

How God Prepares Elders to Serve Him

by Zac Poonen

God prepares elders for ministry through being broken and humbled, and honesty is the most important requirement for Him.

Duration: 44:54

Scripture: Acts 22:1

Topics: "Spiritual Leadership", "Humility In Ministry"

Description

This sermon emphasizes the importance of sharing our testimonies to deepen our understanding of each other and God's work in our lives. It highlights the significance of being broken and humbled by God to be effective servants, drawing examples from biblical figures like Paul, Moses, Peter, and David. The speaker stresses the need for honesty, humility, and a continuous hunger for God, rather than seeking external success or recognition in ministry.

Transcript

Our testimony is a great help to know each other better. Paul gave his testimony three times in the Acts of the Apostles. The Holy Spirit has recorded it.

I thought one would once have been up, but three times the Holy Spirit has recorded his testimony, which means testimony is important. And every now and then in the episodes also, Paul writes something about that. I have written my testimony in a book called *The Day of Small Beginnings*.

I would encourage you to read it because there are lessons there that can help you. The 24 chapters in that is about my life, how God broke me and humbled me, and the other 24 chapters are about the ministry. So I don't want to repeat all that here.

If you're interested, you can read it. What I want to share is how God prepares us to be his servants. We are called to minister to people, to serve them.

You've heard me mention many times about Moses' preparation for service, how Moses had all that education and it was useless. He had to be broken, and God took him through circumstances. I don't know what all he went through during those 40 years in the wilderness, but that was his preparation for ministry, to be the mightiest leader that Israel ever saw.

And he was trained in the wilderness to look after sheep. God trains us in the most unusual ways, because his purpose is not to give us a lot of knowledge and information, or to make us great preachers or scholars. Far from it.

That is the way of the religious world, where they go to Bible college and teach theology and how to preach, etc. But in God's way of training, he has to humble us and break us in such a way that we never lift up our head again. And as long as that has not taken place in our life, there will always be some limitation in our ministry.

I started ministering when I was 23 years old. I sought God for an anointing and the ability to speak, and God gave it to me. It's not natural, because in school I never took part in public speaking.

I was very shy and withdrawn and short, and very introverted. And even when I was in the military, I never took part in public speaking. And even when I became a Christian, I was very, very shy.

But I prayed that God would fill me with the Holy Spirit and give me boldness. And I prayed specifically that I have the ability to preach God's word, prophesying. And I received the gift.

And I continued exercising it, and my sphere of influence spread so wide in a very short time. By the time I was 32 years old, I had written six books, and I had a radio program that was going all over Southeast Asia, and I was going to various international conferences, and I was thoroughly defeated. I hadn't been prepared for the ministry.

It was only with a lot of knowledge. And I think the Lord was seeing whether I'd be happy with this. He was seeing some external success.

I never built anything. You just go and speak to a crowd of 5,000 people, and everybody's stirred. You don't know what happens after that.

You go away to some other crowd, somewhere else. And I could have gone on like that, and I'm absolutely sure my life would have been ruined. Because people didn't know what my inner life was like.

My external life was good. I wasn't running after women or cheating on money or any such thing. But my inner life, I knew God wanted my inner life to be pure, and I was desperate.

And he broke me through failure, and I hit rock bottom. I really thought I should give up the ministry. At the time when my fame was at its peak, I wanted to give it up.

Because just for one reason, my inner life did not back up what I was speaking. I've learned through that one thing, that the most important requirement God has for us is honesty. God loves honest people who will be absolutely honest before him and say, Lord, I am not what I'm pretending to be before people.

I've often been challenged by what the Lord said about Nathanael at a time when he was unconverted. An unconverted man. Not only unconverted, he despised the Nazareth where Jesus was born when Philip found Nathanael, it says in John 1, 45, and said, we found the Messiah.

Messiah? Nathanael says, where's he from? Nazareth? That can never be the Messiah. It's like speaking of some drug infested place or something like that. You can never get a godly man from there.

He said, nothing good can ever come out of Nazareth. Verse 46. That was his opinion.

In the very next verse it says, Jesus says, there's a man who's not pretending. He believes that about Nazareth and he says so. There's a man in whom there's no guile.

He's not pretending. He's not just being diplomatic, saying things to please people. If he's convinced that Nazareth is a rotten place, he'd say that.

The Messiah cannot come from there. That's the type of person Jesus took up, made an apostle of his. Honesty.

So I've learned through my own life, this is what God requires most of all. Baptism in the Holy Spirit, knowledge of the scriptures, yes, all essential. I believe in it.

But honesty, ruthless honesty, so that at every single day of my life, Jesus can look at me and say, there's a person in whom there's no guile. He is what he claims to be. He doesn't claim to be more than what he is.

He doesn't pretend. And it's not that we are satisfied with where we are. We are pressing on to perfection.

But we are never claiming to be what we are not. So, you know when we hear of, like Jamon said, he wrote saying that, yes, I'm defeated. I have a great delight in pricking balloons of false humility.

That's what I did. Whenever I see false humility in someone using their words to act humble, I say, I'd like to prick that balloon and bring him down to earth. They say, okay, then don't come.

You're not fit to be with us. That's not what I believe. I believe a man is genuinely broken and humbled and recognizes honesty about his failure.

He's the right person to be with. He's the one who's fed up with his own life. There's a lot of difference between that and a false humility which just says, oh, I'm just a sinner and all that type of stuff.

And I see in scripture how that's how God prepared all of his servants. Even some of the examples in the Old Testament I think of Isaac and Jacob. Both had godly parents.

One was Abraham, the other was Isaac. But I see a lot of difference in the way they ended their life. And I see it in one incident.

You know the story, so I don't have to point out the chapters to you. Isaac, when he came to the end of his life and he wanted to bless his children, even though God had said at the time of birth, Jacob is the one I've chosen, but Isaac had such a prejudice in favor of Esau that he was willing to modify what God had said. And his prejudice in favor of Esau was just because he loved the meat that Esau cooked.

And the day when he's going to give his blessing he says, go and get some of that lovely venison and I'll give you the blessing. Against all that God had told him. I've seen through the years that partiality is one of the unrecognized sins among many elders in India.

I've seen that. We like somebody like Jacob liked Esau. Sorry, Isaac liked Esau.

And then we overlook certain things. He's my favorite. God sees that.

If he loves honesty, he detests partiality. I've made it a point in my life, I love honesty and I detest partiality. First of all, in my own family, I will never make a difference between any of my children.

They're all the same. I love honesty. I've loved honesty with my fellow believers in the church and even with my own children.

I always encourage them to disagree with me if they want to. Because they're honest. It's fine.

At the end of our long discussion where we disagree, I tell my children, it doesn't disturb me because I know 10 years from now you'll agree with me, so I can wait. Because I realize if a person is honest and continues to be honest about his own life, he will come to the truth. Definitely.

Jesus said this. It's a verse that's always been a great encouragement to me. John 7, 17.

If anyone is eager to do the will of God, he will know the teaching. So when I see people not accepting the New Covenant and the truth of the New Covenant church and the new wineskin, I don't want to judge them. When I say somewhere in their life they're not really eager to do all of God's will.

They want a part of God's will. But Jesus said, if any man is willing to do God's will, he will know of the teaching whether I'm speaking from God or I'm speaking from myself. Jesus was the first one who spoke about the new wineskin.

I find lots of people will listen to me when I speak about the new wine, which is the life of Jesus. A lot of people want it. A lot of conferences we find.

Lots and lots of people come. They want the new wine. But when it comes to the new wineskin, the New Covenant church, which is what Jesus spoke about too, they're not willing to pay the price.

They don't want that. It means somewhere in their life they're not really wanting all of God's will. I see all of God's will as a circle.

There are many segments in it. The life of Christ is one part of it. But the New Covenant church is another part of it.

I can just color the part of the circle which I like and leave out the other which I don't like. We've got to see in our own life whether we have been gripped by all of God's will. Do I want to do all of God's will or am I happy that I and my church are a little better than most of the churches around me? To me that type of logic is garbage.

Our church is better than some other church. I'm not interested. We teach things that other churches don't teach.

I'm not bothered. What is it like? Is it fulfilling all of God's will? Am I fulfilling all of God's will? Am I obeying all of God's commandments in my personal life? Am I teaching all of God's commandments whether it's popular or unpopular? Am I seeking for all of God's power or am I happy with some experience which I call baptism in the Holy Spirit sometime? No. What a tragedy it'll be if I stand before the Lord on the final day and discover that there's a lot more the Lord wanted me to do through me but I lost the hunger.

Somewhere along the way I lost the hunger because I had become a little better than somebody else or I got a little more victory than some other Christians or a church was a little better than some other churches and the hunger was gone. I want to the end of my life to be able to say as the dear plants for water so my heart hungers for you. I'm not interested in the reputation of being a great preacher.

I want to have a hunger for God that never, never gets quenched. I'm not interested in proclaiming new truths and bringing forth new revelations to impress people. I'm happy to preach the same old thing for the next 25 years.

The Old Testament prophets were like that. I want to know God more not new aspects of doctrine or new illustrations and all. These are all to impress soulish people.

I want to know God more. I want to love Jesus passionately more and more. I want to encourage you to go that way.

So you see Jacob was very different when he came to the end of his life. Think of Isaac like this. At the end of his life he's going to put his right hand on Esau to bless him and God miraculously even though Jacob did it through cheating ends up with Isaac blessing Jacob without wanting it.

He was so blind. He was physically blind but he was spiritually blind. But Jacob he was also physically blind towards the end of his life and Joseph brings his two sons Ephraim is the oldest one and he puts him on Jacob's right hand.

You read that in the end of Genesis and he puts Jacob's left hand on Manasseh Manasseh was the older one and Ephraim was the younger one so he puts Manasseh near Jacob's right hand and Jacob, this blind man he crosses his hand and he puts his right hand on Ephraim and Joseph said, no, you got me mistaken dad no, no, no, I know, I know he knew What is the difference between Jacob and Esau?

Between Jacob and Isaac that Isaac was so blind and Jacob knew even though he was blind whom to bless prophetically because Isaac had an easy life he was born into the lap of luxury his father was a wealthy man he got all his revelations second hand from his father his father said this, this, this, this and Isaac sat there and listened, listened, listened he never had any problems in his life I think the maximum problem he had was once when when King almost wanted to take his wife another time when the Philistines took one of the wells a couple of wells he dug nothing very serious an easy way through life without having opportunity to be broken whereas Jacob was different he had to first of all run for his life through his own mistake of course he had to run for his life his brother was

after him to kill him you know how you feel when somebody is after you to kill you I don't think any of us have ever faced that but I can imagine what brokenness and clinging to God that would bring and he tells Laban when he worked there for 20 years he was sweating in the sun and working hard sleeping out in the cold nights God used so many things to break him and he wants to marry one girl and he ends up marrying somebody else all these things, it just broke Jacob thoroughly and still he was a strong man until God dislocated his thigh and said, now Jacob I've succeeded in breaking you now you'll become Israel it's because God took him through all those circumstances of humiliation and being broken and being cheated he tells Laban, you cheated me of my wages cheated me by giving me the

wrong daughter as my wife through all that he came to know God that is God's way and those who have never gone through, who never experienced failure and being broken, really don't have a ministry they'll be like Isaac Isaac is in heaven I'm sure but that's not what I want how am I going to end my life am I going to end my life as one who knows God and can direct people prophetically or have I just accumulated a lot of knowledge it's very easy when we listen to so many messages, there's nothing wrong with that that we have information and knowledge that we can pass on to others it's good, I encourage all our elders please listen to all my messages and you can preach any one of them you don't even have to quote me but don't

let it be just some information you got let it break you the

truths I proclaim have broken me through the years through various circumstances and different, different experiences God had to take me through opposition, ridicule, court cases people wanting to kill me I don't want to go into all that but God just takes care of us and all those circumstances those are the things that prepare you for a ministry, disappointments problems in our, physical problems maybe in our own family and that's what makes us like Jacob, the same in the New Testament Peter's preparation for the most effective ministry he had in the day of Pentecost was his denying the Lord three times that's what broke him, nothing else could have broken him but throughout his life he would never forget I denied my Savior three times I let him down in the most important moment when I

needed to stand with him I let him down, I can never have that opportunity again and it broke him, and the Lord forgave him I was listening to a song by Don Francisco called He's Alive it's a very moving song, I encourage you to listen to it where it's Peter's experience he was in this room scared that the Roman soldiers would come and capture them because they've already captured Jesus and then he was thinking how even if I meet Jesus again it can never be the same it can never be the same like it was the three and a half years I was with him because I let him down so badly in the very moment when I should have stood for him and I boasted that I would stand and then he says how Jesus appeared in him, in the room and there was love and compassion that flowed from him and he just fell down

on his feet he'd been forgiven and that's the thing that excited him, I'm forgiven and he's alive, it's a wonderful thing to know the Lord like that and to look back over I don't think Peter ever forgot that, all his life he'd look back to that time when the Lord wouldn't remind him anything about his past failure nothing never would he remind him that you denied me three times he was forgiven and in that rapture of delight he served the Lord for the rest of his life and if he hadn't experienced it like that, I have recognizing how much God's forgiven me I can fully enter into Peter's experience I haven't seen the Lord physically but it is almost as good I'm forgiven and he's alive, what will I not do for him and I never want to forget that, I want to live in that rapture of he's alive

and I'm forgiven because that makes us compassionate in the way we minister to others we are dealing with broken people, we live in a broken world most of the people who come to our church are struggling with something or the other in their lives life is not easy for many people certainly not in India, even financially and many people have difficulties we have sisters who come who have been forsaken by their husbands people struggling to bring up their children we have to be strict but it must be with compassion that can only be if we live before the presence of the Lord like this Jacob knew he could never forget how he disappointed the Lord, how he cheated and got the birthright and how he cheated Laban and stole his sheep and all the things and yet how God forgave him, that's what made

him a prophet and that's what made Peter all his life, till the end of his life he'd remember even if people praised him and said, wow, what a fantastic ministry you have, he'd say, no, I remember what I was we need to be broken and remain broken, a lot of people are broken for a while and then after some success in their ministry their brokenness disappears I never want that to happen in my life we don't feel condemned about our past failure I never feel condemned, I know my past is blotted out the Lord never reminds me of it, but what it produces in me is a tremendous gratitude and worship for Jesus Christ and to the point where I say, Lord, I don't care if I never preach again you can take away my voice so that I can't preach, you can paralyze my hands, I can never write anything

again, it won't make the slightest difference to me because I'm a worshipper not a preacher, and I want to be a worshipper all my life and who can stop me from that even if I'm paralyzed and lying in bed, I'll be a worshipper never travel again, fine, we must not be so much in love with our ministry and the success we get that we stop being worshippers the new revelations we get and the freedom we have in some meeting to preach and all that don't get taken up with all that, dear brothers be a worshipper, live before Jesus rejoice in the fact that He's alive and you're forgiven it's really true, I listen to that song every now and then He's alive and I'm forgiven I want to be excited about that more than, I built a church here or I got victory because that can be so personal I remember

once the Lord told me, don't ever say you got victory over sin say Jesus keeps me from falling same thing, but it's got a different ring about it, when I say I got victory, I say Jesus keeps me from falling because it's a moment by moment thing it's not that I once got it and now I'm settled for life no, Jesus keeps me from falling, moment by moment that's how it is the apostle Paul, it's the same thing, why did God allow that man to be such a total failure for so many years of his life to the point where he killed Christians can you imagine, do you think he could ever forget that all his life, towards the end of his life God had mercy on me who persecuted his people he never forgets it, never never never and that's what kept him broken for the Lord, so as I was saying you see that in

Jacob, you see that in Peter, you see that in Paul and I'm sure David also, God allowed him to be broken through that failure with Bathsheba most of David's psalms were written before he became king, a lot of them you read that when he was chased by Saul and all that that means before he was 30 years old he was writing scripture but there's one psalm that he wrote when he was towards the end of his life which was nearing 70, I want you to have a look at it psalm 37 he says, I'll tell you why this is written when he's old, because he says that in verse 25, I have been young and now I am old so this is something written, passed from 60 years of age, and he says verse 23, the steps of a man are established by the Lord when he falls he will not be hurled headlong, and I know what he was

thinking of, the Lord is the one who holds his hand and he says, I've never seen the righteous forsaken he was a broken man and he'd never forget his failure how he let down the Lord so badly so even when he preached and wrote psalms there's an element of compassion there because he looks at his past life I know because this is how the Lord dealt with me as well I wished from the time I was converted that I'd never slipped up or never had any dirty thoughts slowly, slowly, slowly, without a single dip press on to perfection but it's not like that with me and I feel sorry for those who've gone that way because there's an element of pride in them, which they don't see themselves I've seen that in some wonderful brothers some elders as well there's an element of pride in them because they've

never been a failure which you could never find in Peter or Paul or Jacob you could probably find it in Isaac and so when it is like that you find in such elders that they don't see their own souliness or pride because they've lived a wonderful life and they entered into the new covenant and now they are leading a church here or there I've met many, many elders in India and I have some experience and there's something about a broken man standing behind the pulpit there's a world of difference between that and one who knows all the doctrines, one who's anointed and one who's gifted and can speak well a lot of difference and a truly broken man will judge himself constantly because he's so he never wants to fail the Lord again he's desperate, he says, Lord I've let you down enough I don't

want to let you down anymore and so he judges himself I found this is some of the results that came in my life that I could never despise a human being it's impossible for me to despise a sinner it's impossible for

me to despise a backslider I mean I may speak strongly but don't live by rules and laws live by the leading of the Holy Spirit He may tell you one thing at one time another thing at another time Proverbs 27 it says answer a fool according to his folly the next verse is don't answer a fool according to his folly boy, if you want contradiction in scripture you have it right there in two verses in Proverbs 27 so some chap who's the intellectual type says here, I see you don't understand the way of the Spirit so if you ask me what shall I do then I say that's where you need the

discernment of the Spirit to see is this fool A or fool B that's not written there, that you need the Holy Spirit and if it's fool A you do this if it's fool B you do this, how will I know that you've got to live by the Spirit ultimately it's the Holy Spirit who guides and if we are broken and humbled God will give you that guidance the greatest need I find among elders is discernment without judging there's a difference between judging and discernment we're not to judge turn to Matthew 7 do not judge lest you be judged very clear it's an absolute statement I should not judge there's no if or but or anything in the way you judge you'll be judged and he goes on right up to verse 5 take the log out of your eye then you can see clearly and what's the very next verse don't give what is holy

to the dogs how do you decide who's a dog he's just told me not to judge and then he says you've got to decide who's a dog and who's a swine it's almost as though he's contradicting what he said in the previous verses here I see a bunch of people who claim to be believers and I have to decide who's a dog and who's a swine that's discernment and there I see like you see scripture if you read scripture without having favorite verses you'll find a balance in the very next verse don't judge but discern so I'm not going to call him a dog or a swine that would be judging I'm not going to tell him this is your fate but I'm going to discern I'm not going to give him what is holy I'm not going to throw a pearl before this person he doesn't know why but it's because I've discerned he's a swine that

guy's a dog but I'll never tell him that I'll leave it to the Holy Spirit to tell him that but if he judges himself, if he wants to do the will of God God will show him so the greatest need I find is discerning like the old soldiers would sharpen their swords for battle we must allow the Holy Spirit to sharpen our sense of discernment in our ministry very important 1 Peter 4 verse 17 it's one of my favorite verses which defines the house of God, the family of God it says that those who judge themselves first this is the opposite of Matthew chapter 7 don't judge others but time has come for judgment to begin in the household of God and it must begin with us first so as much as I'm not here to judge other people I must judge myself first and that is the mark that I'm part of the family of

God in the household of God, judgment time has come for it to begin with us first and if I do that and I keep on doing that God will give me words for others every single time I've seen that in all these 42 years that we've had not only churches planted, special meetings but maybe 200 conferences in different places the Lord has always had something for his people if you judge yourself first see there's no shortage in heaven of anointed words if God can find broken people I remember the Lord said to me if you love my people from your heart fill your heart with love for my people to whom you are speaking and fill your heart with my word and keep judging yourself I will always give you a word for my people I lean on that, I don't try to be over confident and say because the Lord has given

it to me in the past he'll give it to me in the future, no I want my heart to always be filled with love for the people I speak even though they may think I'm very hard, love is hard sometimes we know that with our children our children don't always understand why we are so strict with them but it's because we love them if our hearts are filled with love for God's people I say, you're unfit to speak God's word if you don't love the

people you speak to go and do something else, or that day at least sit down and keep your mouth shut and say Lord I'm not fit to speak to people today because there's something unloving in my heart towards some of those people you'll be hitting people on their head and that happens also somebody's got something, some bee in his bonnet about somebody sitting

over there and he's unfit to speak that day he should keep quiet if you are faithful in that God will be honest I remember once I went to a meeting in our church and they were expecting me to speak and we had a time of prayer usually before speaking usually just a few minutes but I had something that disturbed me that day it was not against anyone but something that had happened in the church which was not done I always get very upset something's not done that should have been done in readiness for the meeting and it disturbed me and I don't remember whether I was disturbed about the person who should have done it but I was on my knees like everybody else who used to kneel down and pray and the prayer meeting was prolonged and it went on and on and on and everybody was wondering what was

happening but I couldn't get up because there was no peace in my heart yet I hadn't come to rest or I should get up and say I'm not speaking today but they were all expecting me to speak so the only alternative was to prolong the prayer meeting till I came to rest and it took a long time and finally I came to rest and I could say Amen now I'm ready to speak God's word but I had decided long ago that I would never never open my mouth either at home to speak to my wife or in a meeting to speak God's word if there's any agitation in my heart about anything it may have nothing to do with my home situation or the church situation but it's an agitation, I'm not at rest I'm not at peace Romans 8.6 says the mind of the spirit is peace and life I will not have the mind of the spirit if I don't

have peace and life in my heart I follow that rule of course I can get up at any time with agitation in my heart and take a bible study on Ephesians I've done it so many times that I can do it again but it won't be the word of the Lord and if it's not the word of the Lord it's better not to speak at all there's no rule that we have to speak for so many minutes I found that also with some people they sort of say well everybody speaks for so many minutes so I should speak for so many minutes you will kill the meeting you say Lord I'm going to speak as long as you give me liberty and don't imitate someone who may be more mature who's got greater anointing or greater brokenness let every man prophesy according to his own proportion of faith it says in Romans 12 and there's a vast difference

it's like signing a check if all of us were asked to sign a check right now we could sign according to the limit of our bank accounts I can't sign beyond my bank account and you can't sign beyond yours and somebody may be able to sign a check for ten times what you can do, that's fine to me prophesying is like that that fellow can speak for ten times the length of time I can speak, fine well, he's got a bigger bank account but if I imitate that person and write a check for the same amount it's going to be rejected by the bank it's not going to accomplish so if I judge myself always and love God's people and fill my heart with God's word that's what the Lord said let your heart be filled with love for my people and let it be filled with my word and keep judging yourself and I'll always

give you a word for my people and the memory, I have to say that the memory of my past failure never, never, never condemns me I look back over 77 and a half years of never having sinned justified completely by my Savior's blood that I can stand before God with such boldness and look at Him and say Father, I've never sinned in 77 and a half years that's why I can look straight into your face that is my faith in the blood of Jesus Christ Romans 5, 9 says justified by His blood but along with that is one of these paradoxes of the Christian life along with that, there's that memory which I'll never lose of having let down

the Lord so badly just like Paul and Peter and I'm not ashamed to speak about it I even spoke about it in that book of mine you can read it I don't want to pretend that it

was all smooth sailing from day one because it was not and I look in scripture and I find the greatest men of God were like that John the Apostle was the man who wanted to call fire down from heaven and destroy the Samaritans can you imagine how he felt about that later on so I pray that God will prepare us for the coming days of ministry our Father make the rest of the day profitable bless us so far in listening to one another's testimonies bless our fellowship together in Jesus name, Amen

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