

Fellowship - Another Mark of Growth

by Zac Poonen

Zac Poonen emphasizes humility and thanksgiving as essential marks of spiritual growth and the importance of fellowship in the New Covenant.

Duration: 1:30:20

Scripture: James 4:6

Topics: "Spiritual Growth", "Humility Before God"

Description

This sermon emphasizes the importance of spiritual growth through humility before God. True humility is seen in obedience to God, as exemplified by Jesus humbling Himself to the point of death on the cross. The speaker highlights the deception of self-imposed humility based on reputation and the necessity of receiving God's grace to overcome sin. The message also touches on the softening of hearts through childlike innocence and the call to bless and build one another up in love, rather than engaging in judgment or competition.

Transcript

So, three weeks ago, or two weeks ago, when I spoke here first, Sandeep had said that since you had completed five years to speak a little bit about spiritual growth. So, that first Sunday, I spoke on humility, and if you want to hear it, it's on the NCCF website. One mark of, one primary mark of spiritual growth is that you are growing in humility.

Now, all of us can imagine that we are growing in humility. Imagination deceives us tremendously. And it's not even a question of whether other people in the church think we are humble.

The question is whether God thinks so or not. Humility is primarily before God. It says about Jesus in Philippians 2 and verse 8, that he humbled himself to be obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.

That is the classic statement on humility in the Bible. He humbled himself to be obedient. If I'm not obedient to God in my private life, all my humility is imagined.

It's very easy to get a reputation for humility before people because it's a good thing to have. It's fit for the trash can, that type of reputation. The only humility that's worth anything is that which is before God.

And there's a way to know whether God thinks I'm humble or not. Because the Bible says, God gives his grace only to the humble. He doesn't give his grace to the proud.

When a person is humble, he gets behind him and pushes him forward. The moment that person becomes proud, no matter how many years he's been humble, God turns around and comes to the front and starts pushing him back. Now, a lot of people don't believe that.

I believe it because I've seen it happen in different places. I've seen it happen in my own life. And that's written in the scriptures.

God resists the proud. And it doesn't matter who the proud person is. Proud believer, proud unbeliever, it makes no difference.

It's a law of God, 1 Peter 5.5. God resists the proud and he gives grace to the humble. So, if you want God to get behind you and push you forward, that's the meaning of giving grace. To overcome sin, to overcome temptation, to overcome the devil, to overcome the problems we face in life.

And everything, if we want to receive that grace, the secret is just humble yourself. That means God must see that I'm humble. And the way we can know that is Romans 6.14. Sin will not rule over you if you're under grace or if you're receiving grace.

So, it's a foolproof method. You can't make a mistake. And for me, for a number of years since I've got light on this, which is nearly 30 years, I think, I have made it a law, a principle, and something which I remember always.

That if I fall into the smallest sin, in thought or in word, a rude word or an angry word, you can say it slipped out of my mouth, whatever it is. We can make 101 excuses. But sin is sin.

In thought or word or action or in an attitude to another human being, especially to my fellow believers, or in a motive. These are the areas we sin in. Thought, word, deed, attitude and motive.

If I sin and I know it, immediately I say to myself, I did not get grace at this time. Because God's laws are unchangeable. He always gives grace to the humble.

And when you're under grace, sin cannot rule over you. It is impossible. Sin rules over me when I don't get grace.

And that's why the devil has succeeded in deceiving what I think is more than 90% of believers. They don't know what grace means. The only understanding of grace is, I sin and God forgives me, I sin and God forgives me.

It's a merry-go-round. I sin and I confess and God forgives me. I sin and I confess and God forgives me.

And the devil is happy to have Christians sitting on this merry-go-round all the time, never, never feeling that they've got to get off it. So, it's a law that's helped me tremendously in my life to recognize that every time I sin, it proves I did not get grace. And I did not get grace because somewhere or the other, God saw me proud, thinking I'm somebody, maybe comparing myself with somebody else and thinking I'm more important or better or more spiritual or whatever it is, and exalted myself.

And God immediately turned around and pushed me back. You mean you say God can push back one of his children? Well, what to do? God hates pride. And it doesn't matter who it is, and it's a sickness.

Even a mother will hate a sickness in a child and do everything to remove it. You know, when you see a surgeon putting open someone's stomach, if you don't know what he's doing, you'll think he's a murderer. He's not a murderer.

He's doing that painful thing to deliver that person from a cancer. So, when God resists someone, it's like a surgeon cutting him open. You think, why does a surgeon do that? Why does God resist his children? To teach them how terrible pride is.

And so, once I've understood that, it's been a great help to me, and I want to pass it on to you. The mark of spiritual growth, the primary mark, is that you are growing in humility, and it's not a question of what other people think of you. It's a question of whether God is giving you grace, which means you can overcome sin.

Not all of a sudden that you become like Jesus, but there's a progression, that you become more and more like Jesus. A progression in overcoming sin in thought, word, deed, attitude, and motive. Just like in the first chapter of the Bible, I love to say that the first chapter of the Bible is like the whole message of the Gospel in a nutshell.

God created the first verses, God created heaven and earth perfect, and between verse 1 and 2 is when the devil fell and spoiled, and the earth became corrupt and dark, and without shape, and lost everything. I mean, the story of the devil's fall is mentioned elsewhere, because the Bible was not written for angels. It's written for man.

But that's why it became corrupt, and then what you see is in the next six days, God progressively changing that corrupt, dark, shapeless earth into something beautiful, which he himself can certify is very good. That's the message of the Gospel. That God created man perfect, but Satan came in and messed up, and man lost the image of God, and became dark and empty, and immediately the Holy Spirit, it says there, began to move upon man, and the word of God went forth.

God said, God said, God said. That's why it's important to hear God's word every day, and little by little by little, God brings us to the place where he can say it's perfect now. So that's spiritual growth, and humility is the number one secret.

And the other thing I mentioned last Sunday, and it's also on the NCCF website, is the spirit of thanksgiving is another mark of spiritual growth. If you're really growing spiritually, there'll be a spirit of thanksgiving in you for the things God has given to you and for people, and there will be less and less and less and less of complaining and grumbling and murmuring at home against husband and wife, or when things don't seem to go right, according to your understanding. If that's not reducing, dear brother, sister, let me tell you the truth.

You're not really growing spiritually. If you're murmuring and grumbling and complaining, it doesn't matter whether other people heard it or not. This is an inward thing.

If you find a grumbling, I don't mean to be tempted. We're all tempted to complain about many things, but if you find you respond to that temptation, and I don't want you to condemn yourself just because you're tempted. We'll be tempted till the end of our life on earth.

That's never going to change. But even Jesus was tempted. Temptation is not sin.

In fact, God allows us to be tempted to show the devil that we're overcomers. So be careful about this. The Bible says we've got to put away all murmuring and grumbling and complaining because that's of the devil.

Godliness with contentment is great gain. The person who is godly, really godly, is content, content with the circumstances, content with believing. His faith acknowledges that his God is so mighty and powerful that he controls everything that happens in his life.

You know, the thing is, when I grumble or complain, I'm saying for a short period, the devil got power in my life and got power over the circumstances of my life. I say never. The devil can never get power over the circumstances of my life.

I mean, he may have power over the circumstances of other people's lives who have given themselves to him, but not over my life. That's impossible because I belong to God. He's a wall of fire about me, the Bible says.

He who touches me touches the apple of his eye. So, I don't believe that the devil gets power over me at any point. But that's what we're saying when we grumble and complain about something.

Oh, this thing happened. Did God allow it to happen? If God allowed it to happen, it must be for your good. Romans 8, 28 says that.

God makes everything work together for your good. If you love him, and you're called according to his purpose, of course, if you don't love him, then it doesn't apply to you. You know, if you get a check, you've got to make sure it's in your name.

Otherwise, you can't cash it. In Romans 8, 28, it's specifically meant for those who love God and who are called according to his purpose. If you love Jesus and your desire is to fulfill his purpose for your life, you can be sure of one thing, that God will make every single thing, and when I say every single thing, every little, little thing, because Jesus said, even the hairs on your head are numbered, he'll make every little thing work for your good, and that good is not to make you richer or profit in the world, but will make you more like Jesus Christ.

That's mentioned in the next verse. The good is, he calls us to become like Christ. So, that's why we never complain.

So, that's another thing I, another principle that I've learned in my life, that if I complain about something, at that moment, I'm saying the devil's been in control. You might as well stop complaining and just say, the devil is in control of my life right now. That's the same thing, when you complain or grumble.

That means, either you don't love God, or you're not called according to his purpose, then you better set that right, but if you do, how in the world did God forget to make that work for your good? It could be something terribly evil that somebody did to you, but you mean God couldn't control that? And I mention this, I'm just repeating this, so that we don't forget it. I probably mentioned all this last time as well. The greatest evil that ever took place on this earth was the crucifixion of Christ on the cross.

And that is the greatest good also that took place on the earth. There's nothing better that happened on this earth than the Christ dying for my sins. Otherwise, where would we be for our sins? But that was also the greatest evil that any human being ever committed on this earth, the crucifixion of the Son of God.

So what do I see on the cross? Not just that my sins are forgiven, not just that Satan was defeated, but the greatest, this is a message from the cross of Calvary, the greatest evil that man could do, God turned into the greatest good for the human race. That's the message of the cross. Have you heard that? Have you understood it? To teach us that any evil that's happened to you, from men or demons or anything, is lesser than the crucifixion of Christ.

There's no evil that anybody can do to anyone which is worse than the crucifixion of Christ. That is the greatest. So anything that happens to you is lesser than that.

And if the greatest evil could be turned into the greatest good by God, then this lesser evil that somebody did to you or that the devil did to you or that happened because of your own mistake, God can turn it for good. That's the encouragement I found. I found that God used my mistakes also to work for good.

That's amazing. Only God could do something like that. You know, for example, I've thought of it like this.

Wasn't it a terrible thing that Adam did, Adam and Eve, when they disobeyed God? Oh, if only they had not disobeyed God, how wonderful the world would have been. No sin, nothing. But see how God turned it for good.

We would never have known of the love of God, of Jesus willing to die for us on the cross if Adam had not sinned. I mean, God would still have been there, full of love. But do you think you would have known it? We would have known God is love, but to see the depth of His love, of willing to come as a human being like us to come into this sewer and muck in which we live and identify with us and take the guilt of our sin and the blame for all our sin.

Does God love like that? We'd never have known it. So in one sense, that happened because of Adam's sin. We don't thank God for Adam's sin, but God used it, even that, to show us His tremendous love which we would never have known otherwise.

So I see God is in the great business of turning even Adam's mistake or sin, God turns it for good. So that's a great encouragement to me because none of us live on this earth without making mistakes. Even if you're utterly sincere, you make mistakes.

But God can turn it for good. That's why we don't grumble or complain. That's why we give thanks in every situation, whatever may happen.

It's not a blind, monotonous habit. It's a meaningful giving thanks. Lord, I give thanks because this is something that you have sovereignly going to overrule.

Maybe I accidentally slipped up and did something stupid, but please forgive me. I take the blame for it and I want you to make even that work for my good. Yeah, I've seen that happen.

So please remember these two things, humility and thanksgiving. I want to speak on another thing today. And that is fellowship.

See, all these things, in the old covenant, they never knew what humility was. They really didn't know. There was not much preaching on humility.

I mean, humility was seen as a virtue in the Old Testament, sure. But when Jesus came, he said these words, learn from me, for I am humble and gentle of heart. And if you take my yoke upon you, you will find

rest in your soul.

All unrest is because we are not learning humility and gentleness from Jesus. One of the proofs that I'm in the will of God is rest in my heart. Any unrest, whenever any unrest comes into my heart, I say, no, I'm out of God's will.

That's a sort of a whistle being blown, saying you're out of God's will right now. Please remember this, my dear brothers and sisters. We really want to grow spiritually.

The whole purpose of God establishing a little church like this in the Bay Area is to help people to see what real godliness is. I hope other churches are preaching it, I don't know. There's a lot of churches today I find are more interested in increasing their numbers in quantity more than quality.

And I'll tell you something, God is a million times more interested in quality than in quantity. Quantity can be wood, hay, and straw, which will all be burnt up in the final day. Quality is gold, silver, and precious stones.

If someone were to give you a million dollars and say you can go either buy wood, hay, and straw, or gold, silver, and precious stones, which would you do? If you're interested in quantity to impress people, you would go for wood, hay, and straw. And it would be a huge... Can you imagine the amount of wood, hay, and straw you can get for a million dollars? And how much of gold, silver, and precious stones you can get for that? You probably can carry in your hand the amount of gold, silver, and precious stones. Who chooses that? And the Bible says in the final day, God's going to test all of our actions, all of our words, and everything we've built.

If it's a church, what we've done, it's going to be tested by fire. And in that day it'll be tested whether we built with gold, silver, and precious stones that which will last for eternity, or just wood, hay, and straw. So it's very important for us to understand fellowship is one of the marks of New Covenant Christianity.

They didn't have that in the Old Testament. They didn't have always give thanks in the Old Testament. There is no command in the Old Testament which said you must give thanks for everything.

That's in the New Testament. There's no command in the Old Testament which says rejoice always, or always give thanks. It was in the New Testament because they didn't have the Holy Spirit within.

So, just like humility is a distinct privilege that we can have in the New Covenant, the spirit of thanksgiving, of giving thanks for everything, is something we can, it's our birthright in the New Covenant. I want to have it. I don't want the devil to rob me of it.

The devil robs me of it. If I grumble about one little thing, the devil will rob me of my inheritance. We are so careful not to lose money foolishly from our bank accounts, or from our investments.

If you lost a little money, which somebody cheated you of, or you didn't get what you deserve, your right to, you would pick up on that and recover it from whoever took it away from you. Do you see that if you grumble a single time, or complain a single time, the devil has robbed you of your inheritance there? Are you as concerned about that as a loss of money? I am. If ever once I grumble or complain, I say, Lord, the devil got an advantage of me over there.

He made me testify that he's in control of this universe. He's not. He's a liar.

And it's never going to happen to me again. I'm going to give thanks in every situation, and thereby testify that my Father in Heaven runs this universe. And I am His child, and He makes every single thing, and when I say every single thing, every single thing work for my good.

We must have that confession, my brothers and sisters. That is New Covenant Christianity. Don't accept this third-rate Christianity that you see in people around you, and in most churches, as normal.

It is not normal. It is sub-normal. The Israelites wandering in the wilderness for 40 years was not God's will for them.

They disobeyed God, and that's why God cared for them. Sure, He gave them manna. He gave them healing from their diseases, and God may answer your prayers, and do miracles.

Don't you think getting manna from Heaven is a miracle? To get food dropped from Heaven for you, even if you got it one day, it would be a miracle. They got it for 40 years. But all those 40 years, God was angry with them.

They disobeyed Him. Does God do miracles for those who have disobeyed Him? Yes. The proof of it is the Israelites in the wilderness.

They were healed of their sicknesses. The Bible says there was not one lame person among them. Can you imagine 2 million people, and not one person lame? How would the guy be able to walk in the wilderness if he was lame? It was a miracle.

Do you know their sandals never wore out for 40 years? That's one of the miracles mentioned in the Psalms. Their sandals and their clothes never wore out for 40 years. There were no stores to go and buy clothes there, in the wilderness.

These are the miracles God did for them, but for whom? For a people who had disobeyed Him, teaching us in the Old Testament that you can have miraculous answers to prayer, even when you're thoroughly disobedient, and God is angry with you. That's not the proof of God being happy, and yet I find so many people around the world, and God's answered this prayer and that prayer. That's great.

But that doesn't prove God's happy with you. You know, Jesus also said that. He makes the sun to rise on the good and the evil.

He makes the rain to fall on the righteous and the unrighteous. Here is an atheist farmer, and here's a God-fearing farmer who sows his seed and prays regularly, and he prays over his field, and here this atheist who defies and says, there's no God up there. I take care of my field.

And when the rains come, they fall equally on both fields. And the atheist says, hey, you spend your time praying for rain, and you got rain. I don't pray at all.

The rain just falls on my... And when the sun rises, which is also needed, the atheist says, did you see? You waste your time praying, kneeling down and all. I don't pray. See, the sun rises on me, and I get as good a crop as you.

You think atheists don't get good crops? What does it prove? It doesn't prove that atheists are right. It proves that God is a good God. So, when we get a blessing from God, a material blessing, it only proves God is a good God.

If I prayed for some material... I've heard of outright unbelievers who are healed of cancer, not because they prayed. I mean, somehow or the other, they took some treatment, and they are recovered. It doesn't prove anything.

It proves God is a good God. That it does. So, these material blessings and even healings don't prove to me the goodness, that God is happy with me.

It proves the goodness of God, but not that God is happy with me. It's something else that proves God's goodness, that proves that God's happy with me. The important thing for me, you see, the thing is, I find there are Christians who seek for God's blessing.

Their main prayer is, bless me, bless me, bless me. There are very few Christians who seek for God's approval. You need to ask yourself, what is your goal in life? Is it to get God's blessing or God's approval? In the Old Testament, God's approval was secondary.

God's blessing was what they wanted. Our enemies must be defeated. Our crops must flourish and we must prosper and our barns must be made bigger and we must do better and better materially and we must be physically healed.

They are all marks of God's blessing. Good. I'm not against it.

Thank God He blesses us. But much more important is at the end of my life, I must be able to say that God's approved of my life. See, God's been remarkably good to me in material things and physical things.

I'm 76 years old and almost never been into a hospital for anything. I've been healthy and God's taken care of me and protected us in all our travels. So many things I could say are marks of God's blessing.

He's provided all my needs, even though I'm in Christian work and never sent any reports of my work or asked anybody, never depended on anyone, even until today. That is not the mark of God's approval. That's the mark of God's blessing.

But I'm more interested in, oh Lord, did my life bring satisfaction to your heart? When I come to the end of my life, I'm not going to count my blessings. I'm going to see whether, did my life bring satisfaction to God? Did I finish the purpose with which He brought me to this earth? Or did I hinder some of that by my stubbornness? And that's where Jesus is our example. He didn't seek for blessing as much as approval.

You know, at the baptism, we read, this is my beloved son in whom I am well pleased. Not this is my son whom I have blessed for 33 years. I don't want God to say to me, this is my son whom I've blessed.

I want to say this is my son in whom I'm pleased. What do you want, brother, sister? Do you want God to say to you, here's my daughter whom I've blessed? Or here's my daughter with whom I'm so happy Her thoughts are clean and pure and loving. Her words are always, you know, it says in Proverbs 31, the law of kindness is in her tongue.

What a testimony for a woman. It's written about a woman in Proverbs 31. The law of kindness is in her tongue.

Wow. That means God's blessed you. The speech is gracious at home, especially to those who live with you at home and your relatives and friends.

Is there a blessing of God upon you? Is the approval of God there upon your life? That's very important. So in the New Covenant, the main thing is to be approved by God, not just blessed by God. They got blessing in the Old Testament too.

Bless the Lord, O my soul, and don't forget all His blessings to me who has blessed you with so many things in Psalm 103. But in the New Covenant, Paul tells Timothy, let me show you this verse in 2 Timothy in Chapter 2. Paul's writing this last letter to a man who was his closest co-worker. Timothy was about, Paul was about 67 or so.

He was about to die. Timothy was around 45. He'd probably been with Paul about 25 years.

And he writes to him in 2 Timothy in Chapter 2, Verse 15. It's a great verse. Be diligent, just like businessmen are diligent to make money.

Be diligent to present yourself approved to God. That means be wholehearted, Timothy, to make sure God can approve of you. Not just people think you're a wonderful Christian.

It means nothing. That God who sees you in secret, who sees your motives, who sees your thoughts, who sees your attitudes, can put a seal of approval and say, good. It says in Genesis Chapter 1, at the end of every day, God examined the work he had done.

Have you noticed that in Genesis 1? He saw what he had done and he said, it's good. And the next day he said something and he did something, it's good. What do I learn from that? I learn from that that God's examining every day, seeing me every day, at the end of the day, to see if it is good.

I wanted to be good in my life every single day. That's the message of Genesis Chapter 1. That at the end of the day, God can look at my whole day's life and say that was good. The way you spoke to everyone today was good.

The way you lived and the way your attitude to money today was good. And the way you reacted to people who were evil was good. The way you reacted to people who had road rage was good.

That you never fought with anyone, you never complained against anyone, it was good. At the end of the day, God must say about everything in my life, it's good. Live one day at a time, that's how I seek to do.

The Bible says we don't even know about tomorrow. What I learned from Genesis 1 is that I've got to live one day at a time and God examines my life. It must be good.

And if I live like that, it's not a strain. It's the most relaxed way to live, I'll tell you that. My life was most strenuous in the days when I didn't understand these principles.

It's so relaxed now. I sleep peacefully at night and don't have any type of dirty dreams or fearful dreams because my conscience is clear. I seek to end the day, every single day, to say that God should be able to say about me like He said in Genesis 1, it's good.

If I live like that, then He said the end of the sixth day, He says it's very good. This is our goal, brothers and sisters, the things that God shows us in the New Covenant, they did not know in the Old Covenant. So I was telling you about fellowship.

I spoke a message once on the five fingers of our hand, which gives us a good grip on things. We can hold things with two hands. I can hold a cup with two hands, but the grip won't be strong.

Somebody can take it away from me. But if I'm holding something with five fingers, that's a solid grip. And so here are the five fingers with which we can hold the Christian life.

First of all, the blood of Jesus Christ. We have to begin there. We must be absolutely convinced that every sin, and when I say every sin, every single sin I ever committed in my life, in thought, word, deed, attitude, motive, has been blotted out in the blood of Jesus Christ.

If I'm slightly in doubt about that, the devil is going to attack me. The Bible says, he's the accuser of the brethren, Revelation 12, 10. And they overcame him, the next verse, by the blood of the Lamb.

So, I don't know where all of you are today, but I know all of you sinned. And I know we've all sinned. But some among us here are absolutely sure that when God looks at us today, He looks at us as if we have never sinned.

Are you in that category? I am. I have no doubt in my mind that God looks at me in my life as if in 76 and a half years I've never sinned. Because the blood of Jesus Christ has justified me.

Romans 5, 9. Not just forgiven me, cleansed me, but justified me. I believe the Bible. It's the only book in the world which is absolutely true.

Justified means just as if I'd never sinned. That's the meaning of justified. Declared righteous.

That is the power of the blood of Jesus Christ. I believe that. It brings me such tremendous rest to know that I've never sinned in 76 and a half years in God's eyes.

That's number one. You must be sure of it, brothers and sisters. And if you've confessed your sin, and you don't blame anybody else, you've taken the blame for it, you believe that what Christ took on the cross was the punishment for your sin, why shouldn't you have that same assurance of justification that I have? A number of others here have.

You must live in that. Don't let the devil condemn you. Absolute importance.

That's where we begin. It's like the thumb, the most important finger. And then the second thing is the Holy Spirit.

God doesn't... In the Old Testament, they didn't have the Spirit of God dwelling within them. He helped them, spoke to them on the outside, encouraged them, fought their battles on the outside. But could not dwell inside them, because until the heart is cleansed in the blood of Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit could not dwell in.

And that's why nobody, even great men like John the Baptist and Elijah in the Old Testament, Christ could not live inside their heart. God was always on the outside in the Old Testament. In the Old Testament, right up to Acts chapter 2, God is on the outside.

And that's why He spoke from the outside. But now, from the day of the Pentecost, the Holy Spirit comes, God comes within, and He speaks to me from within. It's better that way, because He can help me from within.

You would think that it's better if Jesus was physically here with us. Well, look at the Gospels. Jesus was physically with those disciples for three and a half years, and yet they were scared when there was a storm in the lake.

We're not scared if there's a storm in the lake, if Jesus is inside. But you can be scared if He's on the outside. And when He's on the outside, when they sat together at the Last Supper, they were still arguing who's the greatest.

Well, you'll argue who's the greatest, even if Jesus is sitting right there at the table. But you won't argue who's the greatest when Jesus is living inside. So which is better? That's why Jesus said to His disciples, it's better for you that I go away.

You don't understand that, but it is better. It's not Jesus physically being with us that's going to help us overcome. You can't overcome dirty thoughts if Jesus is standing there.

Maybe you can control your words. You can't control your thoughts. For that, Christ has to come inside, and that's the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Whenever you say, Lord Jesus, come into my heart, come into my heart. If you've said that any time sincerely, do you know who came in? The Holy Spirit. In the Old Testament, they would say, I mean, in the early days of Christianity, they'd say, believe in Jesus and receive the Holy Spirit.

Yeah, we combine it too and say, receive the Lord Jesus Christ. It's the same thing. It's not the same as being filled with the Holy Spirit, which is another stage where we open up every part of our being and the Holy Spirit controls every aspect of our life.

But as soon as you receive Christ, the Holy Spirit has come in. You'll receive the Spirit, even if you're not baptized or filled with the Holy Spirit. The third is the Word of God.

You see that in Genesis 1, the Holy Spirit brooded over the earth, and every day God spoke a word, teaching us that every day God wants to speak a word. Think of, in Genesis 1, out of those six days, one day God didn't speak, let's say. Something would have been left out.

Maybe the sun wouldn't have been there. Something important would have been left out if one day God didn't say anything. Look through those six days and say, which of those days was unimportant? Okay, it doesn't matter if God didn't say anything that day.

Do you know that you're missing something when you don't hear God speaking to you one day? Man shall not live by bread alone. I think all of us eat something every day of our life, every single day, 365 days of the year, we eat something. But man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from God's mouth, teaching me that the most, more important than eating my daily food every day is to receive God's Word.

So that's the third thing, to receive God's Word every day. And it's not just reading the Bible. I'd rather read one verse and get something from it than read a whole chapter and ease my conscience I read the Bible.

True. If you read and you get something from it, you can meditate on it the whole day. Maybe read only one verse.

That's happened to me sometimes. I read a verse and it's like a red light, like a traffic light saying, don't move now. You've got to stop.

That means I've got to stop and meditate on that verse before I move on, because God's got something to say to me through it. And it's a good habit to think about that verse during the day. It doesn't cost us anything when we're working, driving, anything.

Think about that verse I read in the morning. Somehow God stopped me at it. I want to think about it.

This is the way we are to grow spiritually. So receive God's Word every day. And the fourth is another thing which is hardly ever spoken of in most churches.

It is taking up the cross and dying to myself every day. Jesus said, you cannot follow me. If any man wants to follow me, Luke 9, 23, let him deny himself daily.

That is, say no to self daily and take up his cross daily and follow me. So if I don't say no to myself every day, throughout the day, and if I don't die to myself, which is taking up the cross, I cannot follow Jesus. Any day which I lived like that, I did not follow Jesus.

I just followed myself or the devil or something like that. So the way of the cross is number four. Very, very important if I want to get a good grip on the Christian life.

And number five is fellowship in the body of Christ. So it's the blood, the spirit, the word, the cross, the body. The body means the body of believers with whom God wants to integrate me, where I can build fellowship.

Now, when you receive Christ as your Savior, you become a part of the worldwide body of Christ. That's immediate. God has, the Holy Spirit has placed you into what's called the church, the body of Christ.

But God also wants to put us in little groups of such churches. And that's why you read in the New Testament that Paul planted little fellowships here and there. He didn't just bring people to Christ and let them go wherever they want.

No. You see, if you were to ask even some of the greatest evangelists of today, there have been some great evangelists through the years who have gone around preaching and if you were to tell them, hey, listen, I heard thousands of people have come to Christ through your ministry in such and such a place. Can you, where are they? They say, I don't know.

I hope they joined some church. What about all those thousands of people you brought to Christ in Russia or India? Where are they? The evangelists say, I don't know. I went there and had meetings for three days and thousands of people came to Christ.

Where they are today, I don't know. But if you were to go to Paul, and that's a New Testament pattern, you say, hey, listen, Paul, I heard that you brought a few people to Christ in Philippi when you went there. Where are they? Come, I'll show you.

He'll bring you to a church and say, here are the people I brought to Christ. You see them? And Paul, I heard that you brought some people to Christ in Thessalonica. Where are they? He says, come, I'll show you.

I'll show you every one of them and take you to the church in Thessalonica and say, here are the ones I brought to Christ. That is the difference between New Testament evangelism and today's evangelism. If you want to see it.

A lot of people don't see it. Okay, I don't worry about them. But I remember, I tried the other method.

You see, God called me to leave my job 50 years ago, exactly 50 years ago, the 3rd of May, 1966. I left my job in the Navy. And for nine years, I did this other type of evangelism.

You know, preaching to huge crowds here and there in different countries. It's very satisfying. Satisfying for one's ego.

And I remember once, I went for a series of meetings for 23 days. And people were coming in different days. They'd come for three days and go.

Another group would come. And it was like a revival. People would confess their sins and get up and all that.

When I went back the next year, I found that court cases against each other and fighting and quarreling in the churches. And I saw this for nine years. And I said, what am I doing? I'm wasting my time.

What am I accomplishing? Just get a satisfaction that so many people signed decision cards or raised their hands or testified. And it looked like a revival. Hollow, empty, accomplished nothing.

The devil wanted me to be satisfied with that. I finally gave up. I gave up all my traveling.

And I said, I'm going to now build local fellowships just like Paul did. And that's what we started doing 41 years ago, right in my house. And we were only two families to begin with.

Two families, that's all. And then somebody else came. Then a lot of people would come and go, come and go.

They would testify. You know, people like to hear something new. Like in Athens, it says they always like to hear something new.

I think all over the world it's like that. Oh, this is a new group. Let's go and see that.

And they sit around for a little while and say, this doesn't suit me. And they go away. So we had people coming and going, coming and going.

Finally, over a period of time, with all that coming and going, finally there was a fellowship. And we began to taste what it is to build a local church as a body of Christ and to build fellowship. And I discovered one thing after that.

And that's what I've done now, 41 years. I said, this is the only thing worth doing. This is the only thing that will remain.

You know, like if I were living in Noah's time, I wouldn't waste my time building houses. I'd build the ark. I'd say, I'd spend all my money on the ark.

And my spare time, I'd go and say, hey, Noah, you want any help? Here I am. Because I know this is the only thing that's going to go through the flood. I wonder whether we believe that it's building the church the way Jesus wanted it.

It's the only thing that's going to remain when Christ comes back. He came to earth and he said in Matthew 16, 18, I will build my church. And the gates of hell will never be able to overcome it.

I praise God for that. I'm a co-worker with Jesus Christ, my Lord, in building, just like in Noah's time, I'd say I'm a co-worker with Noah building the ark. I'm a co-worker with Jesus Christ building the only thing that will remain when the world is destroyed as the church of Jesus Christ.

That's all. And to me, the test of that was when I had four children, I said, what do you want them to do? And I said, Lord, I want them to build a church. They may not all be called to plant churches like me.

No. But they can do something to build the church of Jesus Christ in their own way. Not everybody is called to be an apostle or an elder or a prophet.

But everybody is called to do something. Even the little fingers got to do something to build the church of Jesus Christ. And now I have grandchildren.

That's my prayer for the third generation, that they'll build the church of Jesus Christ, because I know that's the only thing that will remain when everything is gone. And when we devote ourselves to that, you can be pretty sure that God takes care of all your other needs. And my wife and I have found that as well in all these 50 years, that God's taking care of all our other needs when we devote ourselves to do His work, which is building the church.

And building the church means building people in fellowship. You see, in India, houses, the church is also called a building that God builds with Christ as the cornerstone. Here you build houses with wood.

In India, no houses are built with wood. They'll all be eaten up by termites. But it's built with brick and cement.

So the way a house is built in India is a truck will come and unload 10,000 bricks, and then on the side of the road, and then a mason comes and takes one brick at a time after the foundation is laid, cement it with the next one, and that's how a house is built. Now, to me, this is a picture of two types of churches today. One is this pile of 10,000 bricks lying on the road, and the other is those 10,000 bricks built into a house.

That's the difference between a local church and a congregation. A lot of churches today are congregations. A pile of bricks.

Now, the danger of a pile of bricks is the devil can pick it off one by one. That's what happens to it. In India, if you leave the pile of bricks there, you'll find it gets reduced miraculously every day because somebody else is building a house in the next street, and in a few days there'll be nothing left.

But if you have built it into the house, nobody goes and steals a brick from cement it into a house. That's impossible. So that's the difference between a congregation and a church.

A church is built like a house. So I want to ask all of you, are you a part of a congregation? Are you a part of a church? Jesus didn't say I'm building congregations. Congregation is an Old Testament thing.

He said I'm building megachurches, megacongregations actually. Moses had the biggest one, 2 million people, and he was a sole leader, Pastor Moses. What a congregation he had.

And he had miracles too, by the way. More miracles than any congregation on earth has seen till today. Everything you talk about, and word directly from heaven, he'd go up the mountain and meet God himself and come down with a message.

And he would do miracles and he had a megacongregation of 2 million people and God was angry with them. It says very clearly in Hebrews 3, God was angry with them. 1 Corinthians 10, it says God was not pleased with them.

I don't want to be a part of such a congregation which sees miracles and God's not happy with. Because it's not a fellowship. It's not built together.

One mark of spiritual growth. I told you humility, spirit of thanksgiving, and that there's an increasing fellowship that's coming between me and the other people with whom God has placed me. Now, I realize that I can't have, you know, daily, I mean, regular fellowship with all the millions and millions of believers in the world.

Well, that's understandable. But I can't have with the small group of people God places me with locally. That's why in the New Testament there were local churches, one in Ephesus and Philippi, Thessalonica, Corinth, fellowships.

And the New Covenant is not just about victory over sin. It's not just about humility and always giving thanks. All this must lead to a growing fellowship between people, which is impossible in the Old Covenant.

That's why, you know, even the great prophets in the Old Covenant, God never made them work together. You never read in the Old Testament of two prophets working together. If you read the timeline, there were certain contemporaries of Jeremiah just before the Israelites went to Babylon.

There were people like Zephaniah, Habakkuk, and all were around the same time. There was a prophetess called Huldah as well. They all lived in Jeremiah's time, or approximately around the same time.

But they never worked together. You never find them working together. One was in one place, Israel, and the other would be somewhere else.

Why didn't they work together? Because God knew they'd fight with each other. I mean, imagine 12 disciples who walked with Jesus for three and a half years. At the end of it, they're still fighting who's going to be the leader.

And can you imagine how it would be in the Old Testament without Jesus being there? They wouldn't get along with each other, and the whole testimony would be spoiled. So God said, I'll keep Jeremiah here, and I'll keep Habakkuk over there, and I'll keep Zephaniah over there, so that they won't get into conflict with each other. Maybe they'll come together once in a while for a conference or a convention, say hi, and all that, and go back to their corners after that, exactly like a lot of Christians do today.

We come together. We're not going to be built together. That's too much.

But as soon as Jesus came, he changed the rule. He says he sent out his disciples two by two. Have you noticed that, Luke chapter 10? He sent out his disciples two by two.

He never sent a disciple alone. He changed that old covenant thing, because now he was preparing them for the new covenant. Of course, it didn't work very well, because they were still fighting at the end of three and a half years.

But on the day of Pentecost, it changed. God took those 120 pieces of iron, we can say, put them into the furnace, and they came out as one piece. That's the miracle of putting iron pieces into a furnace.

And that's the baptism of the Holy Spirit and fire that made 120 people one. And it's more important for a few people to be one. That's a church, even if there are only four or five people there, than a huge congregation of two million.

But I don't think everybody sees it like that, because from childhood, our human way of looking is quantity impresses us. Skyscraper. Wow.

But on what foundation is it built? If it's built on sand, it's going to collapse. And Jesus said at the end of the Sermon on the Mount, the wise man is the man who hears what I have said and obeys it. He's building on the rock.

The only church that's built on the rock, I believe, according to that verse, is the church that is teaching obedience to all of Jesus' commandments. That's the only church I want to be a part of. I don't want to build a skyscraper and see the whole thing collapse one day when the rain and the storm come.

That's the message there. The foolish man is not the man who didn't go to church. No.

The foolish man, it says in Matthew 7, if you're not familiar with it, look at it in Matthew 7. The foolish man, Matthew 7, is one who hears my word, verse 26, and does not do it. The foolish man and the wise man, verse 24, the wise man is the man who hears my word and does it and his house is built on the rock. And the foolish man, verse 26, is also the one who hears it but does not do it.

In other words, both are sitting in the church. Meaning, what we call church, Sunday morning meeting, they're there but they're not part of the real church. They hear and they do and they hear and they don't do.

I mean, here in a congregation like this, we're only a few people. There could be, all of us are hearing, I hope so, paying attention. I think you are.

But I don't know whether all of you are going to obey when you go away from here. That's another thing. All of you are hearing and understanding, praise the Lord for that.

The wise man, the foolish man, the wise woman, the foolish woman are both sitting in the same meeting, in the same service, listening, listening, understanding, grasping, everything. But the wise man goes out and obeys it. He's the man who builds, puts a rock foundation.

The foolish person is the one who's understood it. He can probably explain it, he can probably preach it, but he doesn't practice it. And if he doesn't practice it, Jesus said his foundation is sand.

Because it takes a little effort to build on rock. You know, in another passage, the parallel passage in Luke's gospel, you see that these two people built next to each other. You know, when I first read Matthew chapter 7, I thought the wise man chose a sort of a rocky area and the foolish man chose a sandy area.

It's not true. They were both building next to each other. It was sand and mud on top.

The only difference was the wise man dug deep till he hit rock. You see that in Luke chapter 6. The same story. The wise man is one, verse 48, like a man building a house.

Verse 47 first, he hears my word and does it. He's like a man building a house, verse 48, who digs deep and hits rock and lays his foundation there. The other fellow, the foolish man, is the one who does not dig deep.

So they were building next to each other. The one fellow said, I don't want to put a superficial foundation. I know it will cost less.

Imagine the amount of money I have to spend if I have to dig deep and the rock is pretty deep down and I have to use dynamite and blast the rock and a lot of expense. Why waste all that money when the important thing is the house? Let me just superficially lay a foundation and build something. And in the beginning, it looks as if the foolish man is the wise man.

Because he's built so quickly and such a grand house with a little bit of money. With all the money he had, he built a grand house. And the wise man looks foolish because he spent most of the money on the foundation, which nobody can see.

Imagine wasting your money and building a house in a part nobody can see. Doesn't everybody want to impress people? And then he doesn't have much money to build the rest of the house. So the house is not very impressive and not very big.

Whereas the foolish man who spent all his money on the house and not the foundation, he's built a huge multi-story building and everybody walks by and says, wow, that man is the wise man. Look at the number of people who come to his church. Look at this small little group here, this small building.

Okay. Just wait till the storm comes. Wait till the rains and the flood comes.

It just wiped out that building. And that's what's going to happen when Christ comes back again. And that's the foundation of all these congregations and churches.

Was it in obedience to what I said? Or was it just hearing, getting knowledge, and then that's it? So, like I said, putting these bricks together, cemented. You know, there's a lot of advantage in being in a pile of bricks. You can walk off when you like, come back when you like.

But when you have brick on top of brick, the way a house is built in India, cemented, it's very inconvenient to have a brick on top of you and one underneath you and one this side and one that side. There's not much room for movement. It's much easier to be a part of a congregation where you can come and go when you like, do what you like.

Nobody there to question you. You're not answerable to anybody. And you're not responsible to anyone.

You don't have anyone to check up on you. You just do what you like and come and sit and sing all the songs and nod your head when you hear the sermon and go home and do what you like. Those are the people the devil picks off.

Those are the people who remain defeated by sin and who never seem to overcome. Even though they've understood all the theory of it, they're still defeated. I know in my own life, it's only when I finally got that fifth finger, the blood, the word, the spirit, the cross, and then it's only when I got that fifth finger of fellowship that I really came to an overcoming life.

That's my testimony. I see it so clearly. I was a defeated Christian until I was filled with the Holy Spirit.

I was even speaking in tongues. But I was still defeated. I'll tell you honestly.

But when I came into fellowship, then I understood what overcoming was. Because I'll tell you why. You see, when you're alone, it's like I never knew how selfish I was until I got married, first of all.

I think most married people will acknowledge that. Because when we are single, if someone is a bit uncomfortable, I can withdraw from him and not contact him anymore. If somebody else is uncomfortable, I can withdraw from him.

But what do you do when you get married and you find the one you married is a bit uncomfortable? There's no withdrawal. You're there. In the olden days, you'd retreat into a room and you're all by yourself.

Now you're retreating into a room and there's somebody else there in that room. And you're going to live with her or live with him. And you discover in that moment what you never discovered in all your single days, what an utterly selfish person you are.

How you don't consider the other person's feelings or seek to help in what the other person is doing. I mean, go and ask most wives. They'll tell you the husband acts as if he's still a single person.

He doesn't realize that there are responsibilities in the house. And that's why there's so much of criticism, a husband and wife, because each thinks that the other person is taking it easy. So imagine you increase that to not just two people, but more people in a church.

You say, wow, this is going to be tough. It's better I just belong to a congregation. I'll tell you why.

Because we haven't understood that the primary purpose of salvation is to deliver us from self sitting on the throne of our life. Let me say that again. From the day you were born, Adam's nature is for self to sit on the throne of your life.

Say, I want what I want. You see little children. Self is on the throne of their life.

They fight for they grab, fight with each other. Self is on the throne. We can teach them to be cultured and nice on the outside.

You must share your toys with the other children. Be nice and all that. But it's only external.

And don't grab the biggest piece of cake. So you teach your child to wait for the others to. He still wants to grab it, but he doesn't grab it.

And when we grow up, we still want to grab it, but it's bad manners. So we hope nobody else gets it. We haven't changed.

Self is still the same. How do I know? Because I'm like that. I know you got the same flesh as me.

That's how I know how every human being in the world behaves. And that is what Jesus came to remove from the throne and say, I want to sit on the throne of your life. And I think you cannot have two people on the throne.

You cannot. And if self is still running your life, your repentance is not complete. I will not say you're not converted.

That would be too strong a statement. It would send you home discouraged. I wouldn't say that.

But I'd say your repentance is not complete. You know, repentance is a 180 degree turn. I remember once someone who was not very good at geometry seeking to be radical and saying, I want a 360 degree turn.

When you get a 360 degree turn, you're still facing the same direction in which you always were. No, repentance is not a 360 degree turn. Unfortunately, it is for some Christians.

It is a 360 degree turn. They turned right around in the meeting and came back facing the same direction. That is not repentance.

Repentance is a 180 degree turn where you are facing exact opposite. In the olden days, the world and sin and my will and what pleased me was in front, and God and everybody else was behind. Now, 180 degrees turn means self is there.

And I'm now facing God with self behind me. Now, I can turn 90 degrees. Keep an eye on both sides.

Try and please God and please myself. This is how most Christians live. Some maybe a little more, 120 degrees.

I want to ask you if you understood what a 180 degree repentance is. I don't think any of us manage it perfectly. We must be willing for it.

I think I was willing for it when I was converted, but I never discovered how deep-rooted self was. And little by little, as God showed it to me, I could put that to death. That is the meaning of taking up the cross every day.

What is it I have to crucify on the cross every day? Myself. My self-life, which gets offended with what somebody said or what somebody did or what somebody did not say. I expected him to say something.

I expected him to come and help me, and he didn't help me, and I'm offended. It's self. It's absolutely self.

And I tell you this, there are so many Christians. I've seen that even in our own CFC churches where people have heard and heard and heard and heard and heard, they've got all their information oozing out of their heads, but self is still on the throne. The proof of it is they get offended with some little thing, some little thing in the home or some little thing that some brother did.

I say, what's the point? God's looking at your life and saying, it is not good. God looked at what happened during that day and said, it's not good. Have you heard it? Man shall live by every word that proceeds from

God's mouth.

It is not good. So God gives us a lot of opportunities in the day to discover whether Christ is on the throne or whether self is on the throne. And this is why I say holiness, which does not lead to fellowship with others, is a deception.

Holiness, which does not lead to deeper fellowship with other God-fearing people. I can't have fellowship with everybody, but with other people who are walking in the light, it's a deception. So to me, I'm very thankful that I'm in a church where I have to relate to other people constantly, not just see them on Sunday and disappear until next Sunday, but see them frequently and see how I relate to them.

And here's a guy whose self is not completely eliminated from his life, and here is me, from whom self is not eliminated completely. I'll be honest about that. If I say that self is completely eliminated in my life, what I'm saying is, I have become completely like Jesus Christ.

It's not true. We become like Jesus when He comes again. But we need to do something until He comes again.

Let me turn you to 1 John 3. 1 John 3, verse 2, the last part, it says, We know that when Jesus appears, we will be like Him. You're not going to be like Him until He appears. And we shall see Him just as He is.

But until that day, what should I do? It says in the next verse, If you have this hope, what hope? That one day I'm going to be like Him completely, where there'll be zero self and 100% Christ. I start with 100% self and zero Christ in my unconverted days. Then I turn around and I say, I want to have 100% Christ and zero self, but it doesn't happen overnight.

Little by little, like you read in Genesis 1, day by day by day by day. It takes more than six days with us. It takes 60 years or 70 years.

Little by little by little, it says in verse 3, He purifies Himself. This is not cleansing in the blood. Cleansing in the blood deals with my past life, which is what God does for me.

I can't do it. I can't remove the guilt of my past sins. The blood of Jesus deals with that.

But this is talking about my self-centered life. I purify myself. He purifies Himself.

Are you doing that? If you're not doing that, according to verse 3, you don't have the hope that one day you'll be like Him. Because it says here, everyone, everyone who has this hope, that one day I'll be completely like Jesus Christ, purifies Himself now. Purifies Himself from what? From His self-centered life, just as Jesus is pure.

This is the meaning of 1 John 2, 6. In 1 John 2, 6, it says, The one who says he abides in Christ must walk as He walked. Not become like Him. You've got to understand the difference between walking as He walked and becoming like Him.

Becoming like Him is only when He returns. Then I'll be perfect. Zero self and 100% Christ.

It's not yet true. But until that day, I can walk as He walked. That means by the principles which governed His life.

What are the principles that governed His life? I'll tell you in one sentence. He said it Himself. Turn with me to John 6, verse 38.

John 6, verse 38. Jesus said, I've come from heaven never to do my own will but the will of Him who sent me. There in one sentence you see how Jesus lived.

Every single day He sought to do the will of His Father and sometimes that was not what He wanted to do. For example, for 30 years the will of His Father was not to do miracles or preach or cast out demons. It was just to be at home and obey Joseph and Mary.

And I think Joseph died sometime when Jesus was a young man. Then it was Mary. And do you think Jesus, He was like a little boy.

Do your little children always like to do what Mommy says? I don't think so. So when, I sometimes use this illustration of Jesus 12 years old playing ball. I mean throughout history every game is a bat and a ball.

So children were playing something the equivalent of baseball outside. And it's come for time for Jesus to bat. That's what everybody loves.

And that time Mary calls Him saying, Hey Jesus come here, I want you to help me. What would the average child today say? Mommy wait just 5 minutes, which means 45 minutes and I'll come. You know what Jesus did? I'm sure He loved to bat.

He said no to His own will. I'm sure it was painful. Dropped His bat with all the people teasing Him, Hey you're Mama's boy.

You can say what you like. He said yes Mom, what do you want me to do? I want you to go take a bucket, that wooden bucket and get some water from the well. And I'm sure He didn't bring a half bucket of water.

This principle that Jesus said on the cross, it is finished, was a principle that applied to everything He did in His life. Everything was, if He brought a bucket of water it was a full bucket of water. If He made a table in His carpenter shop it was a table that wouldn't rock on His legs.

It was absolutely stable. It is finished. Even if it took longer, if it meant more time, it was a principle of a finished work.

He denied Himself. What about when it says His 4 brothers, He had 4 younger brothers and 2 younger sisters at home. And they teased Him and troubled Him.

He wouldn't sin. And you know how children are when they see someone who is really good and not getting irritated at all. They want to do everything possible to irritate Him and get Him angry, and they didn't succeed.

They didn't succeed for 30 years. You and I know how difficult it is to live without sin for one day. I always say the greatest miracle in Jesus' life was that He lived 33 and a half years on this earth, tempted like us and never sinned once.

In thought, word, deed, attitude, motive. He was so utterly faithful. Never to do His own will.

Never to please Himself. This is my example. And I'm pursuing that wholeheartedly.

It's a lot better now than it was in my life 10, 20, 30 years ago, but I still know I've got a long way to go. Paul said, Follow me as I follow Christ. And one more verse in Romans chapter 15 about Jesus' life.

Romans 15, it says verse 3 Christ did not please Himself. You know, He lived 33 and a half years on earth, never pleasing Himself. He always sought to please God.

And if I want to please God, I have to stop pleasing myself. I have to stop choosing what I want and say, Lord, I want what You want. Now whether we're doing it or not is something only God sees.

I mean, you don't know. You can think of me as a holy guy standing up here, preaching, but you don't have a clue whether I'm making that choice in my daily life. That I will not, according to the light I have, that I don't want to please myself.

I want to please God. Whether it's inconvenient or not makes no difference. Is that going to please God or not? You know, it can be a little thing like watching some particular television program.

Is that something that would please God or just pleases me? Or watching something on the computer or on your phone? Is that something that will please God or please me? There are very few serious Christians on earth, I'll tell you that. First of all, because they're not taught what a 180 degree turn for repentance really is. I've had numerous people who have come to our church in the last 40 years who said, Brother Zach, I don't think I was even converted properly till I came to your church.

I said, why? He said, well, over there I was in that other church and I accepted the Lord and I thought I was born again. But it's only after I came here that I even understood what sin was. I never understood that pleasing yourself is a sin.

So what sort of repentance did I have in that other place? It was a shallow, empty, hollow repentance where I gave up drinking and I gave up smoking and I gave up some bad habits and I thought I was a Christian. You know there are hundreds of non-Christians who don't have those bad habits? There are many non-Christians in India who don't drink, who don't smoke, who never divorce their wives. They're better than some so-called Christians.

It's just the external. But self is still in the center of their life. That's how it is with a lot of Christians.

A lot of Christians are just living in a self-deception that everything's alright with them, but 90% is wrong. So this is why fellowship is not built. Because I have my stubborn self sitting inside me and I go to a good church and I say, I don't want anyone coming near this fortress.

Don't ever come into this fortress. We'll say hi over the wall, the fortress and fellowship with you and you're in your fortress and we say hi over the wall and we call it fellowship. It's not.

And that's why so often even in churches there's a lack of being honest. We have to pretend that everything's going well in our life when it is not. Why? Because I'm afraid that fellow will not accept me if he sees what I'm really like.

It's a wonderful thing to be in a church where we love one another. We accept one another as we are. Just like in a home we don't just accept the father just doesn't accept all the mature adult children.

He loves the little babies who dirty their diapers numerous times a day. Yeah, in the church also there are babies and there are grown up people and we accept one another just as they are. And fellowship is built.

The church is meant to be like a family where we know one another, we care for one another. That's fellowship. And I know I'm growing spiritually if I'm in a church where that sense of family is getting better and better.

Not perfect. Nothing is perfect on this earth. But getting better and better with time.

And I thank God that I found a church like that 40 years ago. And I've seen what has happened not only in that church but in a number of other churches that we have planted in India and other places through the years. We've seen what family is.

Not big huge congregations, but little little fellowships where we love one another and grow. We're not, we're trying our best not to seek our own but seek the good of the other. That's why Jesus said you know that wonderful verse? John chapter 13 and verse 34 and 35 All men will know you are my disciples when you love them? No.

When you love one another. It's an amazing verse. It doesn't fit with my logic.

My logic and what a lot of Christians also think like that is people will know that you are disciples of Jesus when you love them. Doesn't that sound more right? God says my ways are not your ways. My thoughts are not your thoughts.

As the heavens are high above the earth, so are the my ways above your ways. All men will know you are my disciples when you love one another. I accept the word of Jesus and not the teaching of psychology that people will know you're Christians when you love them.

That'll come. But I go by Jesus words. Love one another means I'm built in a fellowship with one another.

A church, this is the church that Jesus is building and for myself I have come to see that this is the way I know I'm growing. I spoke of humility and thanksgiving but then my fellowship with my fellow believers is getting better and better and better and better. That I'm getting more integrated with the local church God's put me as a part of.

I'm not like a butterfly going from this flower to that flower to the other flower to the other flower. Where can I get some honey now? Which church, which preacher is coming here and which preacher is coming there? This is like butterflies going from flower to flower to flower or like people go from restaurant to restaurant Thai restaurant. Oh no, I think I better go over Chinese now or Indian food.

I like, this is how a lot of people go to churches to suit their tastes. But what about a family? You better eat what mama's made. Whether it's Chinese or Thai or or nothing.

That's a family where we're not going according to taste. We belong to one another. We love one another.

We're not just listening to great sermons. We're building fellowship. Don't think the best church is the one that's got the best preacher.

It's not true. It's a restaurant in a family. So you know you belong to a family and see preaching is a matter of gift and God doesn't give it to everybody.

I've seen that. I know God gave me this gift when I was 23 years old. It's just like that.

And I know more than anybody else it's not something I could produce. You can't produce something when you're 23. I'd been baptized only two years before that.

God chose me for a particular task, gave me that gift and I don't expect anybody to have my gift. And I don't think you should expect anybody else to have a gift God's given to someone. Because if preaching was the most important thing that God saw to be in the body of Christ, do you know that God could have just as easily given the gift He gave me to hundreds and thousands of other people.

All of you would have been able to preach just like me without a problem. But God says, no, this is what I give Him. This is what I give this other person.

And all of us are needed. Like the Bible says if everything was a tongue, what sort of body would that be? Just tongues everywhere all over the place or eyes everywhere or little fingers everywhere. No.

That's not the body. Each has got a function. And we love one another and every part is needed.

No part is to be despised. So just because you don't have the gift of preaching or singing or playing a musical instrument does not mean in the family, every person is needed. And whatever your gift may be, there is a little bit that you have.

I've used this example. Some people may say, well, I'm just a little finger. What is a little finger? My body can do without a little finger.

No, not necessarily. There are times when a little finger is very useful. To get a good grip on something, you need that little finger as well.

Or somebody says, I'm a little toe. Now, I've heard doctors say that if you remove your ten toes, you won't be able to stand properly. Did you know that? Do you know that your stability is not just dependent on your big feet? It's dependent on those tiny little toes that make you able to stand properly.

So don't despise it. Or the nails. When you feel scratchy, which part of the body can help you? Not your tongue.

Not your ears. Those despised little nails. Those are the ones that make you feel, ah.

So don't ever say you don't have a gift. Can you scratch somebody's back? Who's there who cannot scratch somebody's back? You know what that gift is? The gift of encouragement. Every one of us can encourage somebody else.

I remember when I was a 30 year old young man, a man who was double my age, a godly man who couldn't even speak English properly, put his hands on my shoulder and said, God's got a plan for you. That's all he said. But I remember it after 46 years.

I mean, I've forgotten many other profound sermons that other people preached. Because at that time it was such a word of encouragement to me, to a discouraged young Christian. It doesn't take much to encourage somebody, you know.

At the end of an email, just speak a word of encouragement. At the end of a phone conversation, 10 seconds more just to give a word of encouragement. Who is there who cannot do it? Why don't we do it? I'll tell you why.

Because we are so self-centered. Everybody must comfort me. I'm in such deep depression.

Comfort me, comfort me. I'll tell you how to get comforted, sister, brother. Get out of seeking your own.

Die to yourself. Seek to bless others. And you'll see what will happen.

There's a great verse in Proverbs 11, 25. These are some of the blessings of fellowship. This is how you know you're growing.

Proverbs 11 and verse 25 it says, He who waters others will be watered also himself. Do you know what that means? That if I go and water somebody else's plant, God will water my plant. If I go and bless somebody else, God will bless me.

It's a great verse. If you water others, God will water you. And if you're dry and God's not watering you, you know the reason now.

You're not watering anybody else. You're just thinking of yourself. You say, but I don't have a gift.

Maybe you don't have a gift to preach, but what about scratching somebody's back, encouraging? Just a word of encouragement. This is how we build fellowship. So this is a mark of growth that we have learned to encourage one another a little more.

And begin with the one who's living at home with you. Love your neighbor as yourself. Who is your closest neighbor? Your marriage partner.

Sometimes we think we're looking over the wall on the other side. No, no, no. Don't look over the wall.

Right inside your room is your closest neighbor. Your husband, your wife. Encourage one another and build fellowship.

That's why in our churches we emphasize family life as much as church life. I say if it doesn't work at home, don't give it to others. Don't give a gospel to others that hasn't worked in your home.

I mean, if you've got a microwave that's packed up, would you give that as a gift to somebody? It doesn't work in your home. Pack it up nicely and give it to someone. You wouldn't do that.

You wouldn't give a gift to someone that doesn't work in your home. Don't give a gospel to other people that has not worked in your own home first. That's wrong.

It's an insult. To give a person an electronic gadget that didn't work at home is an insult to give a gospel to somebody else that doesn't work in your own home. Begin in your own home.

Jesus said in Jerusalem first, then Judea, Samaria, the outermost parts of the earth. Jerusalem is your home and your local fellowship, your local church. So I begin in my home and then I go to the local church.

I'll reach the outermost parts of the earth, so hang on. That can wait. But I begin with Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, the outermost parts of the earth.

So my home and my local church, I've got to build fellowship here and ultimately God will be able to reach even the outermost parts of the earth. I mean, when we started, I'll tell you, we didn't dream of going outside that small little place around our home. Just a few people living around here.

Lord, we want to build a little testimony for you here, that's all. And we'd be happy. But as God began to build that, we prayed, Lord, are there other people a little wider circle? Maybe Judea, Samaria, where people are missing out on this life? Bring us in touch with them.

We're not going to push and all that. God brings us in touch with them amazingly. So dear brothers and sisters, build fellowship.

Get rid of the spirit of competition, trying to show that you're better than somebody else. There's no place for that. You know, that can easily come even in a good church.

If somebody wants to say, I pray better or I sing better or my children are better than your children. Ho, ho. You haven't understood.

You turn 360 degrees, not 180 degrees. We're not here to show. But that can happen in a church if it goes well with your children, to inwardly be a little proud that it's gone well with my kids or the desire to compete to show my kids are better than somebody else's kids.

That's the thing that'll kill fellowship. I remember I was in a meeting many years ago out in North Carolina or somewhere. It was a Mennonite group of me, mostly of them from that background.

Many of them had a number of children and a number of those children had Down's Syndrome. You know what that means? They're not absolutely normal. Their mental ability is less.

There were a number of them in that particular group. And boy, I really loved to go and make friends with these little children. My heart went out to them because I knew that they didn't have the opportunities I had to show my love.

I knew all of them would go to heaven, without a doubt. But they wouldn't have the opportunity to show their love for Jesus like I had. My heart went out to them and they would smile and I was so moved by them and blessed by them without their saying anything.

So, I got up in the meeting and I said, all those are going to heaven. We've really blessed one another and I want to say how these little children have blessed me. I'll tell you how they blessed me.

You know, all of us are hard-hearted people. We've descended from Adam with a hardness in our heart that's got to be softened by every possible means. And when I see these little children, my heart is softened a little bit.

And I thank God for that. And every child like that I see softens my heart a little bit, which is good for me. I want my heart to be completely soft like Jesus' heart was.

And so these children do it for me without even preaching to me, without opening their mouth, they bless me. Thank God. God does His things in such a wonderful way that no man gets the honor.

So, it's a wonderful thing. We're not in competition with anybody. We're not here to show that we're better than anybody else or our children are better than anybody else or smarter than anybody else.

We're here to bless one another and build one another up. We're not here to judge one another. We're here to bless one another and love one another and thus glorify His name.

Amen.

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

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