

# Jesus is our Example as an Overcomer

by Zac Poonen

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**Scripture:** Hebrews 4:15, John 6:37, 1 Timothy 3:16, Hebrews 4:16, Romans 6:14, Luke 2:40, Hebrews 5:8, James 1:4, 1 Corinthians 13:4

**Topics:** "Holy Spirit", "Surrender to Christ"

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## Description

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## Transcript

I want to turn to Hebrews in chapter 4. The two things that were a big factor in the beginning of CFC in Bangalore 46 years ago, two things that happened in my life since I was the main teacher there. One was being filled with the Holy Spirit. You know this is something that is not once for all, it's again and again.

But I find many people who are, who talk about being filled with the Spirit are re-imagining. Nothing really happened. I wanted to be absolutely certain and it took me many years to be certain.

It's like being born again, you know, we accept Christ. You're born in a Christian family, maybe from the age of four or five, your parents tell you to accept Christ. Yeah, I believe a person can be saved even when they're three or four years old.

I don't have any doubt about it. But it's a lot of different from their assurance of salvation coming. I prayed and asked the Lord to come into my heart probably, I don't know, more than 100 times or I don't know if it was 500 times from the time I was around 13 years old, I think, because my dad was a God-fearing person who sent us to a good evangelical Sunday school.

But I can say that my life really got established after six years later when I was 19 and a half, when I was sure Christ would accept me, just from one verse. Him that cometh to me, I'll not cast out like an anchor will drop my life that has not allowed me to drift for 62 years. In the same way, I found that being filled with the Spirit too.

I began to pray for it way back a couple of years after I was baptized when I was 23 years old, and I believe I experienced something. But as time went on and I found I was backsliding, even though I had a gift, I was not happy. I said, there's something more.

I need to know a genuine fullness of the Spirit. And God met with me way back in early 1975, and it turned the direction of my life. The graph started going up.

The other great truth that happened was, it was the great truth that I realized at that time, which became real to me, was that Jesus Christ was 100% man without sin, but tempted exactly like me in every area. That's what we read here in Hebrews 4.15. We don't have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weakness. And when we talk about weakness, you know, the average worldly person thinks of physical weakness and sickness, but that's not what he's talking about here.

He's talking about our fundamental weakness, which is we sin. We sin because we are weak. And he says, here's a high priest who can sympathize with the weakness we feel in the moment of temptation, because it goes on to say he was tempted like us.

That's the weakness he's talking about. He can sympathize with our weakness. Why? Not because he was physically weak or he got sick, but because he could feel weakness in the time of temptation, human weakness to do the will of God and want to do our own will.

That's weakness. It's human strength. The strength of our stubborn self-will is called weakness.

That is weakness. That's what prevents us from doing God's will. And Jesus could sympathize with it because he could see the strength of temptation and he never sinned, it says here, without sin.

Now, most Christians, including me at that time, felt, well, of course, Jesus is God. Actually, he did not sin. He could not sin.

But if that were the case, he could never say to us, follow me, because we'd immediately say, we can't follow you. Like I've often said, it's like an angel with a pair of wings trying to teach us how to swim across a river. You know how to say, we can't follow you.

Get rid of your wings first, then teach me to swim. So Jesus came to earth as God with a heavenly credit card with which he could draw things which I cannot. Then he cannot be an example for me.

I should have realized that earlier. Jesus said, follow me. How can I follow him if he does not like me? I mean, if I'm lame and he's got strong legs, he can't tell me to follow him.

But he was tempted like me. Now, I'll tell you another thing. When I understood this, it really changed my life.

I told you two things, being filled with the Holy Spirit and seeing Jesus as having come like me, tempted like me, never sinning. That gave me hope that I can overcome sin too. See, there's a verse in 1 Timothy 3 and verse 16, which is very beautifully paraphrased in the living Bible.

Here it says in 1 Timothy 3, 16, great is the mystery of godliness. Language is more difficult for us to understand. He was revealed in the flesh, was vindicated in the spirit, was seen by angels.

Most Christians reading that, I tell you honestly, they get nothing out of it. I also read it for so many years, I got nothing out of it. Great is the mystery of godliness.

He who was revealed in the flesh, was vindicated in the spirit, seen by angels, proclaimed unto the nation, believed on in the world and taken up in glory. What do you get out of it? So sometimes a paraphrase is good. It helps us to see the inner meaning.

And the living Bible says, it is true that the way to live a godly life is not an easy matter. Now we understand it. The mystery of godliness, the secret.

It's true that the secret of living a godly life is not an easy matter. But the answer lies in Christ, who came to earth as a man. He was revealed in the flesh.

Ah, then I got it. People sometimes ask me, why do you read these paraphrases of the Bible? Don't you stick to the Bible? Well, I never get a doctrine out of any paraphrase. But I tell you, there are some passages of scripture that have become alive to me, when I read it in the message Bible or the living Bible.

I won't get a doctrine from there. But particularly this verse, for example. It's true that the way to live a godly life is not an easy matter.

But the answer lies in Christ, who came to earth like us, and was pure in his spirit. That's the thing. How can I keep my spirit pure? He came like me, tempted like me.

Back to Hebrews 4.15. Tempted like me in every single point, and did not sin in any of those points. Now, we read it. Many of you have heard me preach this, and you believe it.

But I don't know whether in the moment of temptation, you realize that there, that moment, that thing, Jesus was also tempted by. I remember in my, this was, when was this? I was 35 years old, and I'm tempted like all other young men. And when I was tempted in some area, I would say, Lord Jesus, you were also tempted exactly with the same thing I'm being tempted by right now, when you were in Nazareth.

I want to react to this the way you reacted in Nazareth. See, this is what happened to me when I believed this, and I was gripped by it. That in every situation, I could turn to the Lord and say, Lord, you face this.

I'm not facing this for the first time. You faced it. Whatever it is, the worst possible thing, committing suicide.

You know that Jesus, the devil tempted Jesus to commit suicide, jump out of the temple, and the angels would protect you. No angel would protect him. He would have died.

But he resisted it. He said, we don't, you know, take advantage of God's promises and try to tempt God by such things. He was tempted like me in every point.

There's no person who can say, I'm facing something Jesus never faced. The temptation to depression. I'm not talking about clinical depression or something which is in the system.

I'm talking about this temptation to get discouraged. It's almost like saying, well, at this moment, the devil is in control of this sphere of my life. God has sort of ignored me.

He's not my father. He's not present with me. The devil's in control, so I'm discouraged.

But otherwise, God is on the throne. Is there any time when God is not on the throne? Is there any time when God does not make everything work for our good? Even when we do foolish things and suffer for it, God is there to forgive us. So there's never a time when we should be discouraged.

There's never a time when we should condemn ourselves because the blood of Jesus has blotted out our past. Okay. He was tempted in everything.

How is he without sin? That's the point. Verse 16, therefore, like I've often said, whenever you see the word, therefore, in scripture, see what it is there for. Why is this word therefore over here? Because it is connected to the previous verse.

Because Jesus never sinned. And that is our goal also, to never consciously sin. Therefore, what should we do? Let me paraphrase again.

Let us do the same thing he did. Let us do the same thing he did because he was tempted like us and he overcame. He did something that helped him to overcome.

Let us do the same thing. Therefore, let us also draw near to the throne of grace. He prayed to the father that we may receive mercy.

Jesus did not need mercy. Mercy is relating to our past life, forgiveness of sins. That's one thing Jesus never needed.

We need it. But the second part is what Jesus got, which we need. Grace.

Grace relates to the future. Mercy relates to the past. We come to the throne of grace.

It's a word not found in the Old Testament. The Old Testament word is mercy, mercy, mercy, mercy. Because it was only forgiveness, forgiveness, forgiveness.

There was no victory or sin in the Old Testament. But now it is mercy and grace. Let us find that we will find grace to help me when I'm tempted.

That is my time of need. So that's the meaning of verse 16. Since Jesus was tempted like us, therefore, when we are tempted, that is our time of need, let us do what he did.

First of all, ask God to forgive us our past sins. That's mercy. And then go to the throne of grace and ask for the same grace that helped Jesus to overcome.

Now we connect this with Romans 6, 14, which is a well-known verse for all of us. Sin shall not have dominion over you when you're under grace. See, when you're under grace, when grace is over you, grace is a covering over you.

Sin can't touch you. It's like saying, if I'm under a roof, when it's raining, not a drop of rain will fall on me. But if I put my hand outside the window, that gets wet.

So if I move some area out of grace, then I sin. But as long as I'm under grace, Romans 6, 14 says, I cannot sin. Sin shall not rule over you when you're under grace.

And that's how Jesus was from childhood. Turn to Luke chapter 2. Luke chapter 2. And he's talking about Jesus as a child, when he was growing up, referring to Jesus in verse 39 and 40. He came to the city of Nazareth and verse 40, the child Jesus, Luke 2, 40, continued to grow physically and become strong, increasing in wisdom.

And the grace of God was where? Upon him, just like I showed you. When grace is over me, grace is upon me. Sin will not have dominion over me.

You connect this verse, Luke 2, 40, with Romans 6, 14. Sin shall not have dominion over you when you're under grace. And Jesus was under grace, because the grace of God was upon him, right from childhood.

That's why he never sinned. He said, let's also go to the throne of grace and have that grace upon us. That's the only way to be free from sin.

It's not by determining. It's not by reminding ourselves at some particular time of some verse. These are all techniques of Christian psychology.

What you need is grace, not psychology. What about that terrible thing that he faced finally at the end of his life? To go to the cross, to be forsaken by God the Father, the most terrible temptation he ever faced, that he had to struggle and get so many for one year, I mean, for one hour. How did he face that? How could he go to that cross? Okay, we saw how he began his life with the grace of God over him.

Let's see how he ended his life. Hebrews 2 and verse 9. The scripture is given to us so that we can know, we can see Jesus here. The Holy Spirit comes to show us Jesus in the scriptures.

We see Jesus, Hebrews 2 and 9, made a little lower than the angels. That's why the human beings are lower than the angels. Because angels don't die, human beings die.

So we are lower than angels. And Jesus suffered death. That means he came lower than the angels.

But it says there in verse 9, it was by the grace of God that he tasted that he went to that terrible death. So birth to death. The answer of Jesus' life was grace.

It's a very strong word. Jesus lived by grace. He lived the Father.

That's why this evangelical Christianity calls grace God's unmerited favor. Do you think Jesus did not merit the favor of God? Grace is not God's unmerited favor, because I tell you, every human being is getting God's unmerited favor on the earth. When a man can eat food, and live a comfortable life, and be healthy for 100 years old, and he's not even converted.

You think it's not unmerited favor? 100% unmerited favor, but that is not grace. Don't listen to these definitions from evangelical Christianity, which are not found in Scripture. Grace is God's help, God's power that comes to us in our weakness.

That is a definition in 2 Corinthians 12, 9, where God, Jesus, the Lord told Paul, my grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in your weakness. That is a definition of grace. A scriptural definition, 2 Corinthians 12.

The power of God that helps me in my weakness, and my weakness, according to this verse here, is my temptation to sin, and grace can help me, and strengthen my heart. It's not something that needs to be educated our minds. See Hebrews 13, verse 8. I like this verse in relation to all the theories there are about overcoming sin.

So many people preach so many theories about how to overcome sin, and here is the answer. Don't be carried away by all these strange teachings about how to overcome sin, because they won't work. What you need is for your heart to be strengthened by grace.

That's what you need, not strange teachings. If your heart is strengthened by grace, you'll overcome, but you can even listen to the teaching you hear in NCCF, Christ came in the flesh, was tempted like me. Oh great, you've understood nothing.

You need grace in the time of your temptation. Then you've seen how Jesus lived. Then I want to show you something further.

Hebrews 5. He continues on the same subject. You know he says in Hebrews 5 11. This is a great verse.

Hebrews 5 11. Concerning Jesus in this way, and one who's tempted like us. I have much to say.

There's so much I want to say to you. Which whoever wrote this letter, it will fall that God revealed to me. So much I have to say, but it's very difficult to explain.

Was it because the man who wrote it was not intelligent? Or people who are reading it were not intelligent? It's got nothing to do with intelligence. It's hard to explain because you guys are not serious about overcoming sin in your life. Then it's very hard to explain.

Very hard to explain to a student who's not serious about trying to understand that subject. You can explain mathematics as much as you like, but if the student is not interested in studying mathematics, you'll never get it. So it's very hard to explain to most Christians.

I found this in my life too. It's very hard to explain this to most Christians. They understand the theory of it.

I mean you're understanding what I'm saying right now. You probably understood it so well now you can even explain it to others. Well the proof is if you overcome sin in your life, then you've understood it.

Otherwise you haven't understood a thing. I'll have to say it's hard to explain to you folks because he says to the Hebrews, you've become dull of hearing. How brave these apostles were.

What all names they called God's children. James called believers adulteresses. Have you read that in James 4? Little children, you adulteresses.

I tell you they were prophets. And you Hebrews, you're Christians I know, but it's so hard to explain because you're dull of hearing. You're not serious about listening to God overcome sin.

But anyway I'll explain a little bit to you. He says, let me say to you that Jesus, verse 8 of Hebrews 5, had to learn obedience. Think of that.

Jesus had to learn obedience. Because what is it we teach little children from the time they are born? First, obedience. If you don't teach a little child obedience, you can teach them everything else.

It's no use. Obedience is what they need to learn. And Jesus learned obedience.

Why? Because when he was God, he didn't have to obey anybody. He had never learned obedience. You know that God Almighty has never learned obedience.

Who is he going to obey? You must have an authority over you. When Jesus became a man, he voluntarily submitted to his father's authority and he had to learn obedience. He had to learn, for example, as a child to honor and obey his unconverted Joseph and Mary.

You could see Joseph and Mary yelling at each other. You believe that Joseph and Mary fought with each other? Your husband and wife tell me, experienced married people. Did Jesus and Mary fight with each other? Did Joseph and Mary fight with each other? I believe they did.

I'm not a Roman Catholic who believes in the Holy Mary who never sinned. They were an ordinary couple. Mary was probably 19 years old and Joseph was a young man and they all knew married people.

And they were under the old covenant. They didn't have a clue about overcoming sin. And Jesus saw that.

And he never despised them. If he despised them, he would have sinned. So he never did.

And when this so-called father and mother, Joseph was not his father, when Joseph and Mary were fighting with each other and they told Jesus to do something, he did it. He learned obedience to obey those who are imperfect authorities. Supposing you're working in an office and your boss is an absolute crook.

Will you obey him? Learn from Jesus who obeyed imperfect authorities in his home. He learned obedience when that obedience meant suffering. When obedience brings joy or some pleasure, it's one thing.

It's like telling a child, eat that ice cream. Oh, there's not much suffering there. But he learned obedience when obedience meant suffering.

Yeah. And how did he learn that obedience? Verse seven, he prayed with loud crying and tears. What for? He prayed to the father to save him from spiritual death.

Now there are two types of death the Bible speaks about, spiritual death and physical death. Which death is referred to here? It cannot be physical death because Jesus never prayed to be saved from that. He said, Lord, let me not drink this cup.

But the cup he was talking about was being forsaken by the father on the cross and not physical death. He was never afraid of physical death. He would be willing to die a million physical deaths for us.

To save him from spiritual death, and I'll tell you why it is spiritual death, because it says God heard his prayer. He was not saved from physical death. So when it says he was heard, it obviously means it's not physical death.

Let me paraphrase them. He asked the father to save him from spiritual death. James one says, sin leads to death.

The wages of sin is death. That smell of death he didn't want in his life, spiritual death, not even the smell of it. So he prayed and because he was weak, he had to pray with loud crying and tears.

And I believe that's the reason why you read so often Jesus would go into the wilderness to pray. And we have to follow him. And I remember once saying, Lord, I'm living in Bangalore.

It's a big city. There's no wilderness anywhere nearby to go and pray with loud crying. If I had to follow Jesus and this is the way I can overcome sin.

And the Lord said to me something that really changed my attitude to this and helped me. And the Lord said, you know, you can cry in your heart, loud cry in your heart without any sound coming out of your mouth. And I learned it lying on bed at night, lying in the bed at night or other times with a loud cry in the heart and not a sound from the mouth.

Lord, I don't want to sin. I don't want even a small slip up in my thought. I don't want to defile myself.

It's like if you see sin like poison, I don't want to take even a little bit of poison, however tasty it may be. How careful we are with germs in our food and all. We want to avoid it.

We wash our hands. Look at this COVID time. I don't think anybody's washed their hands so many times in their life as in this last one year.

We're so careful. Imagine if we had a dread of sin like we have a dread of this COVID germ. Boy, we'd have a lot of victory in many Christians' lives.

Oh, Father, I don't want even the smell of that in my life. He learned obedience. He had to learn overcoming getting offended.

You read in John chapter seven, he had four brothers and two sisters who did not believe in him. The names of those brothers are mentioned in Mark six, at least two sisters, probably more. But it says in John chapter seven, they did not believe in him.

Can you imagine growing up with Jesus for 30 years or at least some of them for 20 years, this elder brother of theirs in the same house? Just picture this. I used to picture this in my mind. If I was a naughty young boy and I had this elder brother who would never do anything unkind, always obey the parents.

And even when I irritate him and try to make him angry, he doesn't get angry. And not just once or twice, I watched this for 20 years. I'd have to say, boy, this guy's different.

Every other person is so different that I know my friends, but this person is so different. My elder brother is so different. Can you imagine not believing that he is the son of God? Such a prejudice.

But he loved him. Yeah. He never got offended with them.

He never got offended with people. You know, when he walked down the street, people pointing out to him, you see that, see that boy there? The one in the middle there? That's Jesus. He's the son of Mary.

We don't know who the father is. And he heard it. Imagine if you heard that sometimes.

Somebody saying, we don't know who this guy's father is. How would you feel? He never got offended. If he got offended once, he would have sinned.

He could not have died as a sacrifice for us. This is practically what it means to look unto Jesus and run the race. I'm telling you my own experience.

I said, Lord, I want to see you. You know that verse in John chapter 16, which says the Holy Spirit will take of the things of mine and show unto you, Jesus said. It's what I prayed, Lord, Holy Spirit of God, please take of the things of Jesus and show it to me.

And ever since God filled me with the Holy Spirit, he's done that. He takes of the things of Jesus and shows it to me. That's more important to me than speaking in tongues.

I'll tell you any day. Don't be too taken up with speaking in tongues. If God gives it to you, take it.

Otherwise, forget it. Jesus never spoke in tongues. Find comfort in that.

But ask the Holy Spirit to take of the things of Christ and show it unto you like it says in John 16. He will take of the things of mine and show it unto you. Many times I say, Lord, show me.

Show me that inner life of Jesus and his private life, how he was never offended. And through the years, I've discovered that getting offended is one of the things we have to overcome in the kindergarten of the Christian life. See Hebrews 5, it says Jesus learned.

He had an education. The word learn has got to do with education. He got an education.

An education not in math or science or English, but in obedience. And that is the school in which it says in verse 9, having been made perfect, he became to those who obey him the source of eternal salvation. So it's like saying about a boy, he went to school and he learned mathematics and he got a PhD in mathematics.

And now he's become a professor in mathematics in the same school. So here Jesus went through a school and he learned obedience, obedience, obedience, obedience. And he got the highest degree in obedience.

And now he's coming to the same school to teach, verse 9, to teach us the same subject. Who's going to teach me obedience? The one who's become a professor in obedience. And one of the first lessons I've had to learn and others have to learn is in the kindergarten, don't get offended.

See other sins like anger, sexual lust, love of money, they take years to overcome. I'll tell you honestly. But getting offended, it's only because of pride that we get offended.

Somebody said something about you. Why are you offended? You think so highly about yourself? Die, die. I remember once I was visiting a church where it was in England somewhere years ago and a pastor was telling me, Brother Zach, these people are saying this, that, and the other, and the other, and the other thing about me and making life so miserable.

So brother, what do you suggest? I said one word, die. It won't disturb you anymore. You know, years later, years later, he said to me, Brother Zach, I'll never forget what you told me.

You listen to all that I said, you have no sympathy for me. You just told me, die. I'll never forget it.

Yeah, I didn't sympathize with him. I said, Brother, you're getting an education, man. What is there to sympathize with you? You sympathize with the child who's getting a PhD? No, I said, great.

So I have a professor who teaches me obedience from the same, in the same school where he learned it himself. And he teaches me every subject, starting with the ABC, and ABC is stop getting offended. I want to say to all of you, getting offended with what your wife told you, or what your husband told you, or what your wife should have done and did not do, or what your husband should have done and did not do.

He was supposed to buy vegetables on the way home, forgot all about it. She was supposed to tell you that important phone message that came for you when you were not at home, didn't tell you. The world is not going to collapse.

Don't get offended. Die. Die.

That's how he learned obedience. So that's one of the first things I wanted to mention. It says in Matthew chapter 15 about certain people who got offended.

Matthew 15, Jesus spoke some strong words here. He said in verse 8, these people just honor me with their lips. Matthew 15 verse 8. Their heart is far away from me.

These people preach so much. He was talking in verse 1 to the Pharisees and the Bible scholars. Scribes means Bible scholars.

He was talking to them and he said to everybody, these guys, Bible scholars, they only honor with their lips. Their heart is far away from me. Their worship is all empty.

Vain means empty. And the doctrines they preach are not the doctrines of God. It's just the teachings of men.

And the disciples came and said to him, verse 12, the Pharisees were offended. Aha. Do you get offended when somebody says something to you or about you? See what, how Jesus says you should treat people who get offended.

Ignore them. Forget about them. Every plant my heavenly father did not plant will be uprooted.

So forget it. He was not bothered about them. I don't want to be like the Pharisees who get offended.

And like that step-by-step, the Lord will lead us to higher ground. I just mentioned one more thing. In the path to perfection, once you overcome getting offended, there is a path to perfection, which is described in James chapter 1, like this.

And in the King James version and all the word used is patience. James 1, chapter 1 and verse 4, let patience have its perfect results. Then you will be perfect.

You will get your PhD too. And complete. Lacking in nothing, you'd have covered every subject.

Patience. You know, we all know that 1 Corinthians 13 is the chapter on love. You know, what is the first quality of love mentioned there? 1 Corinthians 13, verse 4 or 5. Love is patient.

And it says here, let patience or endurance have its perfect result in you. That means go from first grade, second grade, third grade, fourth grade and patience, patience, patience, patience. And one day you get your PhD too.

And Jesus is teaching you and you'll be lacking in nothing. This is the race we have to run. And I tell you in the world in which we live, we get plenty of opportunity for patience.

Particularly if you have children, they are your professors in your home. God uses them. Don't get irritated.

So often the distance comes between parents and children because the children feel, my dad, my mom has no time for me. If I go to them with something, they get upset and irritated because they're busy. Their mind is on something else.

Don't neglect your children like that. Be patient. Take time to spend time with them.

When they are fixing some toy or something that's broken, sit down with them and fix it. Play with them. Learn patience.

All that very important work you got to do can wait. Spend time with your children. Let patience have its perfect work.

And when your children irritate you, patience. I remember, you know, my children are like all other people's children. They all grew up.

I remember the years when we were speaking about victory over sin. Some brother came to my house and said, asked about my children. I said, my children are children of Adam.

They have to be born again and they will overcome. Till then they are like any other child. So I remember once I was in bed with a headache and I said, Lord, what is this? Did you have headaches? And I believe he did.

You can think whatever you like about me, about my faith in Jesus. I believe he did. It comforted me to know that Jesus had headaches.

Because that's not a sin to have a headache. See, this is a higher class I'm leading you to. You've got a promotion now.

You have overcome getting irritated with your children without a headache. Now I'm taking you to a higher class where you have to overcome getting irritated with your children when you have a headache. I said, great.

It was a promotion. I didn't realize that. Because I have a professor who's leading me step by step the way he went.

Jesus was sick. You read that in Isaiah 53. I don't have time to go there right now.

Sickness is not a sin. He had to experience it in order to be our forerunner. I thank God that I have such a wonderful example who went through everything I go through.

That's what changed my life. And I want to tell you, fullness of the Holy Spirit and seeing that Jesus was tempted like me and has become my teacher now is the foundation on which we built the first CFC in Bangalore. And it changed my life.

And those who have been gripped by it through the years, through hearing the truth, it has changed their life. Those who only understood in their head and not serious about walking this way, well, I hope one day

they will understand. May God help us all.

Let's pray. Our Father, we thank you for sending Jesus to this earth, not only to die for our sins, but that you allowed your son to be ill-treated and despised and rejected and all types of things so that he could be a forerunner for me and for us. Help us to see him more clearly.

Fill us with the Holy Spirit that we see Jesus more clearly every day in all our situations of life. This is your will. Help every one of these dear brothers and sisters who are listening to me now to see you, Lord.

I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

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