

Elders ■ Primary Requirements for Effective Ministry

by Zac Poonen

This sermon emphasizes the importance of seeking God's presence and unity in fellowship, highlighting the power of gathering in Jesus' name. It discusses the burden of delivering God's word with sincerity and the need for a genuine burden in ministry. The speaker stresses the significance of humility, surrender, and seeking the anointing of the Holy Spirit for effective service. Discipline, discernment, and impartiality are also highlighted as crucial traits for elders and leaders in the church.

Scripture: Matthew 18:20, Malachi 1:1, Habakkuk 1:1, Nahum 1:1, Philippians 2:6, Luke 18:1, 1 Thessalonians 5:17, 1 Corinthians 14:1, 1 Corinthians 9:24, Galatians 5:22, Psalms 12:6

Topics: "Seeking God's Presence", "Unity in Fellowship"

Description

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Transcript

Our Heavenly Father, we bow before you and we want to be in your presence. Lord Jesus, you're the head of the church and you're our head as we meet together. We want to experience the reality of what you said, where two or three are gathered together in my name.

There am I in the midst of them. We believe that we are in perfect fellowship with one another. There's no break of fellowship among any of us, to the best of our knowledge.

And so we believe that you are present in our midst and rejoicing with us and that we will sense your presence as we go through this morning time. Lead us, Lord, that your hand be upon each of us. It's your work, not ours.

Help us to always remember we are only servants and you're the master. Thank you. Be glorified in our midst.

Give us a word from heaven, we pray. We trust you, Lord, in Jesus' name. Amen.

Well, thank you, brothers, for joining. You can all turn your videos on and mute yourself so that there's no other disturbance. I hope you're all muted.

Thank you. And one of the things that has come to my mind a number of times in past years is that if we are to serve the Lord, you know, one of the main ministries through which God fulfills, through which God builds the church, is the ministry of preaching. The Bible speaks about, in 1 Corinthians 1, about the foolishness of preaching or the word preached.

And that's a major part of our ministry. And, of course, caring for people as a shepherd. But in relation to the ministry of the word, there is a word that comes a number of times towards the later minor prophets.

In Malachi chapter 1 and verse 1, here the NASB says the oracle of the word of the Lord, the King James Version, says the burden, and I believe that's the real meaning there, the burden of the word of the Lord. You read that again in Habakkuk, the first verse, Nahum, the first verse, and a couple of times in Zechariah in between, the burden of the word of the Lord. These Old Testament prophets did not just prepare a message and preach it.

Their message came out of a burden in their heart. And the closest example we can take of that is a mother carrying a baby. And she has that burden in her womb for nine months and then delivers it.

It's not something taken lightly. She goes through a lot of pain and then delivers. And what delight there is when a baby is born.

Every baby is a miracle. And a real ministry of the word must be of that same type. It must come from a burden.

Anything that you preach without a burden is just hot air that comes out of our mouth. And we should never be satisfied with it. We must, okay, if that happens occasionally, in the early days of our ministry, that can happen.

But we must go before the Lord in repentance and say, Lord, forgive us. And see, when we minister by burden, we're not trying to impress anyone. And we are not going by, I mean, we are reasonable people, so we seek to have a time limit.

But we don't try to extend our message to fill up the time. If you speak for a shorter time, it's fine. But if you find that the burden is over, and then you say, oh, I will speak for half an hour, it's only 15 minutes, and then you carry on, you will ruin the whole thing.

I have seen this happen again and again with different elders I've heard speak in India through the years. And the illustration I have used to them is, if you're a carpenter, I mean, Jesus was a carpenter for 30 years. If you're a carpenter and you've got a job to finish, you're employed by someone who's a carpenter, and you're making a table or something like that, and you've finished it.

I mean, your closing time for the day is 5 o'clock in the evening, but you've finished the job by 4 o'clock. What do you do then? Hey, it's all finished and planed and polished, and it's all done. But you look at the clock and say, oh, I've got one more hour to do something.

So you take your plane and again start planing that table, that finished table, and you've ruined it. If you had left it alone at that time and forgot about the clock, it would have been a perfect table. But I said you

ruined it by looking at the clock and say, oh, I've got to do some more work.

Look, closing time is 5 o'clock. I've seen that happen with numerous people. I've very gently told some of them, brother, there was a particular point in your message.

If you had stopped there, it would have been a fantastic, anointed message, but you continued for another 15 minutes and messed up the whole thing. We must seek to develop a burden. And when the baby is delivered, the mother is relieved of that.

It's over. Now you just pick up the baby and you're not going through birth pains after that. It's over.

So this is something that, I mean, if we are just newly beginning to preach, I can understand. But if some of us have been speaking God's word for some time, I think this is something that we need to examine ourselves, not to condemn ourselves over. Never let any word that we hear bring condemnation.

That is never God's will. Conviction, yes. Condemnation, no.

Never, never, never. And if a word we hear brings condemnation, either the speaker is not anointed, or you are taking it in the wrong way. One of the two.

So this is not something meant to bring condemnation, but this is how these prophets were. They had a burden. And we say, well, am I supposed to have a burden every single time I speak? I'm not necessarily saying that you look waiting for some burden, but I think as you grow more mature in the Lord and as you walk with the Lord more, it will become more clear to you.

It's not something that can be explained. Very often we speak out of a sense of responsibility. You see, it's like a mother cooking a meal.

Sometimes she may have a burden to really cook a fancy meal for the children a number of times when she has time. Sometimes she's so rushed that she says, I have to give something to the children. She loves them and cares for them and still makes something for them.

And the way we present God's word is something like that. So this is not meant to bring any condemnation, but something we need to seek the Lord about. Lord, help me to have a burden.

And sometimes, I'm not saying always, but sometimes we do not get a burden because our hands or our hearts are full of some other thing. You know, all of us work in something or the other, and that can be the cares of burdens of our work, or it could be some family burden, some cases of financial burden. All these things are there in this world.

But the wonderful thing about God is that he can use all of that, even all of that, to work something in our lives. So I found in past years, sometimes here I am supposed to speak somewhere, and I'm trying to prepare for that, and then something happens, which I didn't anticipate. And I've got my mind to have to think about those things, something I have a responsibility for, particularly when we had children at home and all that.

And then I think I'm being distracted, but I've said, Lord, you knew this was coming, and you knew that I have a commitment to minister the word at such and such a time. So this may also be part of my education, that you have allowed at this time some crisis in the home, some sickness perhaps, something I have to do in a rush. That is all in God's sovereign control.

If I don't believe in the sovereign rule of God, who has numbered the hairs on my head, and who watches over me every minute, and who is more concerned about building the church than I could ever be, if I'm not convinced about all these things, it would be very difficult to minister God's word with an anointing. If I think I'm the great person carrying the burden, I'm crazy. Jesus said, I will build my church in Matthew 16, 18, and that's a word which I always tell elders.

Don't you ever get so conceited to think that you're going to build God's church. Not in a million years. That's reserved in the hands of our Lord.

He said in Matthew 16, 18, I will build my church, and the church he builds, Matthew 16, 18, the gates of hell will never prevail against it. That's for sure. The church we build, the sooner it's destroyed, the better.

It's not worth anything. It won't last in eternity in any case, so might as well have it destroyed right now. So, we can have anxieties and burdens in our heart, and what we need to do is obey this lovely verse in Psalm 55, verse 22.

It's a very important verse for all of us to bring to mind frequently, in case you don't know it. Psalm 55, verse 22. Cast your burden upon the Lord.

That is your earthly burden, which can come up. We're all family people. We're working people.

So many things can crop up, which we didn't anticipate. Cast your burden on the Lord, and he will sustain you. This is a very specific action, Lord.

This particular thing is on my mind now. I cast it on you, and I'm trusting you to sustain me. He will never allow the righteous to be shaken.

When I remember that I'm only a servant, the master is the one who's running the business, and just think of an earthly company where, if you were working for an earthly master who has a great burden to build his business, and here you are volunteering to serve him freely, without expecting any salary or any reward or anything from him. Don't you think such an earthly master would be delighted to have someone like you? Take that responsibility? Can our heavenly master be any less? He's delighted. We must not allow ourselves to where the devil to bring us into the wrong type of having low thoughts about ourselves.

There's a right way of having low thoughts about ourselves, and there's a wrong way of having low thoughts about ourselves. The wrong way brings condemnation. The right way is humility, which brings grace.

So when we speak about dwelling in low thoughts about ourselves, there's a right way and a wrong way about doing it. You know, one is where we condemn ourselves and get discouraged. That's not the right way.

Then we're completely wrong. There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, Romans 8.1. Even though we are imperfect and we know we are imperfect, there's no condemnation because we are accepted in Christ. Unless you're living in conscious sin, unless you know something is on your conscience that you've not set right, there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

I must live in that freedom from condemnation at all times. Then I've cast my burden on the Lord, cast all my anxieties on the Lord. I mean, even when we come for a meeting like this, you all may not be

ministering God's Word at this time, but it's important even when we come for a meeting which we are attending.

For example, you know that a particular meeting you're going to, you're not speaking. Fine. Somebody else is ministering the Word there.

But it's so important that as responsible brothers in the church, we go to that meeting without a burden on our heart, I mean, with a spiritual burden, but not with earthly anxieties because we bring a spirit into a meeting. I believe that I can bless a meeting by just going and sitting there without opening my mouth. That is the wonderful thing of having the presence of God with us.

I mean, imagine if Jesus himself came to a meeting and he didn't speak. He was just sitting there. Don't you think that would bring a difference to that meeting? Yes.

I believe that same thing would happen if Paul came to a meeting and never spoke but just sat there in the corner and nobody even knew who he was. It didn't make a difference. It's not because they recognize, oh, there's some great man of God here.

No. Say Paul came quietly into a church where people didn't recognize him and he just sat there in the corner. I believe he would bring a blessing into that meeting.

It's like an aroma. 2 Corinthians 2 says about an aroma of Christ. The illustration I could use is a highly perfumed woman, a woman, a highly perfumed woman comes and sits in a meeting.

Nobody knows who she is, but everybody around knows his. I get a nice scent here. Somebody has come in.

It's something like that, the aroma of Christ, that it's not just in a meeting. I think when you, if even three or four brothers are meeting together and you come in, there should be an aroma that comes in because you came in there. And all you have to do is you don't have to expect some supernatural anointing or anything, but if you are faithfully walking with the Lord day by day in humility, that aroma will be there.

And you won't even be aware of it. It's good that you're not aware of it because it can puff you up. It's better we are not aware of it.

I'd rather be a quiet blessing to people without knowing about it than being aware of it. So, but we must, if we want to be that, we must make sure that we have cast all our burden on the Lord and say, Lord, give me your burden. Give me your burden for this church in which you've given me a responsibility.

And if in some situation the Lord has given you a responsibility and then taken it away, well, praise the Lord. Nothing happens without the Lord's knowing and without the Lord's permission. We've had situations in India where for some reason or the other we have to ask the brother to step down.

You know, one brother in one of our churches in India, I had to say, brother, your children are becoming really wayward. So may I request you to voluntarily step down from eldership? That would be a good testimony. And the church will respect you for doing that because the Bible says a man's children must be brought up properly if he is to be an elder and they will see that you're respecting God's word.

I mean, I'm talking about where children are at home, not where they've left the home. So burden is a very, very important thing. The other word that we must bear in mind, one is burden.

And the other is what, you know, the word which you're very familiar with. Jesus said, I did not come to be served but to serve. The Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve and to give his life a ransom for many.

Jesus always felt in his mind. I mean, if you were to look into the mind of Christ when he was on earth, he was always convinced of one thing. I am here as a servant.

Turn with me to Philippians in chapter 2, Philippians 2. It says here in Philippians 2, this passage that we all know about, that speaks about Christ coming to earth, this is the place where I say the three steps of humility. As God, verse 6 and 7, he became a man. And then as a man, verse 7, he became a bondservant, second step.

And then as a bondservant, he went even lower down to die the death of a criminal, verse 8. Humility, humility, humility, all the way down to the bottom. And so in his mind, he was, he didn't have to remind himself, oh, I'm supposed to behave like a servant. That would be acting.

And if I have to remind myself, no, no, no, I have to behave like a servant here because that's the spiritual thing to do, then I'm acting. I have to be absolutely convinced in my mind that I am a servant. It's not some act of humility that I'm acting like a servant.

That would be like some big political governor or something acting humble. That's all garbage. We're not supposed to be acting.

We're supposed to be genuine. So Jesus wasn't acting. He was absolutely convinced in his mind that the father had sent him to earth to be a servant, period.

And we must be convinced that God has sent us to be elders, to be servants. It's an inner conviction that must be rooted within our minds. I have no other calling.

And if I serve, I serve as a servant. And not even a servant. In fact, the word used in Philippians 2 is a slave.

One servant means a slave. A slave is one who doesn't even get a salary. So we fit in there, all of us.

We're not like the pastors who work for a salary. No, we take care of ourselves. We're slaves.

We don't expect a salary, and we don't get a salary, and we don't want a salary. A slave. A slave expects nothing.

I mean, the slaves who were bought in those days, we don't see it nowadays, but I've thought about this matter. How was it to be a slave in the first century? There were slaves who would go to the market and buy a slave just like you'd buy a piece of furniture. And that was yours.

You could do anything that you liked. You could paint your chair black, red, blue, whatever you liked. It's yours.

You could break it up if you like, throw it away, burn it. A slave was like that with absolutely no rights. And when the Lord calls us to be slaves in his church, I have to see myself like that.

I have no right to be respected and honored and any of that rubbish. But sometimes those things can creep into our minds where we very subtly begin to think I'm some type of elder who's supposed to have some respect here or people are supposed to listen to me. It's all nonsense.

Or I must have a ministry. Rubbish. I'm called to be a slave.

And whatever ministry God gives, I accept. It's like a slave in a house. If a house has got 10 slaves, the master decides what each slave is supposed to do.

And there's no competition among the slaves. A good slave says, okay, master, what do I do? I do that. Jesus' entire life was like that.

That's why his life was so much at rest. He was not in competition with a single person in the world concerning anything. He didn't come here to prove that he was spiritual.

He did not have to impress anyone. You know, that can be a burden for us also if we have to impress people in the church that we are spiritual people, we are fit to lead you. The more we think like that, the more we will act.

And acting is hypocrisy. It's the number one sin that Jesus condemned. All acting is hypocrisy.

And that spirit of acting is in us in the flesh of Adam, the desire to give a better impression than we really are. You know, this is the first sin. Cain wanted to impress God that he was just as good as Abel.

And that's what upset him. When it turned out that God accepted Abel and didn't accept Cain, he got so angry that he killed him. It's the desire to be more accepted by God, or at least equally accepted, as some other guy who's got a fire on his life, like Abel, the fire fell on his sacrifice.

Beware of that, my brothers, beware of it. Beware of competing with one another as elders to try and show that there's a fire on your life just as much as on that other brother's. Let that be rooted out of our lives.

I'm not here, otherwise I'm in the spirit of Cain. Did the fire fall on Abel, my brother? Okay, I'm going to make sure it falls on mine too. And if it doesn't fall, I can unconsciously develop wrong attitudes towards my brother.

Now, I have to live, I have no rights. Jesus wasn't in competition with anybody in the world. We need to be very, very careful.

Our calling is to be a slave. We must have a burden, and we are called to be slaves. This is what it means to be a servant in the church, a slave in the church.

The next thing I want to mention is the anointing of the Holy Spirit. All these things we see in Christ. He came to earth with a burden, and he never lost that focus.

He was fixed in his mind. You know the places where in the Scripture it says, he steadfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem, to the cross. There was nothing that would distract him.

My father has sent me on earth with a particular task, and that task is not to be a great preacher, or to be well-known, or any of the rubbish that so many preachers in the world look for. No. My task is to go to the cross, fall into the ground and die, and finish, and when the father says that's it, father, I finished the work

you gave me to do.

I'm ready to go. I'm only 33 and a half years. Father, that's not considered a long life by most people, but I finished my task.

I don't want to live here one day more. I didn't travel the world. I only traveled around Israel.

I didn't go to China or Japan or anything, but father, I finished the work you gave me to do. I've glorified you on earth. What a wonderful way to finish our earthly course, because it'll come.

It'll come to every one of us if we determine I have one goal in life, and that is to finish the work God gave me to do, not to gradually develop into a respected elder in CFC churches. Garbage. Lord, I've got a work to do, and I want to finish that.

I couldn't care less whether I'm respected or not. It's not even the last thing in my mind. It's not even in my mind at all.

I'm here to finish the work you gave me to do, and I want to be anointed for that. I can't do it without the anointing of the Holy Spirit. Because there is so much of counterfeit in this area of the ministry of the Holy Spirit, that's not surprising, because you know that only valuable things are counterfeited.

So if the anointing of the Holy Spirit is counterfeited in a lot of Pentecostal and charismatic churches, that only proves that the original must be really valuable. Like I often say, people don't counterfeit brown paper and toilet paper. They counterfeit gold and diamonds and things like that.

So the anointing of the Holy Spirit must be fantastically valuable if it is the most counterfeited thing in Christianity. Sure. And if that is the most counterfeited thing in Christianity, and it is the most valuable, I want to make 100% sure that I've got the genuine article, not that I have to convince somebody else that, yes, I'm anointed with the Spirit.

What does it matter whether people think I'm anointed or not? That does not interest me. It's like people who want to impress others. Some lady wants to impress that I've got a, this is real pearls hanging around my neck, or that's a real gold on my ear.

There are women who want to impress people with those ornaments. This is real, not counterfeit. I don't have any desire to convince anyone that I've got a real anointing.

That would be like those women. It would usually be fake. The person who's got real gold and pearls is not trying to impress anybody.

It's obvious. And so we are not here to convince others that we are anointed, but really we must seek God and say, Lord, I want a genuine anointing of the Holy Spirit in my life. And it must be continuous.

The real translation of Ephesians 5, 18 is, be being filled with the Holy Spirit. That means it's a continuous experience, and it's continuous because as we walk with the Lord, our capacity increases. We begin our life with, like the psalmist says, I lift up my cup of salvation to the Lord, and he fills it.

Yeah, I can be filled with the Holy Spirit the day I'm born again. But it's a cup. But if I take up the cross from that day onwards and walk with the Lord, that cup will become a bucket.

And you pour that cup, the water in the cup into a bucket, that's not full at all. It's just not even 10%. I need to be filled again.

And if I continue to take up the cross and walk with the Lord, the bucket becomes a tub. Again, I need to be filled. The tub becomes a pond.

The pond becomes a river, and finally many rivers. Then is fulfilled the word of the Lord, which says, If any man thirst come to me, he who believes in me out from his innermost being will flow many rivers of living water in many directions. That doesn't come overnight.

We start with a cup, and our capacity increases. It becomes even in John 4, Jesus spoke about a well. That's bigger than the cup that he spoke to Nicodemus about.

And then finally in John 7, it becomes rivers. So there you find in John itself a progression. So this anointing of the Holy Spirit, it must increase in our life, the capacity.

And we must really seek God for it. It's not a question of being many hours on our knees. But a lot of people evaluate their prayer life by how many hours they are on their knees or things like that.

For me, prayer is, you know, I used to be discouraged in my younger days, when I read about these biographies of people who spent two hours in prayer and four hours in prayer. I used to think, how did people know about it? Because the Bible says you're supposed to keep secret how much you pray. How did these people discover in their biographies this guy was regularly spending four hours in prayer? Unless somebody told him.

It's better nobody knows. It's better people think you don't pray at all. But so I was discouraged when I read all that, because I found myself very difficult to spend two, four hours in prayer like that every day.

And then I said, Lord, I decided some time ago, early on in my Christian life, I said, Lord, I've decided that I will not be influenced by the teaching of men in my Christian life, unless I find an authority for it in God's word. Yeah, I'm willing to listen to godly men. But if what they say is not something I can find a support for in God's word, I am not going to accept it.

However godly that man may be. I will not argue with him. I respect him, but I respectfully disagree.

And I don't even have to tell him that I disagree. So I began to seek God's word. And I found that scripture said, Jesus said in the length of time we are to pray, you know, Jesus told us the length of time you're supposed to pray, how many hours we are supposed to pray.

That's mentioned in Luke 18 verse one. He tells us exactly how many hours we should pray every day. It's 24 hours.

Pray at all times. And to confirm that in the mouth of two witnesses, everything is confirmed. The Holy Spirit says the same thing in one Thessalonians and chapter five and verse 17.

Pray without ceasing. So those two verses, I mean, there are other verses also that teach the same thing. But the word of the Lord in Jesus in Luke 18 one and the Holy Spirit's confirmation of it in one Thessalonians five, 17 settled it for me.

Now I didn't care which man of God said he prayed four hours or six hours or two hours. It didn't bother me anymore. I say, okay, God bless him.

And I don't know why he told everybody what, how many hours he prayed, because that was disobedient, utter disobedience to scripture. Jesus said, you must not let anyone know how much you pray or fast or how much you give. So these are, I find so many little, little things like that, but Jesus says so many Christians don't take seriously.

And I believe that's the reason for so much of shallowness in Christendom, so much of shallowness in so many churches, so many preachers. These are some of the things in the Sermon on the Mount people just haven't taken seriously. You must never let people know how much you give.

You must never let people know how much you pray, how much you fast. Anger is the first of three steps to hell. Where do you hear that? I've never heard it in my life.

And yet you read Matthew chapter five, verse 21 to 23, and you find that is the first of three steps to hell. And that lusting with the mind is just as bad as going and committing adultery with somebody else's wife. Going and sleeping with somebody else's wife.

If I think in my mind, if I watch 10 seconds of pornography or five seconds of pornography, or one second of pornography, it is lusting. It's committing adultery with someone there who is not my wife. To take that seriously, I find so many Christians haven't.

So many preachers haven't. It's sad. And that's why they don't take some other things in the Sermon on the Mount.

For example, I use this example. Supposing you live a very, very good life. And towards the end of your life, somebody did some harm to you and you just got so bitter against him.

You wouldn't forgive him and you died. What would be your fate in eternity? Now you have two ways to answer that question. One is the way that heathen understand that in the final day, God has got a balance where he weighs all the good things you did with all the bad things you did.

And sees which is heavier and decides whether you go to heaven or hell. I tell you, I'm absolutely convinced that a lot of believers believe that. Even though they won't admit it.

Because they think of some, say, think of some person who served the Lord very faithful for many, many, many years. And then it's discovered that there were some secret sins in his life. Where do you think he is? Well, think of the balance.

He did so much good. He must be in heaven. Many Christians, that thinking is heathen.

You don't realize it, but we got to be careful ourselves. I said, if that man dies without forgiving somebody, to me, it is crystal clear in Matthew chapter six, verse 14 and 15. If you do not forgive others, your heavenly father will not forgive you.

And you die in that condition. Is there some purgatory after that where you can be forgiven? I'm just taking one or two examples at random. No, it's serious.

So, when we seek an anointing of the Holy Spirit, one of the things the Holy Spirit does is give us a tremendous respect for the word which he has written. And that's what makes me study the word. Even after 60 years of studying the word, I still open the Bible.

And think about it every day. And sometimes just one verse. And say, Lord, speak to me through this.

What are you trying to say to me? I'm not going to sit back and say, Oh, well, I read that. I know that. The anointing of the Holy Spirit drives me to find something in the word that he has written.

If I believe that the Holy Spirit inspired God's word, I respect it. And there again, I tell you a lot of Christians, they will say, yes, the Bible is God's word. But they don't meditate on it.

They don't study it deeply. Which proves to me they don't really believe it in their hearts. And if they don't, if the Holy Spirit says they don't take seriously what I've written, don't expect him to anoint you when you get up to speak his word.

The anointing of the Holy Spirit, he will treat us with the same, depending on the respect we have for his word which he has written. There is only one book in the whole world that is inspired by the Holy Spirit. We will acknowledge that.

It's the Bible. Theoretically, we all acknowledge it. How eager are we to not just ease our conscience that every day we read it? No, but do you have a burden to say, Lord, I want to get into the depth of this.

I tell you, I have that burden even today. And I never want to lose it. Lord, I've read the scriptures in the verses and all come to my mind easily, but that doesn't mean anything.

It just means I've got a good memory. That's not the anointing, just that you know where the verses are, or the interpretation of something. Lord, the manna that came from heaven was never stale.

It was fresh, absolutely fresh every single day. And that manna, you know, you know why God gave the manna? It was not just to keep the Israelites from starvation. That was certainly a very important purpose.

But let me turn you to Deuteronomy chapter 8, in case you don't know this verse. Deuteronomy 8 in verse 3. There are a number of things written here about the manna. He humbled you, Deuteronomy 8 3, and let you be hungry and fed you with manna.

You know, God could have put out a new dish every single day. He's the greatest chef in the world. He could have produced a new dish every single morning, but he gave the same manna, which tasted exactly the same.

But it was fresh. It was not stale. If you kept it for 24 hours, worms would breed on it.

It's an unusual type of food. I mean, I've never seen any earthly food that produces worms in 24 hours. Not even meat, but this is something unique.

If you kept it for 24 hours, worms began to eat it. But it was always fresh, straight from heaven. He humbled you, fed you with manna, which you did not know.

And the purpose with which he gave you the manna, was to teach you and to make you understand thoroughly in your mind, that you cannot live by bread alone. But every morning, you need to live by the

word that proceeds out of the mouth of the Lord. Not that which proceeded 2,000 years ago, which the apostles wrote down, but which proceeds, present tense, from the mouth of the Lord.

That is the purpose of the manna. How many Israelites understood that? How many Christians have understood that? That man shall not live by bread alone. The very first words of Jesus' public ministry, very first words, man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God, that proceeds, present tense.

So I see that is one of the results of the anointing of the Holy Spirit. Because Jesus was anointed, and lived in a richness of that anointing, he was always able to hear what the Father was saying. Constantly.

And if he did not hear clearly, he would wait. Like once when they brought the woman, caught in adultery, and said Moses' law says she must be stoned to death. And Jesus knew that he himself gave that law to Moses when he was in heaven, 1,500 years earlier.

And now they were challenging him with the same word that he gave to Moses 1,500 years earlier. Are you going to keep it or not? So he doodled on the ground for a few seconds. Then he got a clear word from God.

He who is without sin cast the first stone. He didn't need a big sermon. It's amazing, you know, I've seen some of these instances where they came to Jesus, tried to trap him to say something against Caesar.

Said should we pay tax to Caesar? And immediately, the Father prompted him through the Holy Spirit, the anointing of the Holy Spirit. Show me a coin. Whose image is this? Caesar's.

Okay, give Caesar what is Caesar's and give to God what is God's. What an answer. And, you know, I thought of this and I said Lord, people ask me so many questions.

I want to be like that. And you know the word the Lord gave me was from Luke 21 and verse 15. Luke 21 and verse 15.

I will give you an utterance. That means the ability to speak and wisdom. You need both.

The ability to speak clearly so there's no confusion in what I'm saying. People understand. At the same time, wisdom to say the right thing which none of your enemies will be able to resist or refute.

That means the same wisdom that Jesus got from the Father in these awkward situations where people put him in a tight spot asking him a question. The Lord said I'll give you the same thing and I want to urge you, my dear brothers, go to God with a clear conscience and say Lord, I'm not seeking anything for myself here. I'm only a servant.

But to fulfill my ministry, I need this. I need wisdom and I need utterance. I need anointing to get wisdom and I need anointing to utter those words correctly.

Please help me according to the promise. It's wonderful if you can go to the promise. These Old Testament people like Nehemiah and Daniel, when they prayed, they quoted God's word, you know.

Lord, you said in your word, it's like this. When Jehoshaphat was coming to fight against a huge army in 2 Chronicles 20, he quoted God's word. Oh Lord, your word, it says like this, so come and do something for us.

You read the prayer of Nehemiah in I think chapter 11 or something and Daniel chapter 9. They were always quoting God's word. So Lord, you said in your word, you'll give me an utterance and wisdom and even the apostles, when they prayed in Acts chapter 4, they quoted God's word and prayed and they were filled with the Holy Spirit. It was good to have a promise when we go before God and say, Lord, I mean, it's for our own.

It's not that God has to be reminded of his promise, but for our own sake, it produces faith when I can claim a promise of God when I go before him. Many times, you know, when our children were small and maybe they had some problem in school or difficult boys would trouble them in some way, my wife and I would pray on the basis of Matthew 18 verse 19. If two of you agree concerning anything, it will be granted by my Father in heaven.

And I said, Lord, here we are, two of us, Annie and I, and to the best of our knowledge, we're not singing anything for ourselves. We want our children to grow up to be your servants. We don't have any other desire for them.

But will you please resolve this problem with these difficult fellow students they have and the situations they face in school. Some of the teachers were against them because they were from churches that were against CFC. So we had to pray against different situations.

That was a great promise. If two of you agree concerning anything, it shall be granted. We can preserve our children through the promises of Scripture.

So the anointing brings these things to mind. I believe it was the anointing of the Holy Spirit that Jesus received in the river Jordan when he was baptized that made it so easy for him. If the devil came with one temptation, he had a verse for that.

He came with another temptation, he had a verse for that. He came with another temptation, he had a verse for that. Of course, it was what he had meditated on and memorized when he was 10, 11 years old, going to the synagogue and learning from the rabbi.

But the Holy Spirit brought the appropriate word to him at that time. It's a tremendous thing, the anointing of the Holy Spirit that brings the right word when we have to speak to somebody who comes to us for counsel. That's a very important ministry as elders.

Or the right word when we have to speak to a church. Of course, we can any day take a Bible study on Ephesians. That's fine.

But the prophetic word is not just taking a Bible study on Ephesians. Prophetic word is that which is the right word for this particular occasion, for this particular group, or this particular brother. And that is the gift of prophecy that we are supposed to seek for.

You won't get it if you don't seek for it. If God tells you to seek for something and you despise it, you say, no, no, I don't need it. I'm okay.

I know the Bible. Well, you can be absolutely sure of one thing that you'll never get, the gift of prophecy. That's for sure.

Dear brothers, let me speak strongly. When the Bible says, earnestly desire to prophesy, 1 Corinthians 14 verse 1, and you only desire, but don't earnestly desire, you're disobeying God's word. Then don't be surprised if you never prophesy.

I remember as a young Christian, I was only 22 years, I was baptized when I was 21, and I started studying the word, and I came to that word, and I was in a brethren assembly that didn't even believe in the baptism of the Holy Spirit. I said, hey, I'm going to seek for the baptism of the Holy Spirit, and I began to seek God, and God met with me in my room, and then I saw this word which says, desire to prophesy. Earnestly desire to prophesy, and explain, not to predict the future.

Prophecy is mentioned in the two verses later in verse 3 as speaking to people to encourage them, to challenge them, and build them up. That's prophecy. To encourage people, to challenge people, to build them up, and I said, Lord, I want that, and I believe I have scriptural authority.

It's almost as though my name is written there because it's for you. It's in everybody's Bible, but very few people take it seriously. I did, and I'm thankful I took that seriously when I was 22 years old, and I'll give you my testimony.

God gave it to me that I was at the age of 23. I found I got utterance to speak, and I was such a shy, reserved person, never took part in public speaking in my life, difficult to stand before people, and the anointing of the Holy Spirit changed everything. Dear brothers, seek for the anointing of the Holy Spirit.

Don't ever, ever, ever devalue it, and it's got to increase in our life, and if you've got a river flowing through your life right now, praise the Lord, pray that it'll be rivers and not just one river. There's no limit to what God can do through one man if he's totally yielded to God. Absolutely no limit.

Remain humble. That's the only thing that's required. Another matter I want to speak about is the matter of discipline.

1 Corinthians, in Chapter 9, as I said in the beginning, we must have a burden. We must recognize we are slaves. We must seek for the anointing, and finally, we must be disciplined.

I'm absolutely convinced that many, many really anointed people never accomplish all that God wants to do through them. They have a good spirit. They are humble.

They do not exalt themselves with anointing, but in their personal life, they are not disciplined. They are not disciplined in their eating. They eat anything they like.

They don't seek to keep themselves fit. They have a lust to eat. Their God is their stomach.

Philippians 3 speaks about those whose God is their belly. They worship their stomach. They worship food, and the Bible has something to speak about it.

In 1 Corinthians 9, it says, verse 24 to 27, don't you know that those who run in a race, all run, but only one receives a prize. Run in such a way that you can win. Paul is speaking to the Corinthians, who was the most carnal church that we know that Paul was working with.

They were a bunch of people who were taking each other to court and arguing. There was immorality in their midst, which they didn't even take seriously. And to such a church, he says, you can win.

You can come first in the race. That's a tremendous encouragement to me. That's written to the most worldly church of that first century.

You can come first in the race. It wasn't written to the Ephesian church. It was written to the Corinthian church.

So you can come first in the race. Run in such a way that you may win. And the wonderful thing about the Christian race is that everybody can come first.

There's no second and third. But he says, if you want to win, you've got to be disciplined. You've got to exercise self-control in all things.

And even these earthly people, think of these marathon runners or the 100 meters runners. They don't just, for four years before the Olympics, they don't eat everything they want. They'll never win.

They don't loll around in bed in the morning. They get up and go for a run because they want to win the crown in the Olympics. And they do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we are imperishable.

And Paul says, I run in such a way, not without aim. I've got a goal. I've got to finish the work God gave me to do.

I'm not here, Paul says, to be known as a great preacher or a great apostle or great planter of churches. I have to finish the work God gave me to do. That's it.

So I don't run without aim. I don't box in such a way as beating the air. I've got an enemy here.

There's a real devil. I'm not hitting in the air. There's a real devil.

My boxing matches. I've got to make sure this guy is floored and down for the count. I discipline my body, Paul says.

Make it my slave. Otherwise, great apostle that I am, when I reach the finishing line, God will say, disqualified. I may think I did a wonderful job, but God will say I'm disqualified because I did not discipline my body.

I love the Living Bible paraphrase of this verse. I make my body do not what it wants to do, but what it should do. That's really the meaning of that verse.

I make my body do what it should do and not what it wants to do. My body may want to eat many things and sleep much longer and do many other things. My eyes may want to read many things and look at many things, but I don't let my eyes do that.

My tongue may want to say certain things, but I don't let my tongue say it. I don't let any part of my body do what it wants to do, but what it should do. I mean, it's a figurative way of speaking.

Ultimately, it's me behind that, controlling my tongue and eyes and all that. The principle is that if I don't do that, Paul says even himself, great apostle that he is, will be disqualified. I've heard of people like that even in the Olympics.

Some person comes first and everybody claps and the person is so happy and all the TV people are interviewing them and filming them and all that and then it finally comes up on the board, disqualified.

Somewhere on that race, they crossed the track and went into another lane. Gone.

They thought they'd come first. They thought they'd run a great race. Disqualified.

That's the picture that comes to my mind when I see here. Even though I preach to others, if I don't discipline myself, I'll be disqualified. This is a very important part of the Christian life.

Discipline. The Holy Spirit is the spirit of discipline. It says in Galatians 5, when we talk about the fruit of the spirit, it says Galatians 5, 22, 23, the fruit of the spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and the last one, discipline.

Discipline. It's the fruit of the spirit. To be able to control myself.

Not to let this horse run away with me wherever the horse wants to go. No. I've got the reins in my hand.

I decide where this horse is going to run. That's what James says about our tongue. You must have a bridle so that you decide what your tongue is going to speak and not just let's go.

You know, if you have to write a difficult email to someone. What I do is, I write it and I leave it in my pending folder for a few days. Look at it every day and correct it and rectify it and purify it until I'm finally, I feel it's ready to be sent.

You know, to fulfill the, this word in Psalm 12, verse 6, which says the word of the Lord are pure words as silver tried in the furnace seven times. Proverbs, I mean Psalm 12, verse 6. So I seek to purify my words seven times. Put it in the furnace of the Lord and take it out and comes out a little purer, a little better.

And especially if I have to write a strong message to someone, it lies in my inbox, I mean my pending box for a long time. I've had some of them lying there in my pending for weeks. I've still not sent it to someone.

It will go, but there is a time for it. It has to be purified in the furnace. The words we speak, dear brothers, take discipline very seriously.

So just a few things that I had in my mind I wanted to share with you today. I hope you will, even if we live like this, there's a gift that God will give us, which is a very important gift for disciples, for elders. And that's the gift of discernment.

Discernment, to know, is this guy trying to fool me? Is this very good brother in the church? Ah, I see something wrong in his spirit. Not in the words he says. You've got to discern when people testify in the church, if you want to help them.

Not in a critical way. I believe God will give you discernment only if you love people. If you don't love the brothers and sisters in your church, what you call discernment will be just criticism.

But if you love them, I believe God will give you discernment. Love is the fruit of the spirit. The Holy Spirit's anointing brings love for people.

And we have to be faithful to help them. We have to be faithful to help our children. I find, for example, some elders, I've often said this is the most common sin I've found among elders.

It's the sin of partiality. They show partiality to some friend of theirs, or to some family member of theirs. If their child does something wrong, it's not as serious as somebody else's child doing something wrong.

That is partiality. If I see that in my mind, and I don't kill it, I will never get discernment. God will say, I'm a partial person, I'm partial, and I'm just trying to protect my own child.

I know he's wrong. I'm not saying you should publicly correct that person, but recognize and quietly talk to your child and say, my dear boy, my dear girl, that's not the way to do it. Lovingly.

But beware of partiality. You'll never get discernment. If you're going to be partial, you're going to be ruthless.

Absolutely ruthless. If you're closest co-workers. God is my witness.

I have really sought to fight this and sought to be impartial with the closest co-workers I have in India. I say, no, I don't care. No one is a special friend of mine.

I love all of them. And I want the best for them. And that's why I want to be totally impartial.

If somebody's wrong, he's wrong. So seek for discernment. Be very careful here.

Because don't suddenly think you've become a great discerner of people because that also goes astray. It's only when needed that God will give you that gift. But it's a very important gift for elders.

People must not feel that they can fool us. We must be able to see through people who come with mixed motives into a church. I believe that if God gives you that gift, you'll be able to see it in a person's eyes.

You know how the Bible speaks about eyes full of adultery? It's a very important gift for young women to have, to recognize which man has eyes full of adultery. Even in the church. To avoid such men.

We must see those whose eyes are full of pride or conceit or deception. Let me just have a word of prayer. Heavenly Father, we pray that you will remind us of what we need to be reminded of at the right time in all these things.

Thank you. Help us, Lord. We believe you've given us some truths that are important for us to remember.

Bless each one of my dear brothers, that they will be anointed to build a church in their locality and in other places. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

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