

From God Through God and to God

by Zac Poonen

God has a plan for our lives, and we are called to live according to that plan, which includes doing good works that He has prepared beforehand.

Duration: 1:03:02

Scripture: Deuteronomy 1:3, Luke 5:15

Topics: "Gods Will", "Holy Spirit"

Description

This sermon emphasizes the importance of seeking and following God's will, relying on His power, and giving Him all the glory in our lives. It highlights the need to seek God's will in every decision, operate in the power of the Holy Spirit, and ensure that all glory goes to God alone. The speaker shares personal experiences and biblical insights to encourage a life built on God's will, power, and glory.

Transcript

Well, praise the Lord, brothers and sisters. It's another opportunity to get into the Word of God to understand things that may not be so clear to us. The Bible says that the God of this world, Satan, blinds the minds of unbelievers so that they don't see the truth of the Gospel.

He prevents people from seeing that all their sins were taken by Jesus on the cross, and that they don't have to accept turn from their sin and believe in Him. That sounds so simple and so many people don't like to see it, but many of us have seen it, that our sins are forgiven, not the way man thinks their sin should be forgiven. You know, all religions almost teach that you have to do something for God to accept you.

And that's why the Christian Gospel is unique. But once most of us have accepted Christ as our Savior, but then the devil seeks to blind us to what is God's will for us after we have become born again. You know, Jesus spoke in Luke 14 about a man who laid a foundation and never built anything on it.

And that is the condition of a person who has accepted Christ as Savior. That is the foundation. He's laid a good foundation.

He knows that salvation is not by works, but by faith in Jesus Christ. But after that, most Christians have not understood what is the will of God. Just like the unbeliever thinks that this is the way to find salvation, and he's completely wrong.

You know, people go and dip themselves in a river or go on pilgrimages, burn candles, give money, thinking all these different ways of salvation, and they're all wrong. In the same way, many believers, after having laid a good foundation, don't know how to build the superstructure. But they think they know.

Just like those unbelievers think they know the way of salvation, and you know they're wrong. When God opens our eyes to see how to build the superstructure, we discover that all our human ideas are wrong. So let me begin by showing you Ephesians chapter 2, verse 8, 9 and 10.

Most believers know verses 8 and 9. They do not know verse 10. And that's the problem. 8 and 9 is the foundation.

Verse 10 is the superstructure. By grace, you have been saved through faith. And that's referring to being saved from the penalty of sin.

Salvation has got three tenses, past, present, future. Salvation from the penalty or punishment for sin is finished once we accept Christ as our Savior. Then there's a salvation from the power of sin, which we have to experience every day.

The law of sin that operates in our body is like the law of gravity. It keeps on pulling everything down. And we need to experience the power of God to hold us up against this law of sin.

It's a daily experience of being saved from the power of sin. So saved from the penalty of sin, past tense, to be saved from the power of sin in the daily present tense. And one day in the future when Christ comes again, we'll be saved from the presence of sin.

That means we won't even be tempted. So past and future, we can forget if we have accepted Christ. We have to think now of being saved from the power of sin.

So by grace, you have been saved from the penalty of sin through faith. And that, it's not of ourselves, means it's nothing that we did that enabled us to be saved from that punishment. It is the gift of God, not as a result of works that anyone should boast.

This is such a well-known verse among believers, that they think that if there are no works in the foundation, then there are no works in the superstructure also. This is where the devil has deceived believers. Not as a result of works.

Now remember, we're talking about the foundation. How can my sins be forgiven? Any amount of works that you do will never forgive your sin. We know that.

Our good deeds are like filthy rags in God's eyes. No works, no works. All believers talk about no works.

In fact, one of the things people accuse me of in my preaching is, oh brother Zak, you're preaching salvation by works. Hang on. I believe salvation from the penalty of sin is by no works.

Let me make that clear once and for all. Not as a result of works. No works can forgive even one sin of yours.

It is purely the grace of God. But once the foundation is over, then we go to the superstructure, verse 10. We are His workmanship.

That means He has made us anew in Christ. What for? He has created us in Christ Jesus for good works. No works in verse 9, plenty of good works in verse 10.

No works in the foundation, plenty of good works in the superstructure. That is what Christians, the devil blinds people to. Just like he's blinded the unbeliever to the fact that salvation from the penalty of sin is by no works.

The world is full of hundreds of religions, all seeking to get salvation by works. Something, something to do to get forgiveness. And they are wrong.

The devil has blinded them by saying, do this work, do that work, roll on the ground, dip in a river, go on some pilgrimage, give some money, do something and God will forgive you. It's a false teaching. The devil has blinded people's eyes.

Now the opposite of that, when the person has become a believer, then the devil keeps telling him, no works in your life. You don't depend on your works. Forget about works.

And that's where the devil has blinded believers to in realizing that in the superstructure, there must be plenty of works. And it says that we are now recreated in Christ Jesus, a new creation for what? For good works and not any type of good works, but good works which God appointed long ago that we should walk in them. Not works that we choose.

You know, Jesus taught us to pray, thy will be in our father who art in heaven, thy kingdom, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done, that means in my life, as it is done in heaven. How is God's will done in heaven by the angels? They don't just run around doing something for God. Sometimes you hear preachers and believers tell other angels, go and do something for God.

You don't find an angel telling the other angels, go and do something for God, man. Don't just sit around lazily. That's not what the angels are doing.

You know what the angels are doing in heaven? They're waiting on God, the father. And God tells them, okay, Gabriel, you do this. He goes and does that.

Then he comes back before God and waits upon him. Then he's given another job. Michael is given another job.

That's how the angels do God's will in heaven. They don't think of their own bright ideas. What should I do next for God? Only human beings think like that.

Arrogant, proud human beings who think that they can do God's work according to their intelligence and their cleverness. And the end result is they do Christianity according to the principles of the advertising world and the business world, which is not God's way. That's not God's way.

The foolishness. That's why there's so much of death in Christendom, spiritual death, I mean. You remember in the Old Testament, there's a story how David carried the ark on an ox cart.

That was not God's way. God's way was that the sons of Levi should carry the ark on their shoulders. But there is a long journey to go.

And David said, well, that's a long journey. Why trouble these poor people to carry it on there? Let's modify God's plan and let's put it on an ox cart. Where did he get that idea from? You read in one Samuel that when the Philistines had taken the ark captive, they put it on an ox cart and sent it back to Israel.

And David heard about that. He hadn't seen it. It was before he was born.

When he heard about that, he said, that's a bright idea. He got the idea from the Philistines. And Christian work today has got a lot of ideas from the business world, from the advertising world.

What is the result? What happened in David's case? Death. One of his fine workers, Uzzah, died because he touched that ark. That's the same principle we see today when the Christian world follows the principles of the Philistines and the techniques that the world adopts in, for example, the way Christians raise funds for doing God's work.

Can you show me one place in Scripture where Jesus and the apostles who did the greatest work of all ever went around raising funds the way Christians are doing today? Where did they get that idea from? From the business world. The business world, when they have a public issue for their company, they raise funds from the world. The Christians are following the same principle.

Advertising the gospel. If Jesus wanted to spread the gospel quickly, he could have given it to an advertising agency. Why did he give it to some 12 unlearned fishermen and poor people? That's not God's way.

People haven't understood. Works, verse 10, which God has prepared beforehand that we should walk in them. Very important to understand that.

That in the foundation, no works. In the superstructure, plenty of works. Just like in the foundation of a building, we don't put doors and windows, etc., but in the superstructure, plenty of doors and windows.

Supposing a person says, no, we don't have any doors and windows in the foundation, we won't have any doors and windows in the superstructure. That's crazy. We won't have any works in the foundation of our Christian life.

We have no works. Everything is no works. We need to understand this very clearly.

No works in the foundation, plenty of works in the superstructure, and the devil blinds unbelievers saying, works in the foundation and no works in the superstructure. He reverses what God has said. It's so clear.

You look at Christendom and you find that that is true. What does it mean when it says, works that God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them? Let me show you a verse in Psalm 139. In Psalm 139, David explains this, inspired by the Holy Spirit.

He talks about the time when he was born and before he was born. In Psalm 139, verse 14 onwards, I'll give thanks to you, Lord, because I've been fearfully and wonderfully made. Verse 15, my frame was not hidden from you when I was made in secret.

Your eyes, verse 16, saw my unformed substance. That's referring to the fact that when we were little embryos, all of us were little embryos once inside our mother's womb. Unformed parts of our body were not fully formed.

And your eyes saw my unformed substance. And in your book, all the days that were ordained for me were written down. I don't know whether you know that, that God has planned the days of our life before we came out of our mother's womb.

I mean, you may not believe it. I believe it with all my heart. When as yet, there was not even one of them.

So I see my own life, and you can apply this to yourself. And before I was born, God planned where I should be each day of my life. You say, surely God doesn't plan such details.

Well, according to your faith, be it unto you. My faith is that God has planned every detail of my life. But whether I walk in it or not is another thing.

Ephesians 2.10. Works that God prepared beforehand that I should walk in them. That means before I was born. That's what Psalm 139 says.

All the days that were for me, what I should do was planned. Okay, if you don't believe it about yourself, let me ask you. Do you believe that God planned where Jesus should be born? Could he have been born in any town in Israel? Or did he have to be born in Bethlehem? It had to be Bethlehem, because he prophesied that through Micah.

That was God's plan. God, Jesus could not be born anywhere. And yet his mother was in Nazareth.

How in the world could a mother in Nazareth have a baby in Bethlehem? You know, in the villages of India. Nobody moves out of that village. If a person lives in a village, they give birth in that same village.

You never hear of somebody delivering a baby in some other town. You know what God did? God did an amazing thing there. He made Caesar in Rome pass a stupid law that when you take a census, everybody must go to their hometown.

Census is just counting the number of people in a country. You don't have to go to your hometown to be counted. When you take a census in India, for example, nobody is told to go to their home village.

It's a crazy law. Go to your home village and then we'll take the census. But Caesar passed a law and Caesar's law is absolute and everybody in Israel had to keep going to their hometown.

And Mary had to go to Bethlehem. It was all for the sake of the fulfillment of Scripture that Jesus should be born in Bethlehem. It's amazing what all God does.

He changes world events for some plan of His to be fulfilled. And everything in Jesus' life, you read in the Gospel of Matthew, that he went to Egypt because Herod was killing the little babies in Bethlehem. And that was written in Scripture in the book of Hosea.

You read that in Matthew chapter 2. Out of Egypt I have called my son. And then he left Egypt and when Herod died and came to Nazareth. And it says in Matthew chapter 2, the last verse, so that it might be fulfilled what is written in the Prophets that he shall be called a Nazarene.

Not a Nazirite, but a Nazarene. I was living in Jesus' life. It says so that the Scripture might be fulfilled.

Sometimes you take time to read the Gospel of Matthew, you'll find many many things. So that the Scripture might be fulfilled. Even when he's hanging on the cross, he says, I thirst so that the Scripture

might be fulfilled.

So many things in Jesus' life you find. So that some prophecy about Him should be fulfilled. Little little things happen in His life.

His entire life was planned by God. That's why once when they took Him to the top of a cliff to throw Him down, He couldn't be killed there. Once when there was a storm in the sea, He could not die in the sea.

That's impossible. Because it was planned that at the age of 33 and a half, He should be crucified on a cross. That's also written in Deuteronomy.

Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree. Jesus' life was planned exactly from the day He was born till the day He died. Nothing was left out.

Everything was so that the Scripture might be fulfilled. Now, I'm sure all of you believe that about Jesus Christ. The problem is to believe that the same God, Father, has made a similar plan for each one of His children from the time they are born and especially from the time they are born again.

If you realize this and accept it, I tell you it can revolutionize your life like it revolutionized my life when I got baptized in January 1961. That's more than 54 years ago. One of the things I realized after my baptism, and I'm very thankful that I realized that baptism was a completion of the foundation.

Hebrews 6, 1 to 3 says the foundation is repentance, faith in Jesus Christ, water baptism, baptism in the Holy Spirit, and then we wait for the resurrection of the dead and eternal judgment. So once that foundation had been laid in my life, God began to open my eyes to see, now I have works planned for you, which I planned before the foundation of the world. And one of the great things that God opened my eyes to see, and that's true for me and for you, is that just like God had a plan for Jesus' life, He had a plan for my life.

Why was that? Because of a great truth. I didn't understand that truth fully then, but I understood it much later, that God loved me as much as He loved Jesus Christ. I always knew God loved me.

John 3, 16 is one of the well-known verses, God so loved the world. But there's another verse that tells us how much He loved us. John 17, 23, not so well-known verse.

I did not know it. In fact, I never discovered that verse for about 16 years after I was born again. I knew God had a plan for my life, but I didn't know why.

It was only 16 years later I discovered why. And the why was because He loved me as much as He loved Jesus Christ. John 17, 23.

In fact, Jesus said that the world may know that you love these disciples of mine as much as you love me. So if you're a disciple of Jesus Christ, a disciple is a learner and a follower. And do you know what we've got to learn from Jesus Christ, first of all? Humility.

It's a lesson which very few preachers have learnt, very few Christians have learnt. Jesus said in Matthew 11, 29, learn from me for I am humble and gentle of heart. So a disciple is a learner and a follower.

So if you are a disciple or want to be a disciple, that means you want to learn from Jesus' example and you want to follow His example, then John 17, 23 is for you. Because the whole prayer is for His disciples.

He says, I pray for these disciples.

If you're a disciple, that prayer is for you. That through your life the world may see that God loves you as He loved Jesus Christ. So if God loves me as He loves Jesus Christ, and He is my elder brother and I have become a son of God, then God must have planned my life also just like He planned for His first son.

God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten son. When He came into the world, He was called the only begotten son. After His resurrection, He's never called the only begotten son.

He's called the firstborn son. Have you noticed that switch in the Gospels, in the New Testament? Only begotten when He came to the earth, after the resurrection, firstborn. Why? Because when Jesus came to earth, He was the only son.

After His resurrection, He got many brothers. In fact, on the day of His resurrection, He told Mary Magdalene in John 20, go and tell my brothers. That is the first time He called His disciples His brothers, because now He had become the firstborn.

And that's why we call each other brother, sister. You know that's the greatest title you can have. That's why I always tell people, please don't call me by some lowdown titles like pastor, reverend, right reverend.

It's all rubbish. Call me brother, because I'm a younger brother of Jesus Christ. Which title can you get better than that? So many people hanker after titles, right reverend, doctor, so and so.

You haven't understood that brother is the greatest of all, younger brother of Jesus Christ, younger sister of Jesus Christ. You know that's what we are doing when we call each other brother, sister. You're a younger sister of Jesus Christ.

You're a younger brother of Jesus Christ. I'm calling you by that. If you didn't understand it till now, you understand it today.

He is the firstborn among many brothers, Romans 8, 29. The firstborn among many brothers. Now I'm one of them.

And if that is true, and it is true, it is impossible. The Bible says there is no partiality with God. I'm sure you all agree.

Romans 2 says there's no partiality with God. And if there is no partiality with God, then he will not treat his younger children different from his eldest son. He will treat us the same.

I've got four sons and I, by God's grace, I tried my best never to show partiality to any of them. And I'm a fallen human being, imperfect father. What do you think a perfect father will do? He will never show partiality.

In other words, he will do everything for the youngest children as he did for the eldest one. Everything he did for Jesus, he'll do for me. That's the faith I have.

I hope you have that faith. That's why I don't live in fear. Will somebody throw me over a cliff? Will I drown in the lake? No, Jesus never drowned in a lake.

Nobody could throw Jesus over the cliff. There was a plan that had to be fulfilled. And if I live in the will of God and don't seek my own, I cannot die before my time.

Impossible. So I realized God's got a plan for my life. Works that God planned beforehand, Ephesians 2.10, that we should walk in them.

So in other words, he's drawn out a plan, but he doesn't show us the whole blueprint day by day by day by day. When God brought the Israelites out of Egypt, do you believe that he had a plan for them? Do you believe that he had marked out a route through the desert in the two years that they were to come to the land of Canaan? But he didn't give them a map with the route. No.

He gave them a cloud, picture of the Holy Spirit, to lead them day by day. But the route was already marked in God's mind. But he showed it to them day by day.

And they followed the cloud. Next day they followed the cloud. Finally, after two years, they came to the borders of the land of Canaan.

And the Lord said, go in. They didn't go in. That's why they wasted another 38 years in the wilderness, outside of God's plan.

That's what's happened to a lot of believers. They don't move where God tells them to go. They say, go in there.

I want you to possess the land. But they go somewhere else to make money or to do something on their own. And they miss God's will for their life.

And then they waste 40 years of their life. That's most believers that's happened. So I want to encourage you.

And if you're young, newly born again, you have a tremendous privilege of being able to start your life and live your life in the perfect will of God. And the rest of us who have missed out on God's plan, there's still hope for you for the rest of your life. There was a little poem I read when I was a young Christian, which many times comes back to my mind.

And I'm very glad that I read it and it gripped my heart when I was a new believer. It went something like this. When I stand at the judgment seat of Christ, and he shows me his plan, which he had made for my life, the plan for my life as it would have been if I had listened to him at every point, if I'd allow him to have his way.

And I see then how I checked him here and I stopped him there. And I would not yield my will as I review my life at the judgment seat of Christ. God says, this was my plan for your life, but you would not allow me here.

You went after something else here and you wanted to do your own will here. And you love money here and you chose something on the basis of money and financial considerations and you missed my will. And I'll see at the judgment seat of Christ, the places where I got sidetracked or I listened to some man's advice instead of following the scriptures and I missed it.

And it says, will there be grief in my Savior's eyes? Not anger. God is not angry with his children. God was angry with the Israelites.

He's not angry with us, but he's grieved, sad, because we miss his will in different points and we waste our life. I mean, if you send your children to college and you spend so many lakhs of rupees for their fees and you see them, you hear later on that in India they're wasting their time. You don't get angry.

You feel sad. After all the effort I make to give my son a good education, he's just wasting his life. That's exactly how God feels about people who run after money instead of doing God's will, who seek the honor of men instead of doing God's will.

God is sad. See, they're missing my will. And that poem goes on to say, will there be grief in my Savior's eyes in that day as he shows me his plan? Grief, even though he still loves me, and I will stand there having missed God's will in my life.

And it goes on to say in the last verse, Lord, I can't do anything about the years that I wasted. But of the years that are left to me still, I've not died yet. I surrender to you at least the rest of my life.

Let me fulfill the plan which you had made for me when I was in my mother's womb. How many of you are gripped by that? I'm very thankful I was gripped by that when I was 21 years old. I'm thankful I was not gripped by that when I was 60.

It's a wonderful thing to be gripped when you're young by the fact that God has got a plan for your life. A much better plan than you can make. Because he knows all the dangers.

He knows all the pitfalls. He knows what the devil has set up for you to trip you up. I don't know.

I don't even know what's going to happen tomorrow morning. But God knows. He's planned everything.

God knew that herded soldiers would come and try to kill Jesus. And so before they came, God took Jesus away. Isn't it wonderful to let God plan our life? God told Joseph, go away.

And Joseph, without asking a question, took Jesus and went. Wonderful. What I learned from the beginning of Jesus' life is better to listen to God's plan.

A lot of times we have messed up our life because we did not wait on God to seek his plan. And so, we've got a funny type of superstructure, you know, a building that's with a good foundation, but a crazy building, broken down walls here and there and all out of shape. That's how many Christian lives look in the eyes of God.

Because we think we know better than God. We think we don't have to wait on the Lord to find his will. You know why Jesus used to sometimes go off? We read that sometimes Jesus would disappear.

And they would wonder where he is and they would find him in the wilderness praying. He was seeking the Father. Father, what is your will for me? Of course, we don't need to do that, right? Because we are pretty smart and we are clever.

But Jesus was lived on earth the way God wants man to live, in helpless dependence upon God. Father, show me your will. Because I want to complete your will on earth.

My only ambition on earth is to do the will of God and move on. I want to ask all of you here, if you are a born again Christian, what is your ambition to accomplish with your life? I've been a believer for 56 years now. I can say more and more.

I never want to go even one single step outside of God's will for my life. There are a lot of things in the earth that you can gain if you go out of God's will. The devil told even Jesus, bow down to me, I'll give you anything you want.

What does it mean to bow down to the devil? We don't actually physically go and bow down to Satan. None of us will do that. I'll tell you what bowing down to the devil is.

Not seeking the will of God for your life. That is in a sense bowing down to Satan. I don't need to seek God's will for my life.

I know what to do and I'll do it on my own. And you do it on your own and you mess up your life. Maybe you make a lot of money but you messed up your life.

Your life could have been far more useful in terms of eternity if you had humbly sought God's will for your life. That's what I want to encourage you to see. I want you to turn with me to 1 Corinthians chapter 3 now.

1 Corinthians 3 also it speaks about foundation and superstructure. 1 Corinthians 3 chapter 3 verse 10. Paul says, according to the grace of God given to me, as a wise master builder, I laid a foundation.

But another is building on it. But let every man and woman, that applies to you and me, be careful what type of superstructure you're building on this foundation. Have you taken that seriously? What type of superstructure? Is it according to God's plan? Is it according to the architect's plan? Verse 11.

No one can lay a foundation other than that which is already laid, which is Jesus Christ. Salvation is only through Christ, the foundation. But on this foundation, a man can build and he uses another type of language.

He says here, you can build with gold, silver and precious stones or you can build with wood, hay and straw. So there's two options you have. That means you can build with material that is expensive but long lasting or cheap that will easily be destroyed.

And he's using picture language. But whatever you use to build, one day when Christ comes back, verse 13, every man's work will become evident. For that day will show it.

So that teaches us that however much we may convince each other today that I'm doing a great work for God and I'm doing this for God here and I'm giving money for God's work there and I'm doing this, that and the other and we all like to convince other people that we are doing great things for God and we like to imagine also that we are doing great things for God. We are pretty conceited. But whatever you may think and whatever you may tell other people, when Christ comes back, it will be evident for the whole world to see exactly what you did.

The foundation is okay. Your sins are forgiven. But what you built with your life, maybe you after born again, you live for 20, 30, 40, 50 years, what you did with that life, it will become evident in that day because it says here in verse 13, that your whole life's work is going to be put into the fire to be tested.

And when you put tons and tons of wood, hay and straw into the fire, it comes out as ashes. But if you put even a few grams, a few grams, quarter kilo of gold, silver, precious stones, put it in the fire, untouched, not one bit of it becomes ashes. Because in that day, this day is going to happen.

Remember when Christ comes back, it says here, the fire will test, verse 13, not the quantity, but the quality of each man's work. You know, we tend to evaluate what we have done for the Lord in terms of quantity. How many places did I travel? How many tracks did I give out? How many sermons did I preach? How many people did I witness to? Quantity, quantity, quantity.

I mean, the Christian world is full of preachers who are boasting, I have been to 25 countries, I have been to 35 countries and I have been to 85 countries. It's like, you know, in Pentecostal churches, somebody says, I have seen one angel, another fellow says, I have seen five angels, another fellow says, he has seen ten angels. You know, the devil comes as an angel of light, so I don't know what they are seeing.

But they seem to be boasting about all this. This is the type of empty boasting that goes on among Christians. Quantity, quantity, quantity.

Number of angels I saw, number of countries I visited. What a surprise you will get when Christ comes again and he couldn't care less for all this quantity. He is going to see the quality of each man's work.

What type of quality is there? I mean, when you go to buy a product, whether you are buying a washing machine or a computer, what do you look for? Size or quality? Quality. We appreciate that in earthly things. Made in Japan, made in China, which will you buy? Everybody knows.

Made in Germany, made in India, which one will you buy? Not which company is producing more. Quality. We are so concerned about quality in earthly things.

Why are we so unconcerned about quality in something eternal? Wood, hay and straw are gold, silver and precious stones. And if a man's work remains, he will get a reward. We don't work for reward, but we'll get it.

But if a man's work is burnt up, he himself may be saved because his foundation is okay, but it will be just as though through fire. But you may say, well, what does it matter? I'll be in heaven. Are you such a selfish person that after all that Jesus did for you, you only want to go to heaven? I'd be ashamed.

If I have to stand before Christ, not just at the judgment seat, but for all eternity and look back over my life and all I can say is, my sins are forgiven. Praise the Lord. It's all my testimony.

And I spent my entire earthly life, 50, 60 years after I was born again, just living for myself, seeking my own and glorying in the quantity of work I did. The number of people I talked to and witnessed and this, that and the other and never thought about the quality. You bring a person to Christ.

Have you made him a disciple? That's what I mean. You just made him a convert, it's wood, hay and straw. Have you made him a disciple? That's gold, silver and precious stones.

When I quit, I left my job in the Navy 50 years ago. And God called me and I've been serving the Lord 50 years. The first nine years I traveled all across India, Kashmir to Kanyakumari and Gujarat to Nagaland.

I traveled everywhere and I saw Christianity in mission stations, churches. And I was so sad to see the dishonor that was coming to the name of Christ by the way Christians were living. By their quarrels, their court cases with each other and the shallow way in which they lived, their impurity in their lives and their anger, their homes where husband and wife would be fighting with each other.

I said, what type of testimony is this? And I quit every Christian organization I was with, I quit every church and I said, Lord I've got only one life and I want to spend that life making some quality disciples. Even if I just, Jesus spent his life making 11 quality disciples and with those quality disciples he revolutionized the world and his work has been going on for 2,000 years. And I learned from that, that it's not a question of making 10,000 converts.

I'd rather make, I said Lord, Lord if I can make 11 disciples the type of quality you made, I've done a great work in my life. Jesus said that, go and make disciples in every nation. It's much easier to make converts.

I said go and say okay, listen accept Christ, give up your old religion and ask Jesus to come into your heart and change your name or whatever it is, I'll baptize you, okay. Okay, the next one. Now you've got to accept Christ.

And I don't see whether this guy is following the Lord, is he accepting, is he overcoming sin, is he trying to learn from Jesus to follow him in humility and brokenness? No. The apostles did that. They went back to make sure that these converts became disciples.

And our work must be of quality. So that applies to all of us even if you're not preachers. So I, what does it mean to build with gold, silver and precious stones? What does it mean to build with wood, hay and straw? Three things.

And I want to show you a verse that will explain it. From scripture, I like to show you everything from scripture. Romans chapter 11 and verse 36.

You see three things here which describe what is gold, silver, precious stones and the opposite of that is wood, hay and straw. Romans 11, 36. From God, through God, to God.

That is gold, silver, precious stones. From man, through man, to man, that is wood, hay and straw. What does it mean in practical terms? Let's look at each of these one by one.

From God, through God, to God. What that means is, from God means, in everything I do in my life, the initiative must come from God. Lord, what do you want me to do? What is your will? In everything.

And if you can start your Christian life like this, Lord, I have options to take one of these two jobs. What is your will? Not what I want. I may be attracted to something which is more convenient and which can make a lot of money.

That is from man. From God means, Lord, what is your will? What is your plan for me? Which of these jobs should I take? Do you see God's will like that when it comes to marriage? Lord, which of these girls do you want me to marry? Show me your will. My will is, I would like to marry the prettiest girl.

God's will may be, He wants you to marry someone who is more spiritual, who has got inner beauty that will last forever. Not an outer beauty that fades away after a few years. God is wise.

He doesn't want you to just marry a pretty face that you keep admiring every day. He wants you to marry someone with whom you'll be happy and with whom you can fulfill God's will for the rest of your life. God is wise.

And in every step in your life, Lord, what is your will? That is how Jesus lived. That's why he prayed so much. And that's why we pray so little.

We don't need to pray because we are very clever. The more clever you think you are, the less you pray. Tell me, is it not true? That stupid, dumb person doesn't know what to do, so he goes and prays.

Lord, what do you want me to do? And a person who wants to build with gold, the first thing will be that he'll say, Lord, I want to do your will on my life, in every little thing. Not just the big things like accepting Christ in my life, but what do you want me to do? In every little thing, what do you want me to do? There are some real advantages in that. I'll give you one practical example, you know, because we are all selfish creatures.

We think, how will it benefit me? Okay, I'll tell you, doing God's will will benefit you and your family. I'll tell you just one incident in my life, I could tell you many more. This happened in 1967.

I was a single, unmarried person in full-time Christian service and I had gone to Ahmedabad. I was living in Vellore those days and I had gone to Ahmedabad for a graduate's fellowship, student fellowship camp. And the day, I took a train, it takes about two days or more to go from Vellore to Ahmedabad.

I was living with my parents those days, I was not married in Vellore. The day I reached Ahmedabad, I was there for a week's camp. I got a telegram from my father saying, I've just been diagnosed with cancer, please rush back because the doctor says I must be operated immediately.

It's pretty serious. I was the only son of my father in India. There was nobody else to be with him and he was in his late 60s.

So I said, Lord, what to do? Here I've just arrived here and these people are expecting me to speak at this camp. I also have a duty as a son to take care of my dad. I decided to pray.

And I had the habit of reading the scriptures chapter by chapter those days and it was a habit of mine and that's how I got to know scripture. And that particular day, my daily reading of scripture, I had come to the book of Deuteronomy and I read there how it came about. It's in Deuteronomy chapter 1 and verse 3. On the first day of the 11th month, Moses said that now you've stayed long enough here, now turn and set your journey.

Deuteronomy 1 verse 6 and 7. On the first day of the 11th month, chapter 1 verse 3. So here I was in a camp in October and I said, OK, I got some guidance. I must turn back on the first of November and go home. So I went and got my ticket and I told my dad, sent a telegram, Dad, I can't come immediately.

I will come after six days. I'll start back on the 11th on the first of November and I'll come there by the third or fourth of November. So he had to wait.

So, I waited. I finished almost the whole camp and left on the first of November and reached Belor on the third of November, 1967. When I reached there, my dad said, well, because you were delayed in coming, I decided to get another opinion on this x-rays from an expert doctor and the expert doctor said, I don't have cancer, so I don't need to be operated.

And my dad never had cancer for the next 13 years that he lived. A simple thing, Lord, show me your will. That's just one example.

I could tell you a number of stories like that, where I say, Lord, I want to do your will. Do you know that seeking God's will will bring benefit to you and to your parents and to your children and to your family from

God. Second thing, through God, that means through the power of the Holy Spirit, what we do in God's power can accomplish a million times more than what we do with our power.

The apostles are all ready to go and preach the gospel and Jesus said, wait, don't go. You are ready to go, but you're not fit. Wait for the power of the Holy Spirit to come upon you and then you can be my witnesses.

And we are so self-confident that we think, no, no, no, we don't need that. We can do it on our own. I've got enough zeal and I've got enough understanding.

No, you can't accomplish God's will through your own power. That was the main lesson that Jesus wanted to teach his disciples on the last miracle that he did. Do you remember the last miracle Jesus did? We all know the first one, turning the water into wine.

What is the last one? The boat filled with fish, John 21. What do we learn there? Big lesson to learn. The disciples went out in the evening at six o'clock in the evening to fish.

Jesus knew very well then itself, as a risen Lord, that they would catch no fish. But he did not come to them at six o'clock or seven o'clock and tell them, hey, don't waste your time. You know when he came to them? Five o'clock in the morning.

Why did he make them struggle and struggle and struggle for 11 hours in the lake of Sea of Galilee? When he knew that they will catch nothing, to teach them a lesson which man is very slow to learn. That if I don't seek for God's power, I will get nothing. That's what he wanted them to learn.

So he said, let them learn it. They think they are smart. They think they're great fishermen.

Go ahead, try. They tried and tried and tried and tried. Six o'clock, seven o'clock, 11 o'clock, midnight.

They say, we haven't caught it, but we're going to make it. Definitely we get something. One o'clock, two o'clock, three o'clock in the morning, nothing.

Five o'clock in the morning, they say, okay, I give up. Then the Lord appears. And who said Jesus does not have a sense of humor? He asked them, well, children, have you got any fish? I believe humor is a wonderful gift.

And Jesus had it. He knew the answer. He didn't have to ask that question.

They said, no, Lord. Have you learned a lesson? Without me, you can do nothing. Most important lesson for proud man to learn.

Now obey me. Cast your net on the right side. And all the fish came running into that net.

That is the lesson that the Lord wants us to learn. And you and I sometimes take a long time to learn it. And we have to fail and fail and fail.

There's a little book of mine there called The Purpose of Failure. Read it. The reason why God allows us to fail and fail and fail and fail and fail.

So finally we come to the place. Okay, Lord, I learned it. I can't accomplish anything without you.

And then we seek for God's power. That's another thing. I'm very glad that I began to seek God pretty early in my life for the power of the Holy Spirit.

Not power to do supernatural things, but power to do the will of God. From God, knowing his will, through God means I want to do it in God's power, depending on God. And you know, there are some people who teach once you're saved, you're always saved.

I don't believe that. I believe that we've got to hold on to Christ till the end. Not because Christ will divorce me, but we may divorce Christ.

Not because Christ will drop us out of his hand, but we can jump out of his hand. That's the thing. And in the same way, there's no such thing as once filled, always filled.

No. You have to keep on being filled with the Holy Spirit. In other words, I've got to seek for the power of the Holy Spirit every day.

I pray every day that God will fill me with the Holy Spirit. God has filled me with the Holy Spirit in the past. I've had experiences of that.

But I need to be filled every day. Because I want to do everything, not only in the will of God, but through the power of God. Because what I accomplish in my own strength, it'll be an empty boat.

I know that. And any fish I think I've caught are all imaginary fish, not real ones. But if I seek the power of God, I'll really have something that will last for eternity.

So remember, from God and through God. And the third thing is to God, which means once I've sought God's will and given up my own will, and once I've sought God's power and received his power and sought to serve God according to his power. I mean, see, I've told you I've been preaching for more than 50 years.

But even now, when I get into a pulpit to speak, I say, Lord, if your power and anointing does not come upon me, I will bore these people and waste their time. I've heard enough boring sermons in my life from people to know that it's easy for even a person who's been preaching for many years to lose the anointing. And so I seek God's power every day.

Lord, fill me with the Holy Spirit. I can never accomplish anything with my human cleverness. I can just entertain people.

And once God has done something through his power, filled the boat, filled your boat with fish, you've got to be very careful, the third step, to God, that we give him the glory and don't touch the glory of God ourselves. Never take the credit for what God did to yourself. Make sure you bow down before God and give him the glory.

I'll never forget a passage the Lord showed me as a pattern for my whole ministry. One verse, Luke chapter 5. It says here that in verse 15, the news about Jesus was spreading far and wide. Great multitudes came to listen to him and were healed.

Luke 5.15. Multitudes were healed. He moved in the will of God and he moved in the power of God and accomplished great things. But then what did he do? See the next verse.

He went off into the wilderness to pray. Now most people pray before the meeting, before the great campaign. Jesus prayed after.

What was he doing? Praying after the, I mean the multitudes have all been blessed and they've gone home. Now what's the point of praying? To offer the glory to his father. Father, you've accomplished something great.

I want to now pray and bow down before you and say it's all yours. No glory for me. That's the point which some people miss out on.

God will give us everything except his glory. He'll give you his love, his power, his wisdom, his nature, everything. But when it comes to his glory, he says in Isaiah 42 verse 8, my glory, I will never give to another.

Many Christians are touching the glory of God. They take the credit to themselves for what God has done. They advertise what they have done.

We have been working, I work with about 120 elders in a number of our churches that have been planted across India and other places for 40 years. We have never sent one report of our work anywhere in the world. You go to our internet website, cfcindia.com, you will not see any report of our work.

Say why? Because Jesus never gave a report of his work. Because Paul never gave a report of his work. We follow Jesus and the apostles.

The picture the Lord gave me was, you know in the olden days we used to have these reel cameras, reels that we put inside a camera to take pictures. You put that roll of film inside and wind it and take 36 pictures. And then you got to wind it all back and keep it in a dark place so that the negatives don't get exposed.

And if you, after taking the pictures, if you pull it out and look at the reel, all your pictures disappear. That's how those negatives were. So they had to take it to a dark room and develop and print it.

You know that, the days when we had negatives. I think the younger generation knows nothing of that. But that was the picture the Lord gave me.

Think of a reel of pictures you have taken, all the work that you have done and then you expose it to people. In the day of judgment, when the Lord looks at that reel, there's nothing there. You did nothing for me.

I said, Lord I did such a lot for you. Yes you did, but you exposed it all before people. It's gone.

My glory I will not give to another. And we have faithfully followed that principle, that among our own co-workers, we share. But the rest of the world knows absolutely nothing of what I have done or what my fellow workers have done.

God knows it. Because we are very careful not to touch the glory of God. Because it's very subtle.

You know we act as if we are giving glory to God, but we are wanting people to admire us. That's what produces straw. Wood, hay, and straw.

My plan, done with my cleverness and my power, and ultimately brings glory to me. Wood, hay, and straw. Or, I humbly seek the will of God, I humbly seek for God's power, and at the end of it all I say, Lord, I'll never tell man about it, the glory is yours.

That'll be gold, silver, and precious stones. I hope that's what all of you will build. We'll have a little break and then continue.

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

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