

(Principles of Serving God) 3. Some Important Truths That I Have Learnt

by Zac Poonen

Zac Poonen's sermon outlines essential truths about serving God, emphasizing love, honesty, and the importance of a personal relationship with Christ.

Scripture: Daniel 11:32, John 17:23, Romans 6:11, 2 Corinthians 9:7, Ephesians 2:10, Ephesians 5:18, Philippians 4:19, Hebrews 12:1-2, 1 Peter 3:13, 1 John 1:9

Topics: "God's Love", "Honesty in Faith"

Description

Zac Poonen shares important truths learned over 40 years as a born-again Christian, emphasizing God's unconditional love for us, which transforms insecurity into joy. He highlights the significance of honesty in our relationship with God, the importance of cheerful giving, and the necessity of being filled with the Holy Spirit to live a life that reflects Christ. Poonen also discusses the need for believers to embrace their unique calling, the value of knowing God intimately, and the reality of persecution for those who live godly lives. Ultimately, he encourages believers to seek God's approval over human opinions and to treat all individuals with dignity.

Transcript

During the 40 years that I have been a born-again Christian, I have learnt some important truths that have encouraged me and given direction and purpose to my life. I share them here with you with the hope that they will be an encouragement to you as well.

1. God Loves Us as He Loved Jesus

Thou didst love them, even as Thou didst love Me" (John 17:23).

This is the greatest truth that I have discovered in the Bible. It changed me from an insecure, depressed believer to one who has become totally secure in God and full of the joy of the Lord - always.

There are many verses in the Bible that tell us that God loves us, but only this one that tells us the extent of that love - AS MUCH AS HE LOVED JESUS.

Since there is no partiality with our heavenly Father in the way He loves any of His sons, He will certainly be willing to do everything for us, His sons, that He did for His firstborn Son, Jesus. He will help us as He

helped Jesus. He will care for us as much as He cared for Jesus. He will be as interested in planning the details of our daily life as He was in planning Jesus' life. Nothing can ever happen to us that will take God by surprise. He has already planned for every eventuality. So we need no longer be insecure. We have been sent to earth with as definite a purpose as Jesus was.

All this is true for you too - but only if you believe it.

Nothing works for the one who does not believe in the Word of God.

2. God Delights in Honest People

If we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another" (1 John 1:9).

To walk in the light means first of all that we hide nothing from God. We tell Him everything, exactly as it is. I am convinced that the first step towards God is honesty. God detests those who are insincere. Jesus spoke against hypocrites more than He spoke against anyone else.

God does not ask us to be holy or perfect first of all but to be honest. This is the starting point of true holiness. And from this spring flows everything else. And if there is one thing that is really easy for anyone of us to do, it is to be honest. So, confess sin immediately to God. Don't call sinful thoughts by "decent" names. Don't say "I was only admiring the beauty of God's creation" when actually you lusted adulterously with your eyes. Don't call "anger" as "righteous indignation". You will never get victory over sin if you are dishonest.

And don't ever call "sin", "a mistake", because Jesus' blood can cleanse you from all your sins, but not from your mistakes!! He does not cleanse dishonest people.

There is hope only for honest people. "He who covers his sin will never prosper" (Proverbs 28:13).

Why did Jesus say that there was more hope for prostitutes and for thieves to enter God's kingdom than for religious leaders (Matthew 21:31). Because prostitutes and thieves make no pretence of being holy.

Many young people are turned away from churches because church-members give them the impression that they themselves have no struggles. And so those young people think, "That holy bunch of people will never understand our problems!!" If this true of us, then we are unlike Christ Who drew sinners to Himself.

3. God Delights in a Cheerful Giver

God loves a cheerful giver" (2 Corinthians 9:7).

This is why God gives man total freedom - both before and after conversion, and after being filled with the Spirit.

If we are like God, we also will not seek to control others or pressurise them. We will give them freedom to be different from us, to have different views from ours and to grow spiritually at their own pace.

All compulsion of any sort is from the devil.

The Holy Spirit fills people, whereas demons possess people. The difference is this: When the Holy Spirit fills anyone, He still gives that person freedom to do whatever he wants. But when demons possess people they rob them of their freedom and control them. The fruit of being filled with the Spirit is

self-control (Galatians 5:22, 23). Demon-possession however, results in the loss of self-control.

We must remember that any work that we do for God that is NOT done cheerfully, joyfully, freely and voluntarily is a dead work. Any work done for God for a reward or for a salary is also a dead work. Any money given to God under pressure from others has no value at all, as far as God is concerned!!

God values a little done cheerfully for Him far more than a great deal done under compulsion, or done merely to ease one's conscience.

4. Holiness Comes by Looking unto Jesus

Let us run the race....looking unto Jesus" (Hebrews 12:1, 2).

The secret of godliness is found in the Person of Christ Who came in our flesh (as 1 Timothy 3:16 makes very clear) - and not in the doctrine that Christ came in our flesh. It is through His Person and not through a doctrinal analysis of His flesh, that we become holy.

Any amount of self-effort will never make a sinful heart holy. God has to do a work within us, for that to happen.

Holiness (eternal life) is God's gift - and it can never be attained by works (Romans 6:23). The Bible states that God alone can sanctify us (make us holy) entirely (1 Thessalonians 5:23 says that so plainly that no-one can mistake it). Yet multitudes of believers are struggling to deny themselves in order to be holy. They become Pharisees instead.

"The holiness which is no illusion" (Ephesians 4:24 - JBP) is attained by faith in Jesus - in other words by "looking unto Jesus".

If we keep looking only at a doctrine we will become Pharisees. The purer our doctrine, the greater the Pharisees we will become.

The greatest Pharisees I have met on earth were among those who preached the highest standards of holiness through self-effort!! We have to be careful that we don't end up as one of them!

What it means to look unto Jesus is very clearly explained in Hebrews 12:2. First of all we are to look at Him as One Who lived on earth "enduring His cross" daily - "tempted in all points as we are and yet without sin" (Hebrews 4:15). He is our Forerunner (Hebrews 6:20), in Whose footsteps we are to run. Secondly, we are to see Him as the One Who is now "at the right hand of the Father", interceding for us and ready to help us in every trial and temptation.

5. We Must Be Continually Filled with the Holy Spirit

Be (being) filled with the Spirit" (Ephesians 5:18 - Literal).

It is impossible to live the Christian life, as God wants us to, if we are not continually filled with the Holy Spirit. It is impossible to serve God as we should without being anointed with the Spirit and receiving His supernatural gifts. Jesus Himself needed to be anointed.

The Holy Spirit has come to make us like Jesus in our personal lives as well as in our ministry (See 2 Corinthians 3:18). God fills us with the Spirit in order to conform us to the likeness of Christ in our

character, and to equip us to serve as Jesus served. We do not have the same ministry that Jesus had, and so we won't be able to do what Jesus did in His ministry. But we can be as fully equipped to serve God as Jesus Himself was - to fulfil OUR OWN ministry.

All that is required is an adequate thirst and faith, on our part, for rivers of living water to flow out through us (John 7:37-39).

We must earnestly long for the gifts of the Spirit if we are to have them (1 Corinthians 14:1). Otherwise we will never have them.

A church without the gifts of the Holy Spirit is like a man who may be living but who is deaf, blind, mute and lame - and therefore useless.

6. The Way of the Cross is the Way of Life

If we died with Him, we shall also live with Him" (2 Timothy 2:11).

There is no way for us to have the life of Jesus manifested in our body other than by accepting death to our Self-life in all the situations that God plans and arranges for us (2 Corinthians 4:10, 11).

We must "consider ourselves dead to sin" (Romans 6:11) in all situations, if we are to overcome sin. We must "mortify the deeds of the body through the Spirit" if we are to live (Romans 8:13). The Holy Spirit will always lead us to the cross in our daily life.

We are sent by God into situations where we are "slaughtered the whole day long" (Romans 8:36) and "delivered to death for Jesus sake" (2 Corinthians 4:11). In such situations, we must accept "the dying of Jesus" (2 Corinthians 4:10), so that the life of Jesus may be manifest in us.

7. Man's Opinions are Fit Only for the Garbage Bin

Stop regarding man, whose breath is in his nostrils; for why should he be esteemed? (Isaiah 2:22).

When a man's breath leaves his nostrils, he is no better than the dust that we walk on. So why should we value man's opinion.

If we are not rooted and grounded in the fact that the opinions of ALL human beings put together are only fit for the garbage-bin, we will never be able to serve the Lord effectively. If we seek to please even one man, we cannot be servants of Christ (Galatians 1:10).

Every man's opinion is worthless compared to God's opinion. One who is convinced of this will thereafter seek only God's approval over His life and ministry. He will never seek to impress people or to justify himself before them.

8. God Detests all that this World Considers Great

That which men esteem highly is detestable in God's sight" (Luke 16:15).

The things that are considered great in the world, not only have no value in God's eyes, but are actually an abomination to Him. Since all worldly honour is an abomination to God, it must be an abomination to us too.

Money is something that everyone on earth considers valuable. But God says that those who love money and long to get rich will suffer the following eight consequences sooner or later (1 Timothy 6:9, 10).

they will fall into temptation,

they will fall into a trap,

they will fall into foolish desires,

they will fall into harmful desires,

they will plunge into ruin,

they will plunge into destruction,

they will wander away from the faith and

they will pierce themselves with many a pang.

I have seen this happen again and again to believers everywhere.

One of the main reasons why a prophetic word from the Lord is hardly ever heard these days in our land, is because most preachers are lovers of money. Jesus said that the true riches (the prophetic word being one of them) would not be given by God to those who were unfaithful with money (Luke 16:11). This is why we hear so many boring sermons and so many boring testimonies in church-meetings and conferences.

9. Nobody Can Harm Us Except We Ourselves

Who can harm you if you prove zealous for what is good?" (1 Peter 3:13).

God is so powerful that He makes ALL THINGS work together for the good of those who love Him and who are called according to His purpose - that is, for those who have no ambition on earth outside of His will for their lives (Romans 8:28). One who has selfish ambitions cannot claim this promise. But if we accept the will of God totally, we can claim this promise every minute of our life on earth. Nothing can harm us.

Everything that others do to us - good or evil, accidental or deliberate - will go through the filter of Romans 8:28 and will come through working for our very best - conforming us each time a little more to the likeness of Christ (Romans 8:29) - which is the good that God has planned for us. This filter works perfectly every single time for those who fulfil the conditions listed in this verse.

Further, 1 Peter 3:13 tells us that no-one can harm us if we are "zealous for what is good". Unfortunately this is not as well known a verse as Romans 8:28 is. But we must popularise it now. However, this promise too is applicable only to those who are zealous to keep their hearts good towards all people. It will be impossible for any demon or human being to harm such a believer.

So whenever any Christian complains that others have harmed him, he is indirectly admitting that he does not love God, is not called according to God's purpose and has not been zealous for what is good. Otherwise, whatever those others did to him would have only worked for his good, and then he would not have had any complaints at all.

Actually, the only one who can harm you is you yourself - by your unfaithfulness and your wrong attitudes to others.

I am nearly 60 years old now and I can honestly say that no-one has ever succeeded in harming me in my entire life. Many have tried to do so, but EVERYTHING they did only worked for my very best and for the good of my ministry. So I can praise God for those people too. Those who have opposed me have been mostly so-called "believers" who have not understood God's ways. I am giving you my testimony only to encourage you to believe that this can be your testimony too - always.

10. God has a Perfect Plan for Each of Our Lives

We are created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them" (Ephesians 2:10).

Long ago, when God chose us in Christ, He also planned what we should do with our earthly lives. Our duty now is to find out that plan - day by day - and to follow it. We can never make a better plan than God's.

We must not imitate what others do, for God's plan for each of His children is different. God's plan for Joseph, for example, was for him to stay in the palace in Egypt and to live in great comfort for the last 80 years of his life. On the other hand, God's plan for Moses was for him to leave the palace in Egypt and to live in great discomfort for the last 80 years of his life - in the wilderness. If Moses had followed Joseph's example, through the love of comfort and ease, he would have missed God's will for his own life.

In exactly the same way today, God may want one brother to live all his life in comfort in the USA, and another brother to toil all his life in the heat and dust of North India. Each must be convinced about God's plan for his own life instead of comparing his lot with that of the other brother and being jealous of him and criticising him.

I know that God called me to serve Him in India. But I have never demanded that anyone else should have my calling.

We will, however, never be able to find God's will, if we are seeking our own honour or if we love money or comfort or the approval of men.

11. Knowing God Intimately is the Secret of Being Strong

The people who know their God will be strong" (Daniel 11:32).

Today, God does not want us to know Him second-hand through others. He invites even the youngest believer to know Him personally (Hebrews 8:11). Jesus defined eternal life as knowing God and Jesus Christ personally (John 17:3). This was the greatest passion of Paul's life and must be our greatest passion too (Philippians 3:10).

One who desires to know God intimately, will have to listen to Him always. Jesus said that the only way man could keep himself spiritually alive was by listening to EVERY word that proceeded from God's mouth (Matthew 4:4). He also said that to sit at His feet and listen to Him was the most important thing in the Christian life (Luke 10:42).

We must develop the habit that Jesus had of listening to the Father from early morning every day (Isaiah 50:4), right through the day; and then to be in a listening attitude in the hours of night when we are asleep too - so that if we ever wake up from our sleep at night, we can say, "Speak, Lord, Your servant is listening" (1 Samuel 3:10).

Knowing God will make us overcomers in all situations - because God has a solution for every problem that we face - and if we listen to Him, He will tell us what that solution is.

12. The New Covenant is Far Superior to the Old Covenant

Jesus is the Mediator of a better covenant" (Hebrews 8:6).

Many Christians do not know that there is a fundamental difference between the old and the new covenants (Hebrews 8:8-12). The new covenant is as much superior to the old, as Jesus is to Moses (2 Corinthians 3 & Hebrews 3).

Whereas the old covenant could purify only a person's external life through the fear of judgment and the promise of reward, the new covenant changes us from within, not through threats and promises, but through the Holy Spirit giving us the nature of Christ - a nature that is totally pure and loving.

There is a vast difference between a pig being kept clean through being restrained by chains (fear of punishment under the Law), and a cat that keeps itself clean because that is its inner nature. That example illustrates the difference between the two covenants.

13. We are Called to Be Rejected and Persecuted by Men

All who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted." (2 Timothy 3:12)

Jesus told His disciples that in the world they would face tribulation, (John 16:33); and He prayed to the Father NOT to take His disciples out of the world (John 17:15). The apostles taught believers that only through much tribulation they could enter the kingdom of God (Acts 14:23).

Jesus said that if people had called the Head of the house Beelzebul, the members of His household would be called by worse names (Matthew 10:25). It is thus that we know we are faithful members of His household. Some of the names that I have been called, by other "believers", have been: "Devil", "Son of the Devil", "Evil spirit", "Antichrist", "Deceiver", "Terrorist", "Murderer", and "Diotrephes". It has been a great honour to be identified thereby as a part of Jesus' household. All who serve the Lord faithfully will experience this.

Jesus also said that a true prophet would not be honoured by "his own relatives" (Mark 6:4). Jesus Himself was not accepted by His family members. Every true prophet of God will be rejected and dishonoured by his own relatives, even today. In the same way, a true apostle will also be "slandered and treated as the scum of the world and the dregs of all things" (1 Corinthians 4:13). Suffering and rejection have always been the appointed lot of God's greatest servants.

The teaching that the church will be raptured before the "great tribulation" is a popular one with most believers because it comforts their flesh to hear it. But Jesus made it very clear in Matthew 24:29-31 that He will return to take His elect only AFTER the great tribulation.

THERE IS NOT A SINGLE VERSE IN THE ENTIRE NEW TESTAMENT THAT TEACHES THAT THE CHURCH WILL ESCAPE THE GREAT TRIBULATION BY BEING RAPTURED OUT OF IT.

This doctrine was invented by man in England in the mid-1800s.

We must now prepare the church in our country for persecution.

14. We Must Receive All whom God has Received

God has placed the members in the Body just as He desired....that there should be no division in the Body" (1 Corinthians 12:18, 25).

God has raised up men at different times in different lands to restore a pure testimony for Him. But after those men of God died, their followers have made their groups exclusive and cultistic.

But the body of Christ is larger than any group. And we must never forget that. The bride of Christ is found in many, many groups today.

So we must seek for fellowship with all whom the Lord has accepted, even though we may not be able to work together with many of them, because of differences in interpretation of the Word of God.

15. We Must Treat Every Human Being with Dignity

With our tongue, we curse men, who have been made in the likeness of God. My brethren, these things ought not to be this way" (James 3:9, 10).

Any word or action that degrades a human being is never from God. It is always from Satan who forever seeks to demean and degrade people.

We are commanded to speak "with gentleness and respect" (1 Peter 3:15) to all people - whether they be our wives, our children, younger people, beggars or enemies. All men must be treated with dignity. For example, when giving a gift to a poorer brother, we must do so, without robbing him of his dignity as a human being. We must be his brother and not his benefactor.

16. We Must Reveal Our Financial Needs Only to God

God shall supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:19).

Full-time Christian workers must trust God for all their financial needs and must reveal those needs only to Him. God will then prompt His children to supply their needs. They must not live "by faith in God and hints to other believers", as many live today.

The Lord directed those who proclaim the gospel to get their living from the gospel (1 Corinthians 9:14).

So those who serve the Lord full-time are permitted to receive gifts from other believers. But they must never receive a salary. There is a vast difference between gifts and a salary. Gifts cannot be demanded, whereas a salary can be demanded. Here lies the cause for the backslidden condition of most Christian churches and institutions today.

We must however, never receive any gifts for our personal or family use from people who are poorer than us. If such people give us gifts, we must either give the money away to someone poorer than them or put

the money into the offering-box for the Lord's work.

Here are "Ten Principles" on money that all full-time workers will do well to take heed to:

Never make your financial needs known to anyone but God (Philippians 4:19).

Never accept money from unbelievers (3 John 7).

Never expect any gifts from anyone (Psalm 62:5).

Never allow anyone to control you or influence your ministry by giving you money.

Never accept money from those who don't receive your ministry.

Never accept money for your personal or family needs, from anyone poorer than you.

Never be dependent on any man for your financial needs.

Never handle God's money in a way that would cause others to suspect mishandling (2 Corinthians 8:20, 21).

Never be excited when you receive money.

Never be depressed when you lose money.

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/zac-poonen/principles-of-serving-god-3-some-important-truths-that-i-have-learnt/>

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