

Personal Influences

by Zac Poonen

Zac Poonen shares his personal influences and the common thread among influential Christians, emphasizing the importance of sacrificial living and a deeper spiritual life.

Duration: 10:00

Scripture: Matthew 6:24, Matthew 16:24, Acts 1:8, Galatians 2:20, Philippians 3:10, Philippians 4:6, James 1:26

Topics: "Christian Biographies", "Spiritual Formation"

Description

This sermon reflects on individuals who have had a significant positive influence on Christianity, including Madame Guillaume, John Wesley, John Fletcher, David Brainerd, William Carey, Charles Finney, A.D. Simpson, William Booth, George Muller, Hudson Taylor, C.D. Studd, Amy Carmichael, Andrew Murray, Jesse Penn Lewis, A.W. Tozer, Watchman Nee, and Bhakt Singh. These individuals emphasized sacrificial living, the importance of the Holy Spirit, and a focus on the Way of the Cross. The speaker also shares personal disappointments with the state of Christianity in India and his journey towards seeking a deeper, more authentic Christian life.

Transcript

What person or persons who lived after the first century had the most positive influence on your Christianity? Well, a lot of people whose lives I've read, whose biographies have challenged me. Going back in time, one of the earliest would be Madame Guillaume, 15th or 16th century. And then, coming down in time, John Wesley, in the 18th century.

John Fletcher, one of Wesley's co-workers. David Brainerd, missionary to the Red Indians. And William Carey, missionary to India.

And then coming down later, in the 19th century, Charles Finney, A.D. Simpson, William Booth, founder of the Salvation Army. George Muller, Finney. And then, Hudson Taylor, missionary to China.

Early part of the 20th century. C.D. Studd, missionary to Africa. And other missionaries were not so well known, Amy Carmichael in India.

And then, later on in the 20th century, Andrew Murray, Jesse Penn Lewis, who wrote a lot about the cross in English. And towards the latter half of the 20th century, A.W. Tozer, Watchman Dean. These are some of the folks whose writings have helped me tremendously.

And, in India, I knew one man, who, till today, is the one whom I respected most, is the most godly man I ever met. He was a Sikh convert. Sikhs are people who wear turbans and have a religion in India, it was a branch of Hinduism.

And he was converted from that. He was, I mean, 36 years older than me. But, his name was Bhakt Singh.

And he started a number of churches. He was the one man who I really felt was a man of God, a man totally free from the love of money, and who did not care to impress men, and who sought to build churches in India, which were not dependent on the West, like a lot of other churches were, free from money, which I felt was a very important thing. So, he was the only man, I would say, in India, who I really respected.

As a young, when I was a young Christian, coming out to serve the Lord, he told me three things, early in life, which really helped me. One, he said, as a servant of the Lord, never, never make your needs known to anybody. And I followed that all these 42 years.

I've never sent prayer letters, or ever made my needs, or the needs of our churches, ever known to anyone. Only told the Lord. Hudson Taylor had that same approach.

George Mueller had it. I learned it from this brother, first time. The second thing he said was, live very simply.

Don't spend too much on yourself. I tried to follow that too, for 40 years. And the third thing he said was, when people, Christians, will attack you, don't respond, don't fight back.

Just leave it to the Lord. Three bits of advice that have helped me a lot in my life. Greg, if I may.

You mentioned a lot of names in answer to that question. If there were one common thread, that is common to each of these people, what would that be? Well, I think they all believed in a life of sacrifice, in order to serve the Lord. Some of them had different doctrines on the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

But I believe they were all filled with the Spirit. And some were able to express the doctrine more clearly. And some were, didn't express it in the same way.

But I believe that these men were all filled with the Holy Spirit. And they believed in, that if you follow Christ, even though they may not have expressed the teaching of the Way of the Cross in the same way, I believe the Cross was central in their life. There were some who talked about it and preached about it.

I see that, you know, some people had the right doctrine in their heads. Some, the doctrine was not so clear in their mind, but their heart was all the same, in the direction of the spiritual life of the Way of the Cross. See, there's a lady in India who's very well known, called Mother Teresa, who has worked a lot among the poor.

She's a Roman Catholic. But I've been tremendously impressed by her compassion for the poor. That was a person whose mind didn't have the right doctrines.

But her heart loved Jesus. So I, this is the thing that I look for. People who love Jesus, and I know their mind was not always expressing truth in the same way, but they loved Jesus and wanted to follow Him.

That's the common thing I saw. Have you had any disappointments with Christians? If yes, what stands out in your mind as the most serious disappointment, and how did that influence your Christianity? You know, when I left the Navy, the Lord called me to leave my job. I was ambitious to go to the top of the Navy, the Indian Navy, and then 1964, when I was 24 and a half years old, the Lord called me to quit my job.

And the Navy never released me for another two years. So finally I left in 1966, when I was about 26 and a half years old. And I spent nine years thereafter traveling the length and breadth of India.

I felt my calling was primarily to India. Even today I feel that my primary calling is in India. I traveled the length and breadth of India, from north to south, east to west, and I went around to so many mission stations, churches.

India's got only 2% Christians out of a population of 1,200 million people. 1% Catholic, 1% Protestant. But I found among that, the percentage of believers was so small.

But the worst part, as I traveled around, was the quality of life of the Christians was so poor. Hardly anybody spoke about the things Jesus spoke on the Sermon on the Mount. In my 50 years as a believer, I never heard a sermon on being free from the love of money.

I never heard people preaching strongly on never lusting with your eyes after a woman. I never heard preaching saying that anger was a sin you had to be completely free from. Or what it says in James 1.26, that if a man cannot control his tongue, his entire Christianity is worth zero.

I never heard a preaching on that. I never heard preaching on be totally free from anxiety, or rejoice in the Lord always 24-7. I never heard things like this, and I wish I had.

So I was disappointed with a lot that I saw. And finally, I pulled out of... I was traveling many countries already when I was 33 years old, 24 years old. I had written books by then.

I was having a weekly radio program. I was invited to conferences in many countries. But a time came in my life, I said, Lord, I'm not satisfied.

I've defeated myself in my inner life. I want to be an overcomer. And I want to spend my life making a few disciples.

I can't change the character of Christianity all over India. But in a few people, if I can lead them to the type of life described in the New Testament, I feel I've done a worthwhile job with my life. So I quit all ministry, stopped traveling, gave up everything, refused all of the new invitations, and sat in my home with about seven or eight people in 1975, August.

And we started from scratch with others who were sick and tired of their own defeated life. I used to tell people, if you're sick and tired of the church you're in, don't come here. If you're sick and tired of your own life, come here.

We want to be a group of people who are sick and tired of our own defeated life. And we don't want to sit here and criticize other churches. We want to judge ourselves and seem to come to a godly life.

So I was disappointed with many things, but I think I was most of all disappointed with myself, my own defeated life. And I translate Matthew 11, 28 like that. Come to me, all of you who are sick and tired of

your defeated life.

And I'll give you rest. And I can honestly say the Lord led me to rest. What year was that? It was, I would say, I can't say a moment like that, but from 75 onwards, from the time the Lord filled me afresh with the Holy Spirit, gave me the gift of talents, I used to be very frequently discouraged and depressed before that.

But it's amazing. I mean, the last 30 years, I've almost never been discouraged or depressed. God's been very good to me.

I mean, like Paul says, there are fightings without and fears within, but I've been able to conquer. God's been very good to me. It all started around 33 years ago, but it's been progressive.

The rest becomes deeper.

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