

Principles for Serving God - Fulfilling Our Appointed Task

by Zac Poonen

God has a specific task for each one of us in the body of Christ, and we should fulfill that task by believing in the authority given to us by the Holy Spirit.

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Scripture: Matthew 6:33, Mark 13:34, Acts 2:22-23, Romans 12:6, Ephesians 4:11-12, 2 Timothy 4:5, 1 Peter 4:10-11

Topics: "Principles"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker addresses the issue of being zealous and radical in one's faith versus being diplomatic and sitting on the fence. He compares this to watching a football game and criticizing the players' decisions from the sidelines. The speaker emphasizes that clarity in one's ministry takes time and should not be compared to those who have been walking with the Lord for many years. He encourages listeners to be faithful in whatever task or ministry they have been assigned by God, reminding them that they have been given authority by the Holy Spirit to fulfill their tasks.

Transcript

Acts of the Apostles, Chapter 20. Here Paul is speaking concerning himself, in verse 24, Acts 20, 24. But I do not consider my life of any account as dear to myself, in order that I may finish my course, and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify solemnly of the gospel of the grace of God.

I will paraphrase of this. It is put like this, that life is worth nothing, unless I use it for doing the task assigned me by the Lord Jesus. Paul had that concept of life, that life was worth nothing, unless it was used to fulfill that specific task which the Lord had appointed for him.

And I think there are very, very few believers who have the same concept and attitude towards life. And we have three evenings now, I thought we would consider three different topics that are essential for one who seeks to serve the Lord, as God's fellow workers. First of all, what we can consider today is fulfilling our appointed task, for which we need to understand that there is a specific task that God, in his sovereignty and in his wisdom, has appointed for each one of us in the body of Christ.

Now, that's the truth which every one of us will acknowledge theoretically. The question is whether we order our life according to faith in that principle. That's the point.

Life is worth nothing, unless I finish my appointed task. Therefore, I cannot waste my life. I make mistakes, but that is part of the means God has appointed for me to learn.

I must never get discouraged because I make mistakes. God has ordained that we acquire wisdom through making mistakes. Have you noticed the little ones of animals? They are able to walk almost as soon as they are born.

But among human beings only, it takes one year before the child learns to walk. It is an amazing wisdom of God. Do you think God could have made babies in such a way that they walk from the first day itself? It would have been very easy for the Lord.

But he has ordained that the baby learns through falling down, getting up, falling down, getting up and getting strength on his feet. And it's somewhat the same way that we come to victory over sin, that we come to an understanding of God's ways. And so, none of us need ever get discouraged because we have made mistakes in our life.

Provided we have acquired some wisdom through those mistakes, we can say those mistakes have been worth it. There are two ways in which we can acquire an understanding of God's ways. One is what we call the hard way of making blunders and mistakes ourselves and learning something.

The other is through being taught God's ways through another person, which is an easier way. But I'll tell you something, it is what we have learnt the hard way which is more deeply imprinted in our minds than what we have learnt through the easy way by just sitting in a meeting and hearing another brother speak about it. That's really true.

For example, water baptism, baptism in the Holy Spirit mean a lot to me because I have had to fight for it and had to struggle with people. Christ manifest in the flesh has involved a terrific conflict for me. But for my children, there is no conflict for them in water baptism or baptism in the Holy Spirit or Christ manifest in the flesh.

In a sense it is easy but I say in a sense it can never be as precious to them as it is to me because I have acquired it through conflict. Now it can be if they take it seriously. So I just say that to encourage us that if we have made mistakes in our life, that need not discourage us.

If we have acquired wisdom through them, through those mistakes, we have learnt some truths in a very deep way, deeply imprinted in our life, we have been convinced about certain things. But it's not a question of these little ups and downs in the graph. If I were to illustrate it by a graph, these little wavy lines don't make a difference provided the general direction of the graph is going in the direction of the will of God and the purpose of God for my life.

But along that line of that graph, there may be ups and downs and ups and downs and ups and downs. There will be. Till the end of our life there will be.

But the general direction is upwards and towards the fulfillment of the will of God. Now that's been a great help for me to know it and I trust it's a help to you so that we never get discouraged by mistakes we make. When we are young, for example, we are very zealous but we are not wise.

None of us are wise when we are young. And I have done many foolish things due to my lack of wisdom and due to a lack of somebody to guide me properly in my younger days. And if I were to live my life again

with the wisdom I have today, I wouldn't do some of those things.

But in the wonderful wisdom of God, when I was 22 years old, God never gave me the wisdom that I have today at 44. That was an amazing wisdom of God that He did not give it to me. He allowed me to make mistakes and I have learned something.

And He will allow you to make mistakes and you will learn something, you will acquire wisdom. But we must have zeal. Now you see, a young person who is not zealous, who is sort of diplomatic and sitting on the fence type, don't offend anybody, don't be too radical about anything, he is not likely to do so many stupid things like a zealous young brother.

And it will be very easy for him to sit on the sidelines and criticize this zealous young brother. But do you know what that reminds me of? It reminds me of 20,000 people watching a football game and have you heard people say, he shouldn't have kicked it there. You see the people sitting watching are better experts at football than these 22 people who are struggling on the field.

He should have passed it to that person. It's almost as though these fellows are specialists, these 20,000 people sitting over here who know exactly where he should have passed that ball and what he should have done with that when he got it. It's very easy.

But if you put these experts on the field, they will make a mess, much greater mess of things. So it is with these diplomatic, non-zealous, lukewarm people who criticize the zealous young people just because those zealous young people make mistakes. I am never disturbed when I see a zealous young brother make a few mistakes, provided he is willing to submit to authority and over a period of time, those mistakes will get sorted out and wisdom will come.

But this other fellow who is not zealous at all, even when he is 60, he will have no wisdom because when he was young, he was not zealous. So the only person who never makes a mistake is the man who never does anything. So we don't want to be in that category.

We want to be people who really want to do something for God, we make a mistake, but we will still complete our appointed task. We need never, never be afraid of that. In seeking to build a church, we may do some stupid things.

I have done stupid things, many stupid things. If I make a list of all the stupid things which I have done in my life, every one of you will go from here tremendously encouraged. There is hope for everyone here.

That is the truth. So never allow the devil to discourage you by saying, what a foolish blunder you did there. You say, yes Lord, that was foolish, but I am learning something.

It is going to be better next time. I have learned to do it better. Maybe I spoke to somebody too harshly in trying to exercise discipline in the church.

Okay. God doesn't take it as seriously as some human beings take it. He understands.

It was done with a good motive, not with wisdom, but the motive was good for the glory of God, but we haven't done it wisely. So never be discouraged by that. Let's turn to Colossians chapter 4. Colossians chapter 4, we read there, Paul says to Archippus, take heed to the ministry which you have received in the Lord, that you may fulfil it.

There is a particular ministry in the Lord that Archippus had received, and he was to take heed that he fulfilled that particular ministry. Not Paul's ministry. When Paul said, follow me, he did not mean be an apostle, he did not mean be a bachelor, he did not mean be a tent maker.

He was saying, follow me in relation to his life. When Jesus Christ said, follow me, and if any man will come after me, let him deny himself, take up the cross and follow me, he did not mean that we should be bachelors, or carpenters, or live in Nazareth, or be full-time workers as he was for three and a half years. He did not mean any of these things.

He meant follow him in his life. He did not mean raise the dead, or walk on the water, or any such thing. Follow me relates to life.

We are to follow Jesus, not in his ministry. It's impossible to do that. But we can follow him in his life.

We are to follow Paul, not in his ministry, but in his life. And we are to follow godly men, not in their ministry, but in their life. Very clearly, let's distinguish between life and ministry, because this is the confusion that people get into.

People say, oh you say, we can walk like Jesus walked. Can you raise the dead? You see, the man doesn't have any revelation on what it means to follow Jesus. He is confusing life and ministry.

We are not talking about raising the dead or walking on the water. We are talking about following him in his life. We are to walk as Jesus walked.

That is life. So, there is a specific ministry which we have received in the Lord, which is distinct from the ministry God has given to someone else. There is a specific ministry that Jesus received, he fulfilled that.

There is a specific ministry that Paul received, he fulfilled that. There is a specific ministry God has planned for every one of us, and we have to fulfill that. And that includes many things in your life.

It includes the one you get married to, it includes where you are to live, and what you are to do in the body of Christ, the gift that you are to fulfill. Everything is already planned. We read in Ephesians chapter 2, Ephesians chapter 2 and verse 10.

We are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them. Read that carefully. We have been created in Christ Jesus, that is speaking about our new birth when we are born again, for good works.

What good works? That which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them. So, in other words, beforehand itself, God has prepared a certain pattern of life and ministry for us, certain works. When do you think he prepared that plan? I believe he prepared that plan for all eternity, because in chapter 1 of Ephesians, it says in verse 4, he chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world.

Now, supposing we think of that individually in relation to each one of us, that God chose you by name, even though you are living in the second half of the 20th century. God knew about you and me before the foundation of the world, and I don't know how many thousands of years ago that was. To me, it brings a tremendous security to know that in God's eyes, I am not human being number 11,004,637,436 ticked off.

No, I am not a digit and a number before God. I am a child and no father knows his children by numbers and so. It is by name that a father knows his children and by name my father knows me and he has known

me from before the worlds were created, almost as though I was the only person existing.

You see, that's the only way my small mind can conceive it. It cannot conceive how God takes care of all his family, but I can think of it like this, that if I am the only one existing here and God specially watches over me and has got a plan for my life, that's the way he planned it before the world was created. And I wandered around in my sinful life for so many years that one day in God's time and God's will, he made hold of me and I got converted.

And then even after I got converted, maybe I was a bit lukewarm and half-hearted and all that for some time, but God had his hand on me. I am referring to you also now and I am applying it to me just to make it personal, but it applies to each one of us. And then one day God began to stir me on and put desires in my heart for something higher, something better, something more that I saw in the Christendom around me and I thought I was getting spiritual.

It was God working in me by his Spirit. I can't take any credit for it. It is God who works in us to will and to do his good pleasure and he has drawn me to the place, given me revelations almost more than the vast majority of Christians have.

And I say, Lord, is this my cleverness? Far from it. Is it my plan that I should run into certain brothers who could lead me on along this way, along this and give me light on the new and living way? Was that an accident? Was it I who planned meeting with them? No. It was Almighty God who was working out his plan, a loving Father working out his plan for your life and my life without even our knowing it.

And in a wonderful way he leads us to the place where he can fulfill that plan in our life. So the very fact that God has led each of us as far as he has led us now is a clear indication that there is something wonderful that lies ahead for every one of us. Therefore we should never get discouraged.

And the devil knows that even if you don't know it, brother, and he is going to make sure, not make sure, he is going to try his best to discourage you by something or the other so that you don't fulfill that plan. I have come to see that discouragement is almost Satan's number one weapon before women and money and everything else. Discouragement.

You made a mess of things there. Yeah, if I did make a mess of things, I have no problem agreeing with Satan. That's right, I made a mess of things, but God has forgiven me and I have got some wisdom over there.

He is not going to discourage me, Satan. I am going to press on. God's got a plan.

Don't let it be frustrated. Mark 13 verse 34. Here we read, Jesus said, It's like a man, speaking about the return of Christ, away on a journey, but when he went on his journey, this is Christ going on his journey, leaving his house.

That is the church. And putting his servants in charge in the church. And listen to this phrase.

Assigning to each one his task. And in order to fulfill that task, in the margin, it says in verse 34, what it means is giving authority to his servants. That if I have to fulfill a certain task, I have the authority to fulfill it also.

God gives me that authority by the Holy Spirit and he will give it to you. But this phrase, he has assigned to each one his task. Now the thing is, do you believe it? I am convinced that the vast majority of believers will not fulfill that task in their life, not because God had no plan for their life, but because they did not believe it.

They did not believe it and therefore God cannot fulfill it in their life. Because one thing is true, whatever God may have planned for our life, it can never be fulfilled apart from the cooperation that I extend to him, which cooperation is basically faith. If I do not exercise faith to believe what God has said, almighty God himself cannot do for me what he wants to do for me.

My dear brothers, it is absolutely essential that we are convinced on this. That God himself cannot do for you what he wants to do for you if you don't believe what he has said. Now I am not asking you to believe something which is not promised or said in the word.

I use this illustration for example, that I am not struggling to believe that I will get a head of hair back before the resurrection. In the resurrection I will get it, but there is no promise that I will get my hair back before that. And I am not struggling to believe or struggling to believe to take off my glasses so that I can see without.

God can do that, I am sure he can. And in the resurrection I know I won't wear glasses, but I am not particularly struggling for these things. If there were some word in the scripture like that, I would.

But I am trying to believe those things which are specifically written. Now there are whole lot of believers today who are trying to believe God to get a car or get a new house or get another job, all types of things. And they may be good things, useful things, but I feel that Satan is getting them to expend all their energy in something which is so secondary, so earthly, so temporal, so that they don't concentrate on believing God for that which is specifically written in his word.

Why not believe God for this? Lord, you have got a task for me. In your church, somewhere in the world, a specific task, I want to fulfill it. That task is as clearly marked out as the plan for Jesus' life was marked out.

Do you think there is anything in Jesus' life which is an accident? Do you think, for example, that God planned him to live for fifty years, but somehow he got knocked off when he was thirty-three and a half? Do any of you believe that? God, he had planned for Jesus' life and Jesus did not live one day less than what the Father had planned for him. A man. I want to tell you, Peter the Apostle was not afraid or ashamed to refer to Jesus as a man.

A man, attested to you by God with miracles, wonders and signs which God performed. This man, verse twenty-three, delivered up by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God. You nailed to a cross.

He said, you fellows did it, but it was all according to the predetermined plan of God. Now, if we believe that wonderful truth of John seventeen twenty-three, that God loves us as he loved Jesus, we must believe that there must be a predetermined plan for us as well. A predetermined plan that God has for every one of us.

According to his foreknowledge, he knows the future and he has planned a specific plan for every one of us. And that is to run a certain number of years. And what I am to do in those years? It was the will of God that Jesus should be a carpenter.

And God arranged circumstances that he would be born into a carpenter's family and grow up to be a carpenter for thirty years. And then, after that, he was to be a full-time worker. Don't have to be ashamed of that.

Jesus was one for three and a half years. For thirty years he supported himself. For three and a half years he was supported by the gifts and offerings of other people.

That was the Father's plan. And Jesus submitted at each step to the Father's plan. If it was this thing now, fine.

If it was that thing tomorrow, fine. Because he knew there was a particular plan for his life. Now, we need to know that there is a particular plan for our life.

Now, Jesus did not try to imitate John the Baptist. John the Baptist was the greatest man of God that the world had seen up until Jesus. How do we know? Jesus himself said in Matthew 11, there is no one born of women who is greater than John the Baptist.

And if ever there was a man to be imitated, surely it was John the Baptist. Because he was the greatest man of God born on earth till that time. And he had a fantastic revival ministry.

And he was Jesus' own relative, according to the flesh. And he must have seen John the Baptist's ministry for some time. And if he was tempted in all points as we are, we can be pretty sure he was tempted to imitate someone else's ministry.

Don't you think so? Yes. So, he must have been tempted to imitate John the Baptist's ministry. But he did not.

He did not start wearing John the Baptist's funny type of clothes. He did not start eating locusts and honey out in the desert. He did not try to have that type of ministry which John the Baptist had.

John the Baptist had his ministry. Jesus had his. There is an example for us to follow there.

That even if you are happening to live alongside the greatest man of God that has ever lived on the face of the earth in the history of Christianity, don't imitate his ministry. Follow his life, but don't imitate his ministry. That's one very important thing to learn.

Don't copy him in the way he speaks or the way he does things. Why? Then we cannot fulfill our appointed task. Take heed to the ministry which you have received in the Lord that you fulfill that.

Fulfill your ministry. Paul was always very keen on emphasizing that. He writes to Timothy in 2nd Timothy 4 and the last part of verse 5, he says, fulfill your ministry, the task assigned to you.

There must be no imitation. Because when we imitate a man's ministry, we become hypocrites. We are unreal.

We are not ourselves. We are trying to be somebody else and that is always a hindrance to the work of God in the body of Christ. Now take for example the written scriptures.

Have you noticed the difference in the way Paul uses certain expressions in scripture? Peter uses certain expressions in scripture and John uses certain expressions in scripture. We know that they are all inspired

by the Holy Spirit. They are all the word of God and yet, if I were to ask you, who uses the expression crucified with him? What's the answer? Well, you'll never find that in the writings of Peter or John.

Now Paul wrote first and now after 20-30 years when John was writing his letter, he could have been tempted. Ah, Paul's writing is scripture. So we must use that type of language if my writing is also to be scriptural.

So let me imitate him and let me speak about being crucified with him. But John never writes that. He speaks about being born of God.

But Paul never uses that phrase. Peter speaks about suffering in the flesh. Neither Paul nor John ever thought of that phrase.

What is this teaching us? They are all inspired scripture but each is expressed through the personality of the individual. It is like light. You know in the New Jerusalem, it says it's got many colored stones.

The same light which is the life of Jesus shining through a red precious stone and a green precious stone and a blue precious stone giving out red light, green light, blue light, but the light is the same behind it. The life of Jesus manifested through your personality, through your ability, through your gift and through my personality and my gift. This is the diversity that there is to be in the body of Christ.

But it can be there only if each of us see God has a specific task for me and I thank God that I am not like somebody else. You know in Christianity there are many people who are sorry that they are not like somebody else. There are multitudes of people who say I wish I were like so and so, I wish I had the ministry of so and so.

Very important for us to see that whereas other people are feeling sorry that they are not like somebody else or having somebody else's ministry, we are thankful that we don't have somebody else's ministry. Lord, I thank you that you have got a specific ministry for me and therefore you have not given me the abilities or the gifts that you have given to that brother. Right? The training that another brother had.

Training means I am talking about earthly education or the natural abilities. That is for the particular task that God has given to that person. Some people for example have a very good memory and other people don't have a good memory.

Now there is nothing spiritual about that. You know there are worldly people, heathen people who have got good memories and some very spiritual people who have got bad memories. That is a human characteristic.

But God has a particular task for that person with a good memory for which a good memory is required. And the other person whom God has not given such a good memory, the task which God has for him, a good memory is not an essential qualification for that task. So it is wonderful to see in the body of Christ.

As we look back we can thank God for our parents, for our upbringing, for the struggles we have faced in life, the difficulties our particular upbringing gave us. All these things have trained us for a particular task. We read that Paul studied at the feet of Gamaliel.

He was a scholar. He had studied many deep things in the Hebrew law. He was a Roman citizen.

None of these so-called privileges, earthly privileges, Peter had. But Peter would have been an absolute fool if he thought, I wish I were a Roman citizen like Paul or I wish I had the training that Paul had. If I were born in Tarsus, if my father was rich, he could have gone to Tarsus as a businessman, then I could have been like Paul.

No! There is a ministry that Peter can fulfill which Paul can never fulfill. Peter probably could speak to fishermen far better than Paul could. But Paul could speak to the scholars better than Peter could.

So we need to see that everything that has happened in our past life is to train us for a particular task which another brother cannot do. That's very important for us to see it. And then when we see that, we don't have any feelings of inferiority.

I have a theory. I haven't done research on this. But I have a theory that every human being has got an inferiority complex, basically.

Because all human beings have the tendency from school days itself to compare themselves with others. How many marks did he get? How many marks did I get? It starts from kindergarten itself. And all the way it works out.

And everybody is always inferior to somebody else. And therefore he has this feeling of inferiority. And sometimes that feeling of inferiority is manifested by an outward air of superiority, as though I am so important and so big.

Actually the man is just trying to cover up his feeling of inferiority within. And when we are believers, we have this problem too. We are converted and we don't get rid of it.

But I feel that other brothers probably don't have this type of problem that I have. You know, it's one of the tricks of the devil to make us feel that we are especially useless creatures. And let's say, for example, he will tell you, brother, oh, the problem you have with sexual thoughts, dear me, no other human being in the world has ever had such.

You are really a filthy person. And the idiot of a believer who believes the devil there is really going to have a tough time getting victory there because he is convinced that the way he is battling dirty thoughts, no other human being in the world is ever battling like that. That's enough to discourage you before you start.

And your defeat is guaranteed to any such person. But if you just believe the word of God which says in 1 Corinthians 10.13, no temptation has come to you which is not common to all human beings, you say, well, that means other human beings, they may not get up and testify about it in public, but they are facing these troubles just like me. Sure, that's written for our encouragement.

Did you know that? The things written in the scriptures are written for our encouragement, that we might have hope, that we might not get discouraged. Yes. So, we have these feelings of inferiority due to various things, that we cannot express something from the word of God as beautifully and wonderfully as somebody else.

Well, maybe God hasn't called you for that ministry, brother. That's all. That's the answer to that.

That takes care of that problem. Let's move on to the next one. Why keep on harping on that one particular point? Let me see.

Alright, I can't do it like that, brother, but there's something else I can do. And in that, I can do it much better than someone else. So, to see that there is no need for me to feel inferior when I see that God has got a specific task for me in the body of Christ, a task for which he prepared me from my mother's womb.

The Lord told Jeremiah, from your mother's womb I have ordained you to be a prophet. Now, if you have the faith to take it, let me tell you, that if God chose me from before the foundation of the world, I believe he certainly must have had his eye on me by the time I got into my mother's womb. Is that difficult to believe? Your faith can rise up to that.

According to your faith, be it unto you. Then from that time onwards, even though you did not know him for, say, the next twenty years, God was sovereignly arranging your path. I believe that.

When I joined the military academy in the navy, I might as well tell you honestly, I never prayed about it. I never sought God's will. I was not really converted.

I just wanted to go for that and I went. I got selected and I went. But now when I look back, I cannot think of a better place in the whole wide world where I could have gone to be freed from the opinions of men and various other benefits that came to me, studying the scriptures, etc.

And I say, Lord, that proves one thing to me that you ordained my path, even though I never sought your will. It's a wonderful thing that God orders our path. It's not our willing or our choosing, but God showing mercy.

And it is of his mercy that he has given us revelations that we have today and that he gives us a ministry in the body also. Never forget, it is his mercy that he gives us any job at all to do. If we ask God to give us what we deserve, you know what we'll get? Hellfire.

But he's given us salvation and he's given us the privilege of being fellow workers with him. Mercy, mercy, mercy, mercy, all the way from beginning to end. Let's never forget that.

So, there's no need of feeling inferior. My father loves me just as much as he loves that brother to whom he has given all these fantastic abilities and gifts. Maybe he's put him in better financial circumstances than he's put me.

I'm not jealous of him. I'm not covetous of what he has. I believe that if I became like him financially, I would never be able to fulfill the ministry that I can fulfill now.

Thank God that I'm not like him financially. Thank God that I'm not like him intellectually. Then I would never be able to fulfill my specific task.

It's very important that we see this clearly so that we never compare ourselves with others. Then we have no feeling of inferiority. We are secure.

Now let's turn to 1 Timothy 1.12. Paul says, I thank Christ Jesus our Lord who has strengthened me because he considered me faithful, putting me into the ministry. Now that's a very important phrase, that Jesus Christ is the one who puts a man into the ministry. Jesus Christ is the one who has put me into the ministry, Paul said.

In other words, your getting a ministry in the church does not depend, listen carefully, it does not depend on your being the favorite blue-eyed boy of the elder brother in the church. It's got nothing to do with that.

That the elder brother has got a particular fancy for you and therefore you have opportunities that other young brothers don't have.

That's a lot of garbage. It's Jesus Christ who puts a man into the ministry and you can be the blue-eyed boy of 10,000 elders if Jesus Christ doesn't consider you faithful. He can never put you into the ministry he has planned for you, whatever position any elder brother may push you into.

Very important to see that. And if you feel that you are not one of those favorite blue-eyed boys of some elder brother and therefore you don't have the opportunities which you think you should be getting to minister or whatever it is, therefore you can't have a ministry, that's a lot of nonsense. It's Jesus Christ who sees your private life and gives you a ministry.

I remember when I was a young brother in a brethren assembly and I was just 23 years old and I was beginning to share the word and it was pretty obvious to me after some time that one of the elders there was jealous. And one manifestation of his jealousy was that he wouldn't give me much opportunity to speak in the meeting, on the Sunday meetings. I said, fine, I'm not going to get into competition with him over that.

The streets are always available to go and preach in. So I used to go twice a week to the streets. Nobody was interested in coming there, there was no competition there.

That was a free place we could go, stand in the streets and I went down the streets of Arunachalam twice a week in sun and rain here and there, standing in the street corners and preaching. And that's where the Lord taught me to preach and that's where the Lord taught me to be free from the opinions of men. It wasn't in any refined meeting hall.

It was out in the streets. And then I would go to some poor, say, Telugu speaking brother who couldn't speak English properly. His family and all couldn't come to the meetings because the meetings were in English.

So I would go to his home and say, well, can we get some Telugu speaking people together, we'll have a meeting here, you translate brother into Telugu and then all these sisters who can't understand English can learn something. And we'd have four or five people there in the meeting and that's not a very attractive type of thing for elder brothers to go and minister at. So the other brother could carry on speaking every week to these three, four people.

And if one day one family didn't come, you were left with two people. Fine. That's how I carried on for many years.

I said, fine. Who can rob me of opportunities to minister when all these things are open? If you are only thinking of that convention platform or that Sunday morning ministry and all, then of course somebody can stop you. But if you are thinking of serving the Lord, what a lot of opportunities.

There are men in the world who can say there are not enough opportunities to serve the Lord. There are. But when we are young, God will test us to see whether we are seeking for great things or whether we are quite happy to serve Him in a humble way in some small corner.

And if He sees that you are faithful there, He can lead you to something more in due course. But be faithful. Nobody can rob you of a ministry God has intended for you.

Be sure of that, brother. Nobody. And don't get into fights.

It is now nearly more than twenty years since this event which I spoke of happened in the brethren assembly. But I have a good relationship with that particular elder brother even today. I never had a fight with him in all these twenty years.

I praise God for that. If he is jealous, that's between him and God. It's got nothing to do with me.

He cannot stop me from having a ministry God has for me. And he has never been able to. We are not in competition.

We are secure because we say God loves us. And He can open doors for us no matter who is jealous of us and who is against us. And we found that, for example, when we started out as a small fellowship of five brothers and five sisters about nine years ago.

Oh, it was almost as if the whole world was against us, including the whole of hell. But what did it accomplish? They tried everything. They wrote tracts.

They did this. They warned. They criticized, abused, slandered.

What has it accomplished? It has not accomplished a single thing except furthered God's purposes. Who can stop us from fulfilling what God wants us to do if we live before God's face? It has got nothing to do with human beings. Every one of us must be established in that conviction.

It's not a question of a man giving us openings. We don't want any openings. The Lord says, I have set before you an open door and who can shut that? So, never be afraid of men closing doors because when we preach the whole truth, men will shut doors.

And that can be a test. God is testing you at that point to see are you interested in more open doors or are you interested in faithfulness to what I have told you to preach. Very, very important.

Another thing I want to show you is 2 Corinthians 1 verse 4. It says here that God comforts us and whenever I read the word comfort in the New Testament, I think of the comforter, the Holy Spirit. So, it's a ministry of the Holy Spirit that I receive in our affliction. This is a wonderful verse.

This is a Bible school verse, by the way. That means, well, it also means that no Bible school student understands it. But what I mean is, this is the Bible school God takes us through.

That in our affliction, we get a certain revelation of Scripture, a certain experience of the Holy Spirit, a certain experience of God's love and power and wisdom, so that we can minister what? Not some dead garbage we accumulated in the Bible school, but which we got in the midst of affliction and trial. We can now minister that to other people who are going through the same problems we went through and we can give them, it says here, the same comfort and ministry which we got from God when we went through it. So, how do you have a ministry then, according to this verse? We've got to go through it, through afflictions.

Then we have a ministry to other people. Now, it is to bypass this education that people go into Bible schools and accumulate knowledge instead. But with knowledge, you can't minister life.

Here is a question of a ministry of life. He is speaking in 2nd Corinthians 3 about how to be a minister of the new covenant, as we read in chapter 3, verse 6, to be a servant of the new covenant. That is not a question of dispensing knowledge.

It is a question of life. And there is only one way to be a minister of the new covenant and that is to go through affliction. How did Jesus become a minister of the new covenant to us? By getting an education through temptation.

He learnt obedience, it says, through the things which he suffered. Now, we are to learn obedience through suffering, then we have a ministry to other people. Otherwise, we don't have a ministry to other people.

So, when you go through suffering of any sort, physical suffering, financial hardship, opposition, slander, persecution, difficulty, perplexity, uncertainty about the future, various types of sufferings, that's a Bible school. Do you want to graduate or not? Or do you want to be a loafer? There are lots of spiritual loafers who don't take their studies seriously. Or do you want to take your studies seriously? Say, Lord, it's an education for me.

And to look at everything we go through in the daily life. Ah, this is part of my Bible school syllabus. Something new in the syllabus today, which I never thought was included in the syllabus.

Wonderful. Some new thing God is trying to teach me there. Because he has a specific task for me.

Don't be an idiot there and ask, Lord, why is that brother not going through it? He's got a different task, brother. He's got a different task. You don't teach anatomy to the person who's going to become an engineer.

That's a waste of time there. Engineers study anatomy. If you're going to be a surgeon, study anatomy.

But if you're an engineer, why study anatomy? So, don't ask, why is he not going through that? Because his calling is different. Very simple. That's the answer.

That's the end of it. Why is that brother in the assembly not going through some of the things I'm going through? Ministry is different. Your ministry is different.

God's got a specific task for you and me. And then we never become those spiritual idiots who compare ourselves with others, like it says in 2 Corinthians 10. We live before God.

Lord, you've got a specific task for me and I thank you that you are training me through these things and equipping me. That is life. And that is the life that I can offer to others.

That is very, very important. There's no other way, except the 2 Corinthians 1 verse 4 way, that we can have a ministry of life to other brothers. And that's why it's very important that every one of us take seriously all the difficulties and afflictions and sufferings and trials that come across your way.

If you have a difficult neighbor, yeah, think of that as part of your syllabus. Or a difficult person at work. If you're married, even if you have a difficult wife, yes, even a difficult wife can be part of that syllabus.

In God's wonderful program of education. So, let's keep this in mind. God wants to give us an education.

And in that education, He has planned out a syllabus. And at the right time, He will lead us into each particular thing. And we must be ready to take it and not play the fool when God leads us into that education.

Now, I want to say something about gift. We need life. And I spoke about how we get life, 2 Corinthians 1 verse 4. We also need gift to be able to fulfill our tasks.

1 Corinthians 12 speaks about the various gifts in the body. And again, these are distributed, 1 Corinthians 12, 11, according to the will of the Holy Spirit. But there is something for you.

Maybe not some of the things listed in verses 8, 9 and 10. Maybe something else. But something.

Now, the temptation for all of us is to desire the spectacular gift. Because this lust for the honor of men does not go easily from us. That is why we spontaneously opt for the spectacular gift.

But if I could only put to death the lust for the honor of men, then I will not opt for the spectacular gift. I will say, Lord, give me that gift by which I can fulfill the task which you have called me for in the body. Spectacular, not spectacular, I am not bothered.

I am interested in fulfilling my task. And give me the gift for that. And therefore I seek God for the anointing of the Holy Spirit to fulfill my task.

Jesus prayed for the anointing of the Holy Spirit. And we need to pray and pray. And it is possible to be anointed and to lose the anointing.

Then I need to pray again that the anointing will come back upon me. Because it is impossible to fulfill the task God has for you if you are not anointed with the Holy Spirit, even Jesus could not. Now I want to say this.

I spoke about life earlier. You can live a holy life without the anointing of the Holy Spirit. Proof, Jesus in the first thirty years of his earthly life.

He was not anointed. He had the fullness of the Holy Spirit and he lived a godly life in the power of the Holy Spirit. But he did not have the anointing and the gifts which he got only when he was baptized in Jordan.

And when he was anointed, he did not live a more holy life in his thirty-first year than in his twenty-ninth year. But he could heal the sick. He could preach with power.

Something happened. So the anointing is for fulfilling our ministry. And we must seek God for the anointing not to live a holy life but to fulfill our ministry.

And how can I know what my ministry and my gift is? By experimenting. I seek to serve the Lord. As I serve the Lord, I find fruitfulness in one area.

See, I remember once after meeting one brother came up to me and said, Brother, I feel that God is calling me to the ministry of healing. I said, Wonderful. That's a wonderful ministry to have.

But how to know whether you got a gift of healing? Well, you pray for about three hundred people and nobody is healed. You know pretty well whether you got the gift or not. I mean, if you are honest, if you

love the truth, you will get the answer pretty quickly whether you got the gift or not.

By experimenting, we find out. The teaching, for example, you open the word and begin to teach and you find that people are getting light. Oh, you know that maybe God is calling you along that direction.

Or as an evangelist, you have got a burden for lost souls. You are going out after them, going after them and God is blessing your work. People are getting converted, even people.

You know that God is giving you a gift along that line. It's by serving that we find out. It's not by sitting in my easy chair saying, Lord, show me what my gift is.

I'll never find out. I go out to serve and as I serve, I discover what my calling is. We see this, we see that, we see the other thing.

Finally, over a period of time, over a period of years, it's like something, the best illustration I can use is a picture which is being projected onto a screen. And you say, hey, it's hazy. I think that's a human being, but I'm not too sure.

And then the person turns the lens and focuses it. Gradually, it becomes clear. It's something like that in our life.

Over a period of time, things get focused and it becomes clear what our ministry is. So don't compare yourself with someone who's been walking with the Lord for 20 years and saying, he seems to be clear about his ministry, but I'm not clear of mine. Well, he wasn't clear of his ministry either 20 years ago.

Don't forget that. So it's a matter of time. As we go on, as we are faithful, it becomes more and more clear.

But be faithful. What your hand finds to do, you know the verse, whatever your hand finds to do, do with all your might. And you'll discover pretty soon what your ministry is.

God will open up the right ministry for you. Now, if we don't go into the ministry God has planned for us, we'll find the yoke is heavy, the burden is heavy. Jesus said, come unto me all you that labor and are heavy laden.

And I like to apply that to people who are trying to fulfill a ministry God never called them to. They are weary and heavy laden, trying to do something which God never called them to do. The Lord says, come to me, I'll give you rest.

Take my yoke upon you, the ministry I gave to you. Then you'll find rest. The reason you are not finding rest is you are trying to imitate some other person.

You are full of unrest and the Lord is so heavy because you are trying to be somebody else. Come to me, take my yoke, my ministry, and you will find rest. And one mark that we are in the place and in the ministry that God has for us is that there is a rest and a peace in our heart because His yoke is easy and His burden is light.

If I found a particular ministry which I'm doing such a burden and I'm complaining other people are not coming to help me in this and this, that and the other, I say, brother, give it up. Come to Jesus and give up this self-made ministry of yours. Because if it is a God-given ministry, you won't have a complaint that other people are not helping you and it will flow from your life.

There will be rest, there will be peace. That's a wonderful test of the ministry which God has given and appointed for us. You know that verse in Jude 6? It says about the angels who did not keep their proper abode.

They tried to move into an area God did not want them to move into. That was the sin of Satan, Lucifer. He tried to move into a ministry God had not called him to.

Do you know that's the origin of sin, trying to move into a ministry that God has not called you to? Be in the place God has called you. Be sure. Say, Lord, I want to fulfill the ministry you've called me to.

You've got a specific task for me, specific plan for my life. Over a period of time it will become clear to me I want to be faithful in that which my hand finds to do, humble myself and over a period of time it will become clear to me what you've planned for me and that is what I want. That's what I want to live for.

That's what I want to fulfill in my life. And I believe that my life is worth nothing unless I fulfill that which the Lord has assigned for me. It won't be anything compared with yours, but it is what the Lord has assigned for me.

If each of us can take that place, there will be no more jealousy, no more competition, sincere rejoicing in the ministry of the others because we are finding joy in our own ministry. You know when we talk about, are you willing to let a younger brother move ahead of you even into leadership in the assembly? That is no problem for a man who has found security in doing his assigned task because he's not in competition with anybody else. Oh Lord, by all means, let another brother move ahead and take over what I'm doing now because I'm not interested in doing a particular job.

I'm interested in finishing the work which the Lord has assigned for me to do.

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