an evangelist.

But I found through the years that I didn't get much fruit from it. God showed me that was not my calling. That was my first choice.

God said no. I said okay. And he gifted me to teach his word.

I accepted that. And as the years have gone by, I have seen that that is the gift that God gives me. And it's very easy.

You know it's by trial and error that we find the gift. For example, how do you know whether you have the gift of healing? Well you pray for a hundred people and nobody's healed. You know that you don't have that gift.

It's pretty easy to find out. Or if by accident one person was healed who was already getting better in any way. It's not necessary that you have the gift.

Or you try to do a lot of evangelism and not many people are converted. That's not your gift. But that's how it was with me.

But I found when I began to teach the word, if a hundred people sat there listening to me, all hundred would get something. Ah, now I knew what my gift was. It was by trial and error over a period of time that I realized that God had given me, he had put me in a particular place in the body of Christ.

And not just teaching, but in teaching also there are sub-sections, you know. Like in any college there are people who teach different subjects. And I found that I had a specific calling from God, not just like expository preachers.

I hardly ever do expository preaching. I found that what the Lord told me specifically. Now this is not for anybody else.

This is just for me. I'm just trying to say that you have a specific calling. Before I say that, because God wanted me to be a teacher, in my mother's womb he equipped me with things like a good memory, which is necessary.

That's not a spiritual gift. But because God knew I had a particular calling, he gave me that. Clarity in speech.

Some people don't have clarity in speech. It's something they're born with. You don't despise them for it.

But if you want to be a communicator, you need to have some ability to speak clearly. And trained me, I mean I got educated in a good school where my parents sent me where I could learn English properly. I was not even converted those days.

What I'm trying to say is that God prepares you for your ministry from the mother's womb. And all the circumstances you go through, the education your parents give you, are all ultimately designed to give you a particular ministry. And then finally, he anoints me and gives me supernatural gifts.

Gift of prophecy. Which I coveted, like the Bible says, covet to prophesy. So, earnestly desire spiritual gifts.

But all of this, it's not just a spiritual gift, there are natural things. And not only the natural gifts God gave you from your mother's womb, the experiences he takes you through. Different, different experiences in life.

Paul says, I went through so many trials and I experienced God's strength in that. And there, I learned something through it. I went through a court case for 10 years in India with people who took me personally to court.

Made me stand like a criminal in a court. It was a wonderful time of education for me. Life is a constant education.

I first had to learn how to be a father. My children got married. I had to learn how to be a good, a spiritual father-in-law.

And then now, I had to learn to be a grandfather, spiritually. Life is a constant education. It never ends.

To be spiritual, to really be godly in different areas. When people cheat you, how to react to that. So the circumstances, the way, the things we are equipped with, our early training in life, and the spiritual gifts God gives us, and the experiences he takes us through, prepare us for a particular ministry.

And you have been prepared by God through all those things from your mother's womb for a particular task. Which none but you can do. Like that song says, there's a work for Jesus that nobody but you can do.

I believe that. There's a work for Jesus that nobody but I can do. And whatever your name is, put that there.

God needs only one Zak Poonen in the body of Christ. God needs only one you. That's why I keep telling my co-workers in India, don't ever try to be like me.

Or copy my ministry. You are not supposed to speak like me. I found in my teaching ministry, God, the particular calling mine was, listen to what all of what is being preached in Christendom today.

I don't have cable television at home, but I did get cable television for one year to listen to all the Christian programs going on in India. 90% were by American preachers. Because India is flooded with Christian television today.

So I listened, listened, listened to one year just to find out what are they preaching. I read books, I listened to tapes to see what are people preaching. That was my commission from God.

And then the Lord said to me, now compare that with scripture. And preach what they are not preaching. You know it's like you have a big circle.

And you got a number of people to color it all. And then I have to come in and fill in the parts that are not colored. So I saw very clearly what my calling was.

And that's what I sought to do. Many people have tried to change me and say brother you need to be more balanced. You can say what you like brother.

I know what my calling is. When you don't know God, you are influenced by people in your ministry. When you know God, you appreciate their sincerity in trying to tell you to be something else.

You say thank you very much, but you don't do what they say. Because you know God. Think of the kidneys in the body of Christ.

The kidneys in your body, they are thoroughly imbalanced. They only purify the blood stream, get rid of the impurities from the blood. That's all they do.

They balance the chemicals in the blood so that everything is there. Almost nothing else. And you say is that all? Well that's one very important function in the body of Christ.

And the day your kidneys pack up, the body packs up. So I believe that God needs certain ministries like that. And I want to say to you, if your ministry is that of helps, it may not be as important a function as some others, but it's a very necessary function.

Somebody told me that, you know the little toes we have? We have ten toes? He is a brother who had a problem with his legs and went to a doctor and the doctor told him, do you know that it's those ten toes that are hidden inside the shoes all the time and people don't think much about it? If you didn't have toes, you wouldn't have stability on your feet. I never knew that. It's not just the feet, it's those ten toes that give you some stability.

So what does it matter if you're just a little small toe, hidden away underneath, not observed by nobody? You have a very important function in the body of Christ. And your goal as a little toe is to become like Jesus. Don't evaluate yourself by how much you're accomplishing.

Evaluate yourself by, are you becoming more like Christ? That is your destination. And that is what God has planned for you. So, to be a younger brother of Jesus, it says, the purpose with which God conforms us to the image of Christ is so that we might be younger brothers and sisters of Christ.

And now, let's come to that very well-known verse, Romans 8, 28, which many of you know. We know that all things work together for good to those who love God and are called according to His purpose. Now, it's one of the most misunderstood, misquoted verses among Christians.

Here somebody wants to marry a girl, and she gets married to somebody else. He says, okay, Romans 8, 28, God wants to give me a prettier girl, that's why he took that. That's not it.

That's not it. I'm sorry, that's not it. Or you couldn't get, you applied for a job, you didn't get it, God wants to give me a job with a better salary.

No, He may get you a job with a lower salary. The good mentioned in Romans 8, 28 is described in verse 29. That is, you will become a little more Christ-like.

The girl you get married to may be a little uglier, but more Christ-like. The job you get may be lesser pay, but it will lead you to greater sanctification. Because God's goal, He doesn't care for your temporary good.

He cares for your eternal good. You know, little children are taken up with toys, but their parents are planning something great for their children. God seeks our eternal good to make me like Christ.

When we get to heaven, I'll tell you, when we get to eternity, we'll discover that the greatest good God could have ever done for me is not to make me a prophet or an evangelist, but to make me like Jesus. Even if I was a nobody in the body of Christ. If you understand this, your heart will be at rest.

You will never again, I'll tell you from my testimony, you'll never again be in competition with anybody. You'll never compare yourself with somebody and congratulate yourself that you've done things for God. And the other wonderful thing is, you will not be a backslider.

A lot of people in Christian work, if they're honest, they have to admit they're backslidden. You will rejoice always. I remember in the early days of my serving the Lord, I used to be frequently discouraged and depressed.

I wouldn't let anybody know it. Because on Sunday morning, we'd sing songs like, I'm happy all the time, etc. I wasn't really happy all the time.

It was just a lie. But once I knew, God loves me as he loved Jesus. He cares for me as he cared for Jesus.

He'll do everything for me that he did for Jesus, because I'm his younger brother, and there's no partiality with God. Provided I fulfill the same conditions, of course. Jesus humbled himself, so he was exalted.

If I humble myself, I'll be exalted too. And by exalted, that's another thing God gave me light on. Humble yourself before God, 1 Peter 5, that he may exalt you at the proper time.

What do you understand by that? That he'll give you a ministry? Wrong. He will exalt you over sin in your flesh. That's the only exaltation I want.

Not this empty exaltation before the Christian world. It's garbage. If you haven't seen exaltation in the world or the Christian world as garbage, you're not really going to make much progress in the Christian life.

It means absolutely nothing. Many times the Lord has told me, the opinions of men are fit for the trash can. Humble yourself before God, because God will give you grace and he'll exalt you over sin in due time.

In other words, even if you're defeated, defeated, the day will come when you'll be exalted over sin. Sin will not rule over you. You will be a little more like Jesus.

That is the good God has in mind. So I trust, brothers and sisters, we have got our vision focused. You know, very often we read scriptures, it's like a projector projecting something onto a screen and the letters are... I can't read that.

Hey, fella, can you please focus it a little bit? Did you get your vision focused today? Scripture, a little more focused? Certain verses a little more clear? Well, that's God's truth. Let's pray. Heavenly Father, help us, we pray, to understand your calling upon our life.

To be satisfied with what you have called us to be. To rejoice in it. What a fantastic calling you have called us to be like your Son.

Help each one here, Lord, to pursue that goal. In Jesus' name we ask. Amen.

Video: <https://sermonindex2.b-cdn.net/cXSUOvJJPd0.mp4>

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/zac-poonen/destination-christlikeness/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net