

How God Led Me In My Life

by Zac Poonen

This sermon reflects on the speaker's journey of humility and surrender to God's will, emphasizing the importance of being an ordinary person in the eyes of God and seeking to serve others selflessly. It highlights the need to prioritize spiritual values over earthly ambitions, the significance of being filled with the Holy Spirit, and the transformation that comes from being part of the body of Christ. The speaker shares personal experiences of testing, breaking, and growth in faith, underscoring the value of integrity, friendship, and encouragement in parenting and nurturing spiritual growth in children.

Scripture: Proverbs 22:6, James 4:10, 1 Peter 5:6, Ephesians 4:16, Philippians 2:3

Topics: "Humility", "Spiritual Growth"

Description

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Transcript

Over the past few years, as you have heard me say that the word Jesus used about himself, the Son of Man, Son of Man, Son of Man, you heard me mention how that has really gripped me. And as I sought the Lord about it, the understanding the Lord gave me of the meaning of that word is, Jesus said, I am an ordinary man. It's the son of an ordinary man.

That, you know, if you really think about it, that Almighty God walked this earth and he called himself an ordinary man. And I looked around Christendom at all the great preachers. I couldn't find ordinary men.

They were all big men. But that gripped my heart. He said, Lord, I want to be like Jesus.

I want to be an ordinary man till the end of my life. I have to think like that, that I'm an ordinary man, not somebody special. Because then we can help everybody.

Most people in the world are not gifted, not famous, not able to speak well. Most people in the world are ordinary people. And if you want to help them, you must be willing to be an ordinary person.

Then you can help everybody. But there's a great lust in us to be something special, somebody special, to stand out in the crowd, to be different, to show how well we can do something better than others. Maybe true, God's gifted you like that.

But behind that, I have the desire to show others that I'm a little better. You make that other person feel small, and you'll never be able to help them. When I look at Jesus in the scriptures, you know, when I read the Bible, I don't read the Bible to get doctrines and messages.

No. I'm greatly gripped by 2 Corinthians 3.18, which says, In a mirror the Holy Spirit shows us the glory of the Lord. So I look, I read the Bible to see Jesus a little more clearly.

You know, pull the veil a little more and see his life. It says the Holy Jesus said, the Holy Spirit, when he comes, will show you things about me. You know that verse, it's a lovely verse.

John 16. So many people are wanting the power of the Holy Spirit to be great preachers or speak in tongues or do miracles. I'll tell you why I want to be filled with the Holy Spirit.

John 16, he's talking about the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit will glorify me, for he will take of the things of mine and disclose. Disclose means reveal it to you.

Disclose means it's revealing, it's referring to secret things, not the obvious things. You don't need the Holy Spirit to tell you that Jesus raised the dead. That's written in the Bible.

You don't even have to be a believer to understand that. You don't need to be a believer to know that Jesus walked on the water. It's written in the Bible.

There's no disclosing there. Disclose is a word which means there's a little secret which the Holy Spirit tells you. When he's come, he will take of something of mine which people can't see and he'll disclose it to you.

It's like whispering something in your ear. Not because somebody's special. God has got no special favorites.

All are his favorites. He has no partiality. But there are a few among his people who are very eager to see what Jesus is like and who seek the Holy Spirit and say, show me the beauty of Jesus.

Because it's only then we can be like him. Second Corinthians 3.18 says, first he'll show you the beauty and then make you like him. A lot of us want to be like Jesus.

You can't be like Jesus before you see it, see what he's like. Otherwise, we'll get an idea of Jesus from the world or the Christian world which will be completely wrong. The Holy Spirit will take of mine and show it to you.

I want to say to all of you, this should be the great longing of your heart. The Holy Spirit will take little parts of Jesus and show it to you. And one of the things he showed me was that he was an ordinary man throughout his life on earth.

And that so gripped me. I can't lose sight of that. I say, Lord, I want to be an ordinary man.

I never want to say anything that gives people the impression that I'm some type of favorite of God, which is absolute nonsense. I don't believe God has got any favorites. I am a father.

I can honestly stand before God and say, none of my four sons are my favorites. They're all my favorites equally. And Jesus said the best earthly father is evil compared to God.

So how can God have any favorites? If you're a child of God, you think I'm more a favorite of God than you are? Or do you have some conceited notion that you are a sort of a favorite of God compared to others? That's absolute nonsense. That's been a great help to me to know that God has got no favorites. All are the same.

And what he did for Jesus, he'll do for you. I remember when I understood that truth about more than nearly 38 years ago. That's when I wrote that song.

It so gripped my heart. What he did for Jesus, he will do for you. And it challenged me.

Lord, is it really true? And the Lord says, yes, if you fulfill the same conditions that Jesus fulfilled. And basically, Jesus fulfilled only one condition. He always humbled himself.

That's all. It's not 25 things he did. One thing, he always humbled himself.

So he never did his own will. He always humbled himself and said, Father, do what you want me to do. That was the secret of his life.

And in his private moments, when he thought about himself, he thought of himself as an ordinary man. He related to people as an ordinary man. So that's really gripped my heart tremendously.

And in Ephesians 1 and verse 4, this is another truth that's really helped me. It's given me a sense of, though I'm an ordinary man on earth, I was in God's mind before the world was created. That's an amazing truth.

Ephesians 1 and verse 4. He chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world. The foundation of the world was in Genesis chapter 1 verse 1. We think in the beginning. That's in the beginning as far as the earth is concerned.

But go beyond, before Genesis 1 verse 1, and you'll see me in God's mind. And not me only. You also, if you have faith to believe it.

You say, no, no, no, it can't be you. Well, that's up to you. If you don't believe Ephesians 1, 4, I can't do anything about it, but I believe it.

That He chose me in Christ before the foundation of the world. So I'm not an ordinary person in God's eyes. Out of all the millions of people that are in the world, He chose me in Christ before the foundation of the world.

And if you have surrendered your life to the Lordship of Christ, He chose you as well. That gives you a tremendous sense of worth before God. And at the same time, when you walk with men, you're an ordinary man.

You need both. But when you come before God, you have such boldness. Because He chose you, forgave you, blotted out your past, and clothed you with the righteousness of Christ.

And yet when you come before men, you're just an ordinary person. And you mingle with people, you mingle with children at their level, you mingle with young people at their level. You mingle with older people at their level, you're just an ordinary person.

That's how we are to live on this earth. I had the great blessing of hearing the gospel from when I was a child. I used to go to Sunday school when I was 10, 12 years old, and I heard the pure gospel message that Christ died for my sins.

I used to read the Bible every day and never get out of bed without prayer. As a child, my parents taught me that. My father was a believer before I was born.

But I was not born again, in spite of all of that. It took me years before I really was sure I belonged to God now. I think a lot of people born in Christian homes are like that, they're never sure when they were saved.

Because I must have asked the Lord to come into my heart, I don't know, 100 times or 200, I don't know, so many times. And one of the earliest things I learned was, as long as you're not sure that God has accepted you, you will be a backslider. And I was.

At home, because of the protected environment my parents provided, I couldn't backslide. But once I left home and I went to the military, I left home when I was 15 to join the National Defense Academy. And then the next four and a half years, I was being trained to be an officer.

And I was exposed to, suddenly exposed to the world. And because of my Sunday school background, God kept me from serious sin. But I was worldly, just like anybody else.

And by 18 and a half, I was earning a lot of money. 18 and a half, I was earning money. And by 19 and a half, I discovered the world was empty.

That's when I got converted. Just by reading one verse, I was just reading the Bible one day, and I was in Cochin Naval Base, and I read John 6.37. It's a verse I must have read many times, and many of you read many times. But sometimes a verse hits you.

It's like explodes in your mind. Well, that's what happened. Him that cometh to me, I will certainly not cast out.

That's all. Now, you know that. You read that verse so many times.

But somehow, in July 1959, I was 19 and a half years old. I read that verse. And I said, Lord, I've come to you hundreds of times.

He said, I never cast you out. And I believed it. That's all I did.

I wasn't perfect. I hadn't overcome sin. I wanted to give up sin.

I wanted to give my life to Jesus. But I believed that day that Jesus Christ accepted me. And my backsliding stopped.

That is why I say to people, if you don't, if you're not absolutely sure that Jesus Christ has accepted you, I can tell you, you'll keep on backsliding till you're sure of that. And if you think you have to be good enough, good enough and do some things, then only he'll accept you. You'll never be good enough.

You won't be good enough in 100 years. I don't believe I'm good enough today to go to heaven. If I come to the gate of heaven today and they ask what qualifies you to enter, I have to say the same thing that a newly converted person says.

I'm a sinner, but Jesus died for me. That's it. So, don't let the devil take you to a gospel of works.

I have to do this, and I have to do that, and I have to do the other thing, and then God will accept me. No. Do you desire to turn from sin? Do you believe that Christ died for you and rose again, and you receive him as your savior? That's it.

I urge you to lay that foundation, and I'll tell you my experience. That was July 59. 55 years ago, it was like I dropped an anchor, to use naval language, and my ship never moved.

From that day till today, I have never doubted the fact that I have become a child of God, and he accepted me. I can't claim any credit for it. I just believe God's word, and I think even that faith God gave me.

So, I want to encourage you, if you haven't come there, you must come there pretty quickly, because you can never make progress till you lay this foundation. Now, once I laid this foundation, the next thing was I heard people talking about baptism, and I was going to a brethren assembly, where they spoke about baptism, but nobody forced me to do it. I'm thankful for that, and I knew there were two people who said infant baptism as a child, if you're baptized as a child, that's it.

You don't need to be baptized again, and then, you see, I belong to a church called the Jacobite Orthodox Church, and people said, that's the place where people need conversion, not brethren assembly, they're already converted, and you get baptized, this church throws you out, how will you convert people there? Oh, that sounded a very logical argument. So, I studied the Bible, and I found there's not a single verse about child baptism. I once thought of writing a book called, What the Bible Teaches About Child Baptism, with four blank pages.

That's what the Bible teaches about child baptism. So, I was convinced that it was wrong, but I didn't take baptism, and for one and a half years, every time I knelt down to pray, I heard God saying to me, when I say that, I mean in my heart, you're not listening to me, why should I listen to you? So, that's the second thing I learned, first, assurance of salvation. So, another thing you need to learn after that is that, if God has told you to do something, even a small thing like baptism, baptism is just going into the water and coming out, that's all, and you don't do it, expect God to say to you, you're not listening to me, why should I listen to you? It could be anything, I don't know what God is saying to you, go and ask forgiveness from somebody, or go and return that money which you took wrongfully, but you don't do it, or you postpone it, just forget about asking God to answer your prayer, just forget that.

Finally, I got so fed up, I said, I don't care which church throws me out, I want to get baptized. So, at the age of 21, I took baptism, and that was like moving out of the gravitational pull of the earth into outer space, where you begin to then, you know the rocket, when it goes up, for a lot of time it's struggling, because it's fighting against gravity, and then it moves out of the gravitational pull of the earth, and then there's no stopping it, it's just zoom, it's something like that, that happened to me, that when I got baptized,

I don't know, it's, there's a word in English called exponentially, the speed increased, that means it increased not by 234, but 248, 16, 32, 64, like that. So, that's what happened to me.

I saw, I realized one thing there, that baptism, though it's such a simple thing, going into the water, coming out, it is so, in my case anyway, it was a big stepping stone in my life, it wasn't an ordinary thing. That's why I never compel people to be baptized. I said, get baptized when you're sure of it, because I don't want it to be a meaningless ritual you go through.

I know what it meant for me, just like getting married, you don't get married, you know, carelessly, what's it, just come together for two days, what goes on in a marriage, hardly anything, but it's a very meaningful thing. Once I took that step, God began to show me the next step, and the next step in my life was, as far as I knew, I had wanted to give up sin, I wanted to stop going to the movies, and I used to go with my friends to the movies. I used to invite them, take them.

And one day, two of my naval fellow officers came up and said, hey, there's a, we had a naval base cinema inside the naval base for our naval folk. They used to get movies and screen it there, and they asked me to go with them, and I was scared to say, no, I don't go for movies now. They think I've gone off my head.

So I went with them, walking towards the cinema theater, inwardly groaning, Lord, how to get out of this? Please help me, help me, help me, silent prayer. That's the third thing you need to learn. When you're in a tight spot, pray silently to God, and if God sees that you really want something, He'll do miracles for you.

We reached the theater, and there was a notice there that said, we couldn't get the movie in time today, so it's being canceled. I said, wow. There was one happy person that day, even if others were disappointed.

I said, Lord, what all you will do for one person? You make the whole naval base not see a movie just because one person doesn't want to go there. That was another amazing revelation to me. I didn't say it.

It was a longing in my heart, and I learned something there, that prayer is not what you say. I believe God sometimes doesn't even listen to what we say. He sees the longing in my heart.

If the longing in my heart is different from what I say with my lips, it's the longing in my heart that God answers. That's the reason why sometimes what we say with our lips, we don't get the answer, because that's not the longing in my heart. There are other times when you say nothing with your mouth, and there's a longing in your heart, and you get the answer.

I learned very early in my life that prayer is not words. It's not kneeling for hours and all. Like a lot of people say, I never preached that.

You know that. It's a longing in your heart for something that you will feel will glorify God in your life. Then God began to show me that in my previous life, I had money with me that I had cheated the government off that I should return.

I calculated the tax and duty and all that I had cheated the government off in my past days as an unconverted person. It came to about three or four months salary. I was getting a pretty good salary, and it came to three or four months salary.

I said, Lord, and began to think. I was not sure. Should it be so much, or should it be so much? I wasn't sure.

Should it be this much or that much? One figure that I got was 20% more than the other. When you're in doubt, you always choose the lower figure. Then I read an Old Testament verse that said, when you pay back what you take wrongfully, add 20% to it.

I said, wow, God speaks pretty directly. So I added it, and I took some time, you know, to here it is, Numbers 5, by the way, if you want to know where that verse is. I was calculating, is it so much, or is it 20% more than that? I was settling on the lower figure.

Then I read one day this verse, that Numbers 5, 7, that he shall confess his sin, and he shall make restitution in full for his wrong, and add 20% and give it to the one whom he's wronged. I said, boy, this is pretty direct. The things God has written in the Bible, and I felt when God wrote that through Moses, he was looking 3,500 years later and say, there's a boy there who's going to need this verse in 1961, and I'm writing it for him as well.

Amazing how God thinks of me when he writes the Bible 3,000 years before I live. I don't know whether you believe it, I believe it. You know, it says in Hebrews 10, in the volume of the book it is written about, about whom? Me.

Hebrews 10, read verse 5 to 8, in the volume of the book it's written about me. It's wonderful to read the Bible like that, that God wrote the Bible hundreds of years ago thinking about you. You say, am I so important? Yes, you are, because he chose you before the foundation of the world.

See, there are two problems I find with Christians. There are some Christians who don't realize how important they are to God, and there are some Christians who don't realize that they're ordinary people before others. This is the problem with most Christians I've met.

You need both truths in your mind. I'm a very important person before God, but I'm a very ordinary person before men. I'm just an ordinary brother.

So I saved up over three, four months and I went to the tax office in Bombay where I had to return this and looked for some window where honest people could come and return what the money they've done. There's no such window anywhere. And I didn't want to give that to some clerk who would give me some false receipt and cheat me.

And so I didn't know how to return this money because there's no department to collect restitution from people who feel guilty about what they cheated us in the past. So you know what I did? I said, well, the money has got to go to the government. It's stolen from the government.

So I went to the railway station and I bought the longest distance tickets I could get to distant places. A number of tickets for that much money and I tore it up and I said, okay, the money's gone to the government. So there are ways by which we can make restitution.

And from the beginning, one of the things that was very true in my life is this, that I did not give my life to Jesus to get something in return. A lot of people do that. They do a little business with God.

I'll give you this, you give me this. You know, the happiest marriage, and by the way, being born again is like getting married to Jesus Christ. The happiest marriage is not where you want that person because you want something from him or her.

Usually a man wants to get married because he wants sex. Usually a woman wants to get married because she wants money and security. So if you marry a woman just for sex, you're not going to have a very happy marriage, I'll tell you that.

And if you're marrying a man just because you want his money or his position, you're not going to have a happy marriage, I'll tell you that right now. And if you get married to Jesus Christ because you want something from him, it's going to be that type of marriage. Imagine somebody who got married on that basis, all their life they're going to be miserable.

Because they started out wrong. They started not because they loved one another, but because they wanted something. Ah, he's a rich man.

I can enjoy life if I marry him. Oh, she's a pretty girl. Every morning when I wake up, I'll see this pretty face.

I'll tell you, you're not going to have a happy marriage. So I didn't give my life. A lot of people give Jesus because Jesus can heal me or Jesus can give me money or Jesus can take me to heaven.

That sounds very spiritual. It's not. Jesus can give me something.

I'm very thankful that I did not give my life to Christ on that basis. I fell in love with Jesus. That's the best way I can express it.

It's like when I married my wife, I fell in love with her. I didn't marry her because she was a doctor. She never earned one cent from me as a doctor.

That was not what I was interested in or anything else. And that's why it didn't matter to me. Anything else.

I was happy with my wife because I loved her and I was happy with Jesus because I loved him. I didn't care if he sent me to hell. I love Jesus.

I said, Lord, if you're there, it's fine. I don't want anything else. I want you.

So it's very important. That's another thing I say to people in their relationship with Christ. Think of it like a marriage.

Do you get married to get something, to satisfy some lust in your heart? You will not have a happy marriage. You'll be married at second best because you'll always be demanding. I want that which I expected from you.

You don't give that to me or you'd some people marry because they want a cook or adobe or something to do things for them and you'll always be disappointed. The secret of a happy marriage is to have no demands, no expectations. The same thing with Christ.

And I said, Lord, you love me so much that you came to earth and gave your life for me that I might be saved from hell. I want to love you in return. That's it.

As you gave yourself completely to me, I want to give myself completely to you. Heaven and all that doesn't figure in my thinking right now. I just want to respond in love.

You gave yourself to me. I want to give myself to you. That is the basis on which I started and that's the basis on which I continue today to tell you honestly.

I'll tell you honestly. I don't think about heaven. I think about Jesus.

I never think I'm going to heaven. I think I'm going to be with Jesus. That's it.

I don't care where it is. I'm not looking for streets of gold and gates of pearl and all that. They don't interest me at all.

Mansions and crowns. Zero interest. I can say that before God.

But Jesus, I'd like to be where he is. So because I started my Christian life like that, I've had a very satisfying experience with Christ. Because now I've been 55 years a believer and I'm still taken up with my bridegroom.

I love him. I'm passionately in love with him. I'm not ashamed to be known as belonging to Jesus, the bride of Jesus Christ.

And that's helped me so much because it doesn't matter if I pray for something, I don't get it. I say forget it. I got Jesus.

It doesn't matter if I don't get that prayer. Supposing you pray for some healing and you don't get it. What does it matter? You got Jesus.

Never, never disappointed. He is not a disappointment. You know that song we sing, I love it.

He's not a disappointment. Jesus is far more to me than in all my glowing daydreams I had fancied that he could be. So I want to encourage those of you who have a sort of unhappy, frustrated Christian life.

Ask yourself, why did you give yourself to Christ? Did you give yourself because you expected something? Well, no way. No wonder you're disappointed. You can change that and say, Lord, I want you from now on.

Not the gifts, but the giver. That's the secret. And I'm very thankful that from the beginning I had that attitude that has continued till today.

And as it's continued, the Holy Spirit has begun to show me deeper and deeper revelations of the love of Jesus in different, different parts of scripture. Many of them you've heard in my sermons, like what he was struggling with in Gethsemane. Take this cup away from me.

And I said, Lord, I want to know what that cup was. And the Lord showed it to me. I never read it in a book.

I never heard it in a tape. That cup was not the physical death on Calvary. He would have gone through a thousand deaths for me.

He loved me so much. But the cup was the break of fellowship with the Father for three hours on the cross. Not the physical agony, weeping, and all that.

He didn't care about all that. But Father, you mean to say that this wonderful fellowship that you and I have had from all eternity is going to be broken? And say some angel says, but Lord, you'll get it back after three hours. No, I don't want it to be broken even for a moment.

I learned there the value of fellowship with the Father. Every time we sin, we lose fellowship with the Father. You may not realize it.

You don't even feel it. Because we are living so much in the muck of sin that when fellowship with the Father is broken, we just continue on as if nothing has happened. But not for Jesus.

He couldn't live like that. He couldn't live for one minute with fellowship broken. Not even for one second.

That was the thing that scared him. But that was the price he had to pay for my sin. Hell is to be forsaken by God.

Fellowship with God broken forever. And Jesus began to realize there that this is what I have to pay. I imagined a conversation between the Father and Jesus at Gethsemane where the Father tells Jesus, okay, you don't have to go to Calvary.

But come straight up. You lived a perfect life. But Zach will go to hell.

He says, oh, okay, Father, then I'll go to the cross. I'll even be willing to break fellowship with you, which means more than the world to me if I can save him and bring him to be with me for eternity. I wept when I saw his love for me at Gethsemane.

And what he faced on the cross was three hours of eternal hell. What I would experience for eternity was concentrated into three hours because he was an infinite being. And I saw the love of Jesus for me, and it just deepened my love for him.

We love him because he first loved us. I wanted nothing from him. Think of a person has given you 10 billion rupees, billion.

Would you ever go and ask him for anything else? You'd be ashamed to go and ask him even for one rupee after that. He's only given you 10 billion. So when I think of what Jesus went through on the cross for me, I say, Lord, I don't want to ask you for anything.

I'm not disappointed if I don't get anything. If I ask for some healing from some ache or pain, and I don't get it, I say, it's okay. I don't want it.

I already got 10 billion. I got Calvary. He's given us everything for me, and I don't want anything else.

So little by little, you know, when you have this love relationship with Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit takes of things and reveals to you. I believe there's more that God's going to reveal to me in the days to come. I haven't seen everything, but I know that God is love, and it's the love of God that will melt our hearts when one day we see him face to face.

We will feel so ashamed at how little we loved him, how little we responded to his love. We'll really feel ashamed, those who were calculating on earth as to how much should I give to the Lord? Should I do this? Should I do that? Oh, I feel sorry. I say, Lord, I never want to be calculating.

All that I am is yours completely. You can't be calculating. Imagine a husband and wife calculating how much should I do for my husband? Should I do this much or not do this much? Or should I do this for my wife? Or suppose you go to get a gift for your husband and wife, and you look for the cheapest thing available to get for your husband and wife.

What type of marriage have you got? But that's how we give to God. What's the cheapest thing I can give to God? A little thing here, and I say, oh, I gave something to him. You don't love him, not at all.

I said, Lord, I'm never going to be like that by God's grace. You can have all that I have, all that I am. Now, I had great ambitions when I joined the Navy.

I'll tell you, my dad told me when I was going to join the Navy in Military Academy, I want you to retire as the Admiral of the Navy. So I worked hard, and I topped my class, and I was on my way, and Christ came into my life. And immediately, I didn't take time.

It changed my whole direction of my life, and I realized if I'm going to be an out-and-out Christian, I have to give up my earthly ambitions. I have to make a choice now, my earthly ambition, or to live for Christ. Because, you know, in living for Christ, I would have to not compromise.

There were certain things in the Navy I couldn't do. I had to stand up to my senior officers and say, sir, I can't do that because I'm a Christian, and then they won't give me a good report at the end of the year, annual confidential report. There'll be something negative there.

Okay, that means you won't get your promotion. Fine. I said, I'm not living anymore for promotion.

I was, but not anymore. There's only to be a witness for Christ. And God gave me increasing boldness there.

I had verses written on my scooter for my fellow officers to see, and I'd stand on the streets and preach, and people thought I was mad or something. It doesn't matter. I loved Jesus so much, and it didn't matter if people made fun of me because I was a Christian.

So those are the early years, and I said, Lord, if you call me to quit my job, I'll quit, but I won't leave till you call me. I don't believe it's right for any person to go into full-time Christian work unless God calls them. We're not doing God a favor when we go to full-time missionary work.

Some people think, oh Lord, here I give my life to you. You know, you should be very thankful to me that I give myself rubbish. You can't join the army if they don't say, come.

You can't join anywhere. You can't join a college unless they give you admission. And if you do join the army, you can't say, I'd like to be posted over here, not over there.

You have no choice. They determine everything. And so God says, I want you to be a teacher.

I don't want you to be a missionary. You've got to be a teacher. You can't say, no, no, I'd like to be sacrificed and be a missionary.

No. So I realized that I couldn't leave. I'm very thankful that I decided I wouldn't leave the Navy unless God called me.

And God tested me in numerous situations when I was in the Navy to see whether I would stand up for him whenever my conscience was saying something else and even stand up to senior officers respectfully. And many, many instances like that happened. And I didn't realize, but God was testing me.

What's your real interest? Your interest is promotion or pleasing me? Promotion or pleasing me? Pleasing man or pleasing me? It was always that. Seeking your own or pleasing me? And after he had tested me for three years after my baptism one day, the Lord spoke to me, I want you to leave your job. Through scripture, I was reading Isaiah 49.

I remember I was sitting in a little station here in Bangarpet. I was traveling on leave, preaching in meetings with Brother Buxing, and I'm sitting alone there reading the Bible. God spoke to me in the train.

I took a decision right there. And on the train to Bangalore, it was confirmed. Now, I never realized I'm finally going to live here.

That was 1964. I was on leave from the Navy. I went back, and as soon as I went back to Cochin Naval Base, there on my table was an appointment letter from Naval Headquarters for a very, very prestigious course, which a lot of people want to get, which I could have got.

And it was like the devil offering the world to Jesus saying, take this. And I said, no. So I went to my senior officer and said, sir, I don't want this.

He said, are you crazy? People in the Navy are just longing to get this course. You got it like that, and you want to check it out like that? I said, sir, God's called me to leave the Navy. Then he was sure I was crazy.

I said, okay. So I put in my resignation straight away, and Naval Headquarters didn't accept it. Then I was really discouraged.

I said, Lord, how in the world did the Naval Headquarters say no? And then the Lord reminded me, this is the advantage of knowing the Bible. When you read the Bible, God will remind you of something in the Bible that is an answer to your problem. And I saw how Moses went to Pharaoh and said, let my people go that they may serve me.

Pharaoh said, no. Who's greater, God or Pharaoh? The Lord said, what did Moses do? Moses went back. He said, go back.

But God didn't send any plagues on the Navy or ask me to go back 10 times or send any frogs or anything like that. But I had to go back. Again, they said, no.

Again, I went back. And they thought I was some spy because I learned so much about naval intelligence and all. And now I was going to take all that information and go to some other country.

So they had the CID checking up on me, which somebody told me years later. Finally, I think the CID gave a report, this chap is not a spy. He's just off his head a little bit.

He's a crazy religious nut. So better let him go. So one day I got a release order like that.

Two years after I applied and I was out. And I was so thankful. I just emptied out my bank account and all my money I'd earned in eight years I gave away for God's work.

Now, as I said before, God never asked everybody to do that. He asked only one person in the Gospels to sell all that he had. That was a rich young ruler.

You never see Jesus asking anybody else to do that. He does ask some people to do it. Zacchaeus gave half his money.

Jesus said, fine. But the rich young ruler had to give everything. Lazarus and Martha had to give nothing.

He kept their house. So it's different. But in my case, he asked me to give up everything.

I said, fine. I'll give it up. I gave it up and I left.

Of course, I wasn't married. And I didn't plan to marry either. So that's how I started my service for the Lord.

And I decided another thing, that money would never, never be a factor in my serving the Lord. That's right there when I was 26, before I got married. And I said, I'm going to serve Jesus.

But Jesus said, you can't serve God and money. And I understood that very early in my life. And so I said, I'll never go to preach in rich places just to make money with my gift.

And the way I got it was, when I meditated, you know, when you meditate on scripture, you learn things which are not plainly written there. You know, how the Holy Spirit takes something secret and discloses it to you. So one day, the Holy Spirit took that passage in the first temptation in the wilderness and disclosed something to me as to what that temptation meant.

You know, turn these stones into bread. If you are the son of God, turn these stones into bread. That's the first temptation.

And I meditated on that and said, I discovered what the devil was saying was, you're anointed now, right? You're anointed in the river Jordan 40 days ago. Now, use that power which you got through the anointing to satisfy your need. What is your need right now? Food.

Use that power to get something for yourself. You have a right to do it because you're needy. You're hungry.

You're not stealing somebody else's food. To meet your own need, use the God-given power to turn stones to bread. Jesus said, no, unless I hear a word from God.

You know, it's the verse we have there. A man should live by every word from the mouth of God. Unless I hear a word from God telling me to do it, I won't do it.

So the way that came to me was, God has given you the gift of preaching. Use it to get some money for yourself, some honor for yourself. And the Lord said to me, if you do that, you will fall in that temptation where Jesus overcame.

So I learned something from that temptation, that I'm not meant to use the power God gives me through the anointing of the spirit to get something for myself. Never, never, never. I said, Lord, I'll never use my preaching gift for making any, getting any honor or anything for myself.

And I said, Lord, all the great preachers, they have their conventions in the big cities. The big American preachers come, the big famous preachers in India. Their conferences are all in big towns and cities.

Send me to the villages. I said that way back in 1966. And the Lord took me at my word.

And most of my ministry throughout these 50 years has been among the poor villages and students and poor people who could hardly give me any gifts. And I used to get so little that I couldn't even pay house rent when we got married. And we had to live in one corner of my dad's home for a number of years because we were so poor.

But that was good for us because God was training us. There also He was testing. Testing never stops.

I was tested when I was in the Navy. I was tested afterwards. Now God was testing me to see, am I going to use my gift? I had an obvious gift because I was preaching to 5,000 people when I was 23 years old.

That's not me. Two years after my baptism, I was preaching to 5,000 people in conferences. Bhaktsingh himself asked me to speak at his conference.

I was the first person he ever asked to take those meetings. And the devil said, you can use this. You can make money with it.

And I said, no, I won't. I'll go to small churches. I'll go to small groups and I'll go only where God leads me.

So he was testing me. And when we got married, he was testing me. Are you going to borrow and go into this buy now, pay later type of stuff? And I said, never.

I won't buy a single thing I can't afford. Fortunately, I had a wife who agreed with me. We never got into debt.

In 75 years, I've never been in debt to anybody for even one rupee. I strictly obeyed Romans 13.8, owe no man anything. Again, the Bible doesn't say don't borrow.

What it says there is, if you borrow, give it back as soon as possible. But that's the best. That means there may be emergencies where you have to borrow.

There's nothing wrong in it, but pay it back. But in my case, I felt I should go a little further than that. I said, I don't want to borrow at all.

If I don't have, I'll just try and make do with what I have. These are little, little things that God tested me. I didn't know what he had in store for me.

But I said, I just want to be faithful. And I was absolutely unknown. And then the Lord led me into fellowship with Brother Buxing and something happened where he misunderstood me.

Of course, he loved me very much. He was grooming me like Paul groomed Timothy way back in 68. And he was the one who suggested Annie to me because she was from his assembly and conducted our marriage.

And there also, it was another trial because her father said, I'll never let you marry this man. He's got no job. I was going to take care of you.

I mean, rightly, I respect his father, her father, because you wouldn't let your daughter get married to someone who's got no job. So I told her, that's fine. Let's honor your dad.

He's a believer. So God will speak to him. And God did.

In three months, he changed his mind and we got married. So there are many little things like that. God did miracles and he was testing me in different, different, different things.

And I didn't know where all this testing was leading to. I used to be frequently discouraged. It's easy to get discouraged when you don't know what lies ahead.

But I tried my best to live by the principles of scripture. And then we were there and you know, we, after I, there was a misunderstanding. I was not allowed to speak anymore in the same church where I'd spoken to 5,000 people and others in that same group of churches.

I was not allowed to speak at all. So I sat at the back of the church for, you know, two and a half years. Just keep quiet.

And the Lord said, just keep your mouth shut, submit to the elders, don't rebel, don't speak against them. And I sat there. Those are the years God broke me.

It was not the end. He had to break me again. Testing, breaking, these are the things that we have to go through in our younger days.

I was 31, 32. God was breaking me, humbling me. It was all good for me.

And I would sit at home with nothing to do. So I said, okay, I have a typewriter, so I can type out some of the messages I've shared with other people. And that's how I wrote my first book.

So something good came out of that. And then because I was living in Vellore, I felt I should move to a more central place so that I can, I thought of Bangalore only for one reason, because I thought of moving to Bangalore or Chennai. And both Mahani and I prayed.

This is in 72. And we were working with students a lot those days, college students. There was already a lot of college student work in Chennai, those days called Madras.

But there was nothing, very little or nothing in Bangalore. So we felt the Lord leading us to Bangalore. That's why we came here.

And then I had an invitation from the pastor of Emmanuel Church, who was going away for three months. He said, can you fill in my pulpit for three months? You can stay in my house. So I had a ready offer.

So we came here. We had a house for three months that we could stay in. And I was preaching there, seeking God's will now.

And then, of course, after three months, that man came back. And then we moved into another house. And then my dad bought this house where we lived for more than 35 years.

It was a very cheap house those days, very, very cheap. It was a miracle God gave it to us because nobody wanted it. And so I said, now, Lord, what will I do? And little by little, God began to open doors for me to preach here and there.

And gradually, I began to have a ministry across the world. In 1972, 73, I was traveling here and there. If you go to our website, you'll listen to one of my messages that I preached in 72, 40 years ago, that I preached in Singapore called The Secret of Paul's Authority.

The voice sounds a bit different, but it's me. And I wrote about six books by then. And I had a weekly radio program that is being broadcast all over Southeast Asia.

That's also on our CFC website, verse by verse through the New Testament. So I was like, on my own, God was giving me a ministry here in all these spheres. And I was being invited here and there, all over India and other countries.

And it puffed me up without my knowing it. Pride is such a subtle thing. I didn't know it.

I felt I was very humble, but I was becoming puffed up. And when you're proud, one proof of it is, I didn't know it those days, you don't get victory over sin. You cannot control your anger.

You cannot control your thoughts. That is one proof you're a proud man. But I never knew that.

I never knew this glorious truth that God gives grace only to the humble. And if you're under grace, sin will not have dominion over you. I never knew all that.

And I was defeated inwardly, but preaching as a great preacher on the outside, till I got so fed up in 1974, I said, I'll quit the ministry. I don't want to be a hypocrite anymore. I go and sit at the back of some church.

Lord, you got to meet with me. That's when God met with me in January, 1975 and filled me with the Holy Spirit. But that still didn't solve my problem fully.

Because there was one more thing I needed, and that was fellowship in the body of Christ. And I didn't have it then. I had knowledge of the word.

I was filled with the Holy Spirit. That is a climactic experience. And God met with me right in my house upstairs.

God met with me, and it really changed my life. But I still struggled for the next six months till this church that I was preaching at threw me out for preaching baptism in the Holy Spirit. I said, fine, I'll leave.

If you don't like the doctrine, it's fine. And we started meeting in our house, and I said, Lord, I don't know what I'm supposed to do. But we started meeting together, and we just continued like that.

And CFC was born almost accidentally. It was not some planned program that we decided, okay, we're going to start CFC. It was God who planned it, and we just sort of happened to be around there.

And from that time, my life was completely changed because that one more thing God added. I had already understood. I had only spoken of the five essentials in the Christian life.

I had already understood about the blood of Christ that cleanses me, justifies me. I had already understood the importance of the word of God. I studied it, studied it, studied it.

I knew the Bible pretty thoroughly by then. And I had been filled with the Holy Spirit, number three, and I had understood the way of the cross, death to self. Four things, very important.

The blood of Christ, the word of God, the Holy Spirit, the way of the cross. One was missing, the body of Christ. And that began to take place in August 75.

And when that was also there, then my grip on the Christian life became solid. You can hold a glass with two hands, what somebody can plug it out of. When you hold something with the full fist, it's difficult for somebody to take it out.

So that's why I discovered I needed all five, the blood, the word, the spirit, the cross, and the body. That completed my experience. And as time went on, the body began to grow.

And my dad is a godly man. He was the one who gave this property to us initially. He had paid 20% of it and said, that's a gift for you.

We paid the remaining 80% and bought this. But he couldn't understand. That was 79.

But when I started meeting in the house in 75 for four years, he just couldn't understand it. He said, my son, you got a gift like Billy Graham with your gift to preach around the world to thousands of people. You're sitting here with five or six people just preaching to them.

Are you crazy? Well, many people in my life thought I was crazy at different decisions I took. But I said, Dad, I'm not called to be a great preacher. I will not use my gift to make myself famous.

I'm called to build the body of Jesus Christ, because Jesus said, I have come to build the church. So I'm going to do that. And he said, your children, you don't take any money.

Your children are growing up. They're all in school now. My oldest son was only in sixth standard or seventh standard then.

He said, you know how much it costs to educate them in college? I said, I don't know. But if I don't seek the kingdom of God first now, even the 100 rupees I pay in the school fees, I won't be able to pay. Leave alone college.

My dad died in 82. His was the first funeral we conducted in this building. And he never lived to see my children going to college.

When he died, my oldest son was only in seventh standard. It was years later that all my four sons got scholarships to go to college. And my dad, if they can see from heaven, he looked down and said, son, you're right.

I was wrong. So don't be afraid if others, relatives and all can't understand the way you go. If you've seen what God wants you to do, go that way.

And you'll find finally that God proves that you chose the right path. And I really wanted to be a good father to my children, not by providing them all that they needed of earthly things, but really seeking to instill spiritual values into them, to be a friend to them. I wanted them to grow up to be my brothers in Christ, to joke with them and laugh with them.

And that's one reason when Sanjay asked me in the last birthday celebration, dad, can I do a little skit about you? Give me your lungi and your belt and your glasses and your Bible. And I didn't know what he was going to do. I said, sure.

I don't mind my children joking with me. I want to break this Indian habit of stiff father-son relationships, where father is always like a stern person who can't joke with his children and children can't joke with him. I said, I don't believe that.

I believe our children must feel free to joke with us. And we must break that stiffness that there is even in some CFC families. So I said, Sanjay, go right ahead.

And I'm glad he did it. It fulfilled a purpose, I think, for some people. So I felt that if I failed in my home, I can't have a ministry.

If I can't bring up four sons to follow the Lord, where am I going to preach to hundreds? Say, Lord, please help me. And I was really scared. I'm not saying that, you know, sometimes our children have ups and downs.

I'm not saying that every time they go a bit down, we give up. No, no, no, it's not that. But if you find that they've basically gone completely astray, that would have been a great tragedy.

But God had mercy on me and my children also went through their ups and downs like all children go. Some escape it, but many children go through that. But God helped them to come through.

I want to say one thing to all of you. You can't make your children follow the Lord with any amount of preaching or teaching or Sunday school. They have to see integrity in your life.

That means you live at home exactly like you preach and believe in the church. And you must not keep on harassing your children, do this, do that, do the other thing. Encourage them to be godly, but be friends with them.

A lot of parents are not friends with their children. They never put their arm around, even now I put my arm around my children and kneel down and pray with them. So many parents never do that.

They do that when they're little babies. They hug them and say all types of meaningless syllables to their little baby, but they pretty soon give up all that. You know they need your hug more when they're grown up than when they're little babies.

Put your arm around them and say, son, my girl, let's pray. Let's pray together. Kneel down and pray for one minute.

And even discipline. I said, Lord, I don't love to discipline my children. I want them to grow godly.

That's the only reason. Once when my son did something wrong, I said, let's go into the other room. He thought I was going to give him a spanking or something.

I said, no, let's kneel down and pray. And I knelt down and said, Lord, just make me a better father. By the time he was 15, he was beyond the age of spanking.

I said, Lord, I'm sorry that he's behaved like this. Please forgive me. It was a small thing, but I was disappointed.

And I said, Lord, make me a better father. Forgive me where I failed. Help me to be a better father to my son in Jesus' name.

OK, son, that's it. You can go. He was surprised.

Years later, he stood here and spoke to the young people and said, that did more good to me than all the spankings I ever got in my life. So I want your parents to recognize that encouraging your children is a very, very important thing. That's another thing the Indian parents don't do.

All of you who are parents, think of the things you've spoken to your children. Think of the hundreds of corrections you've given them. Stern fathers and mothers.

This is wrong. That is wrong. Why don't you do this? Why don't you do that? And then count the number of times you've said something encouraging to them.

And if you have done hundreds of criticisms, at least from now on, let's balance it with a few words of encouragement. Very important. So that's how God led us.

I was asked to share a few things about my life, and that's why I shared it. All I can say at the end is God has been good to me beyond what I deserve. And he's given me two wonderful gifts.

One is Jesus, and the other is the body of Christ. Of course, my family, which came before the body of Christ, but then also the body of Christ. I'm very thankful for these gifts.

And thank you very much for your love for me. I'm deeply humbled by it. God bless you.

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