

Principles of Serving God

by Zac Poonen

The sermon emphasizes the importance of prioritizing our relationship with God, recognizing our limitations and weaknesses, and being humble and authentic in our service to Him.

Duration: 46:03

Scripture: Philippians 3:13, Revelation 4:1

Topics: "Principles"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker focuses on Revelation chapter 4 and the invitation given to John to 'come up higher' and see things from God's perspective. The speaker emphasizes the importance of seeking fellowship with God before going out to serve Him. They caution against being solely focused on the needs around us, as it can lead to a decrease in the quality of our work. The speaker encourages listeners to prioritize doing what God tells them to do, rather than getting caught up in the pressure to meet the needs of the world.

Transcript

I would like to turn to the word of God in Revelation chapter 4. After the Lord had given John a revelation of himself in chapter 1, and then an insight into the actual state of many of the churches that were around that part of the world in chapters 2 and 3. And as you know, many of them were in a pretty backslidden state. Then the Lord said to John, in chapter 4 verse 1, He said, come up here. And that's a lovely word.

When we see the state of a lot of things in the world, and many things we don't know the solution to, it's good to hear the Lord saying to us, come up higher. Come and see everything from my standpoint. Not from that low earthly level, from which you have been looking at those things.

And I believe this is a voice that all of us need to hear constantly. Come up higher. Paul said, one thing I do, forgetting the things that are behind, and pressing on to the things that are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.

He was never satisfied, no matter how far he had attained. The danger in Christian leadership is, we stand so much in front of people, we are acclaimed, we now have media coverage, we have titles before our name, degrees after our name. What else do we need? I'll tell you what we need.

We need to get closer to the heart of God. We need to come up higher. God did not create Adam because He wanted a servant.

He did not create Adam because He wanted a scholar. And He did not create you and me because He needed servants or scholars. He's got enough servants in heaven.

Millions of angels. He created Adam, first of all, that Adam might have fellowship with Him. And that's why, for Adam, the law was not, six days you shall work, and the seventh day you shall rest.

That came later under the law. Adam was created on the sixth day, and His very first day, the seventh day, the seventh day for God, but the first day for Adam, was a day of rest, of fellowship with His Creator. And it is from that fellowship that He was to go out into the garden and serve.

And when we forget that order, when we forget that fellowship with God is to precede going out into His vineyard to serve Him, we have missed the primary purpose of our creation and our redemption. We can be so taken up with need, and particularly in a country like India, if we are taken up with need, we'll have no time for fellowship with God. It's a waste of time, because there is so much need.

But what is the result of need-based work? Well, perhaps a lot of work, but the quality goes down. Statistics are deceptive. You've probably heard the statement, there are three types of lies, black lies, white lies, and statistics.

It's deceptive. The Jehovah's Witnesses have got statistics. The Mormons have got statistics.

They are among the fastest growing groups. Islamic fundamentalists have statistics. Everybody has statistics.

Jesus never bothered about those things. There are times in my life when I've been through certain crises. One was very early in my life, as I sought to serve the Lord, and I found I knew the word, but I lacked power.

And I sought God for the baptism in the Holy Spirit, to be endued with power from on high. Now, I'm not, I know there are different views on this, and I'm not trying to convert anybody. I'm just trying to say that I was born again and I was baptized, but rivers of living water were not flowing out of my life.

That's all. And I knew God had promised, Jesus had promised, that everyone who believed in him, rivers of living water would flow out of their life. They would never be dry.

I found myself at times dry, even though I knew the word, even though I was preaching. I was dry. And very often, my service for the Lord was like pumping a hand pump.

And you pump and pump and pump and get a few trickles of water out. It certainly wasn't like a river. And yet I saw the word of Jesus so clearly that everyone who believed in him out of their innermost being would flow rivers of living water.

All I can say is I sought God and he met with me. And that changed the direction of my life. I didn't join the Pentecostal church.

I do not consider myself a Pentecostal or a charismatic, but God met with me, filled me with the Holy Spirit. And then, years later, I came to another crisis in my life. And that was another crisis that dealt with the

issue of reality.

Whether what I was preaching was true within, in my inner life. Whether the burden I appeared to have when I spoke to people was really true within. I forget when it was.

I think it was about 27 years ago or so when we had what I think was the first Congress on Evangelism that we had in India in Devalali after the Berlin Congress. And I presented a paper there. I was young.

30, 31 years old. And you know how it is for those who are young. I wanted to impress.

And my paper was impressive. I'm unsure of that. I worked on it.

It went on like that. I traveled to speak at deeper life conventions in Australia, Singapore, here and there. And my aim was to impress.

And the Lord spoke to my heart once and said, Do you want to impress people or do you want to help them? I said, Lord, I want to help them. And the Lord said, Stop it, trying to impress them then. And I said, Lord, I'm going to do that.

I want to help people. And I came to a place in my life where I said, Lord, my inner life does not correspond with what I'm preaching. Externally, I had a good testimony.

But my thought life, my attitudes, my attitude to money were not Christ-like. I was proclaiming Christ with my life. But it wasn't the spirit of Christ that was reigning in my thoughts.

And I was honest. I believe the first step to God is honesty. And by then, I mean I was fairly well-known.

I was writing books and my books had a wide circulation. I had a weekly radio program. I was invited here and there.

And the Lord one day spoke to my heart and said, Are you willing to stand up in front of that congregation that respects you and tell them that you're not genuine, you're not real? I said, Yes, Lord, I don't care what people think of me. I want you to do something for me. I ask you only for one thing, and that my inner life will correspond with what I preach.

That's what I asked the Lord for 23 years ago. God met with me again. He's a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.

The Lord said to me, Come up higher. Fellowship with God has become to me the most precious thing in the last 22 years. It's changed my life.

It's taken away discouragement and depression from my life. I have found the secret of walking with God. And that's made my service joyful, no longer dry.

Everything must depend on your walk with God. Remember when Jesus was in the house of Mary and Martha? He said to Martha, You are careful and worried about so many things. What was Martha worried about? There was a knee.

She was serving the Lord unselfishly like many of us are. Sacrificially, sweating away in the kitchen, not cooking food for herself, but for the Lord and His disciples. What greater service.

Totally unselfish. And she didn't do it for money. She didn't do it for a salary like many Christian workers serve.

No, it was totally unselfish. And yet the Lord said, You are worried about many things. She thought Mary was selfish, sitting there, not working, listening.

And Jesus said, That's the important thing. There is a beautiful paraphrase in 1 Corinthians 4, 2, in the Living Bible, which says, The most important thing about a servant, the most important thing about a servant, is that he does just what his master tells him to. You know, that's brought so much rest into my heart.

What do I have to do when I see a needy world get all worked up? There are plenty of manipulators who are out to work me up. I say, Lord, I want to listen. There are plenty of Marthas out to criticize and say, Tell her to get up, not waste her time when there is a needy world perishing.

Well, we certainly need to see the need. Jesus said, lift up your eyes and look at the harvest. To see the need, to point out the need, yes.

But the call must come from God, not from man. I've discovered that. Jesus sat in heaven for 4,000 years while a world lay dying in need of a savior.

Nobody could pressurize him to leave heaven till the Father's time. In the fullness of time, he came. And when he came to earth for 30 years, he sat making stools and benches while a world lay dying.

He would not be moved. But a time came when the Father said, And he went. And he did more in three and a half years than others could do in 3,000.

The most important thing about a servant is not that he runs around doing this, that, and the other for God, but he listens. It's difficult to listen. I used to be in an assembly in my younger days where we spent a lot of time in reading the scriptures and praying and fasting and praying.

And every morning, it was a rigid rule to get up and spend a quiet time. Very good habit. I would recommend it to everyone.

But I found that in spite of these hours apparently spent in the presence of God, people were sour, bitter, hard to get along with, critical, judgmental, suspicious. Something was wrong. I know times when I have spent just 10 or 15 minutes with a godly man, and it's challenged me.

10 or 15 minutes with a man of God, and it's challenged me. Can you imagine what it would be like to spend 10 or 15 minutes with God himself? And how is it these people are not changed? How is it I was not changed? And the Lord showed me I wasn't spending time with him. I was just spending time with myself.

I mean, whether it was a chemistry book or the Bible in front of me didn't make much of a difference. It was just studying some book. It wasn't time with God.

To listen. Jesus said concerning Mary is the one thing needful. From that flows everything else.

And that's a very efficient way of serving God because God can tell you what to do. He told Jesus what to do. Jesus felt the prompting of the Spirit He went once to walk 50 miles to Syrophenicia outside the borders of Israel from Galilee.

I don't know how many hours it took him. Probably a whole day. He went there.

He met one Gentile woman whose daughter was demon possessed. Cast out that demon. Pointed out to his disciples what great fate that woman had when she said give me the crumbs that fall from the table and walked back.

That's how Jesus lived. For one soul. Not very impressive statistically but it was the will of God.

He lived like that for three and a half years. And he said at the end of his life Father I have finished the work you gave me to do. Had he met all the need there was in the world? What about India? What about Africa? But he had finished the work God gave him to do.

And he never desired to live on the earth for another day. The Apostle Paul could say at the end of his life I have finished my course. You may have a different calling and I may have a different calling we are different members in the body of Christ.

But we need to understand what God wants us to do. And one of the major hindrances to our becoming deaf to the voice of God is unreality. When I'm not honest when I pretend.

The Pharisees could not hear what Jesus was saying because they were living a life of pretense. They gave people the impression they were godly. They were up there in the front.

They were the leaders. They were the scholars of that time. If you had met Peter, James or John say four or five years before they met Christ and you had asked them well Peter can you tell me the name of some godly man whom you know? He would have perhaps mentioned the name of some Pharisee who was the elder in the synagogue because that was his understanding.

People who knew the scriptures people who fasted people who prayed people who were carrying little boxes of scripture on their forehead and who appeared so holy and pious they were godly people. And then can you imagine the shock he got when Jesus came and lambasted these elders in the synagogue God saying you are a bunch of hypocrites candidates for hell and when he selects his apostles he doesn't go to any bible school there was a bible school in Gemaiel running it in Jerusalem at that time he doesn't go and pick them up from there. He picks them up from the shores of Galilee illiterate uneducated fishermen and made them his apostles and they write books which today we give people doctorates when they study.

Isn't that amazing? I think Peter himself wouldn't go through some of our seminaries and get a degree. Perhaps one among the twelve disciples could have got a degree and you know who that was the cleverest and the smartest of the lot. Why did Jesus pick up such people?

They were simple they were willing to listen and what a stir they caused when they went to the synagogues and preached they were not just giving the routine messages that the synagogues had heard for years they were prophets and people have never liked prophets in fifteen hundred years of Israel's history Stephen said which of the prophets did you not persecute they were not diplomatic speakers, they were prophets and I believe that our country could do with a few more prophets so that we can hear what God is saying He doesn't care for that which is big and great in the eyes of men yeah I'm not against you know meetings like this but more than twenty years ago I stopped going to them I turned down all those invitations I mean, I know, you get known, you get famous you get media coverage

and you're well-known but I discovered in this land as I travel down the villages where I spend most of my time now that the people doing the work are not here they're out there, unknown you don't even know their names, they can't even speak English they don't know what it is to present a paper but they're filled with the Holy Spirit and they love the Lord and they go out and reach the souls for Christ praise God for them there are many others who organize the thing and who are leaders who appear to be the mission leaders that's fine but many who at first will be lost when Jesus comes again it's good for us to be humble it's good for us to have low thoughts about ourselves perhaps we're not so great in God's eyes as other Christians around the world think we are because of our degrees and

our titles they can impress men, but not God not only they don't impress God, even the devil's not impressed the devil's impressed by a holy man a man who is genuine a man whose inside and outside are the same a man who never preaches what he never does people ask me, Brother Zach, why don't you stir people to go to North India I said, Jesus taught what he did I haven't done it, I will not do it, preach it I'm not saying it doesn't have to be done it has to be done, but I'm not the whole body of Christ I'm only one part of it I'm an imbalanced member of the body of Christ I will always be imbalanced the only balanced man that walked on earth was Jesus Christ you are imbalanced and so am I we're one part, let's never think we're anything more than one part and every part is needed the

evangelist, the teacher, the prophet the shepherd, the apostle for people to be made members of the body of Christ what is evangelism? let's consider, what is our calling? it is to make someone who is not a member of Christ's body a member of Christ's body isn't that our calling basically? that's it, I think you'll all agree on that to use an illustration from, I mean since the Holy Spirit has used the illustration of the body to use an illustration from our physical body here is a plate of food on the table say a potato, that's an unbeliever that potato has to become a member of my body how does it happen? it happens first with evangelism and that is the hand reaching out it's always the first ministry, evangelism that's why I never devalue it I highly value, particularly those who

suffer in the heat and dust of North India I read their magazines, I get a number of magazines in my home and I really thank God for these dear brothers of mine who labor there, and I've been up there now and then to see some of them too here is this, taking this potato and putting it into the mouth it will never become a part of my body if the evangelist doesn't go out and do that but is that all? if I keep it in my mouth forever does it become part of the body? it doesn't I'll spit it out after a while it will get rotten inside the mouth just like some converts have got rotten inside some churches they just pulled in and kept there something else has got to happen once it goes inside the mouth that's the way God has made the body, it's got to be chewed, it's got to be crushed and then

it goes down, and then this poor potato which is all broken up now feels at last it's all over and goes down to the stomach and finds it's not over and now he gets acids thrown on it, that is prophetic ministry it's not comfortable to have acids poured on us this gentle ministry of picking up and all is so nice but when acids are thrown at us and that potato is broken down completely till it no longer looks like a potato and lo and behold in a few weeks it has become blood and flesh and bones a part of the body of Christ now whose job is important? what have you that you did not receive? when we are humble we will confess we are imbalanced the hand is not more important than the stomach they complement each other unfortunately in Christendom there is this perpetual competition the hand

building it's own kingdom, the stomach building it's own kingdom and the mouth building it's own kingdom and what have we? we don't have a body we have an anatomy laboratory with the mouth there and the

hands there and the legs over here, it's not a body what do we need? yeah, we need instruction we need humility we are all equally important you and I and the great mission leader is no more valuable to God than that poor brother who can't speak English properly who goes out and brings souls to Christ they are all a part of the body come up higher, the Lord says see things from my viewpoint and things will look very different from God's viewpoint then they look when you look at it from this low earthly standpoint why is it so many Christian workers have such a high opinion about themselves

I want to ask you my brother sister tell me honestly what are the thoughts you think about yourself when you are by yourself are they thoughts of humility recognizing that you are nothing there are times when I sit outside and look at the stars and knowing a little bit about geography I know there are millions of them and I know that the earth is but a little speck of dust in this vast universe and I say God how great you are what am I? just a small talking big things help me to have a sober estimate of myself I would recommend that to you God gives grace to the humble knowledge anybody can have grace only the humble get we need grace more than knowledge I will tell you that I have thought of young people coming to the Lord from Hindu backgrounds, Muslim backgrounds recently I was

speaking to one of them converted in one of our churches in Tamil Nadu I thought of that Muslim opposed, persecuted by his family and I thought what does he see when he comes to Christianity does he see people with the spirit of Jesus Christ you know people have such a wrong impression of what we claim to be when we are Christians the other day, well some months ago one of my Hindu neighbors said to me, well Mr.

Poonen I saw your Pope on the television the other day well I said, well sir he is not my Pope I will tell you that, well he was relieved to hear that he was relieved to hear because he was a man who respected Jesus Christ he was relieved to hear that my version of Christianity was not one where people were carried around on thrones but that which we see in the Gospels where Jesus was a servant I have long believed that the first principle of all ministry whether it is evangelism, teaching prophecy, whatever is found in Hebrews in chapter 2 and verse 17 Jesus was made like his brothers in all things I want you to meditate on that verse he was made like his brothers in everything how can I serve another person I have to be made like him in everything, I have to descend to his level, why is

it I cannot communicate with a little ant crawling on the floor, because I am so big if I go to him, to that ant as a human being, he gets terrified the only way I can communicate with that ant is becoming like him, and the only way God could communicate with us was by becoming like us that we can understand but in our ministry to others too, whether it is in a local church or whether your calling is to go out into some unreached area, the first principle is this, like Ezekiel says I sat where they sat to be made in all things like our brothers in other words, I don't want to exalt myself above them in any way that's why Jesus told his disciples, don't take titles like Rabbi, Father or any other title, and we got lots of them in Christendom today because that title exalts you above that

other person whom you are supposed to serve you will over all them with your knowledge instead of being one like them Jesus became one like us you know, we think that we can serve God better with the, sometimes with the methods of the business world but it is not true, we read in the Old Testament once that the Philistines had captured the Ark of God and when they had some problems with it they sent the Ark back on a bullet cart years later David heard about it and said, hey that's a bright idea this crazy thing that Moses taught about the Levites carrying it, that's ok for a short distance but long distance, bullet cart is a better idea, the Philistines have got a bright idea there and he put it on a bullet cart you know what

happened the oxen stumbled and Uzzah reached out his hand to

touch the Ark and he was smitten dead right there and David was greatly disturbed, where did it all start? it started with David trying to imitate the Philistines death came in, death always comes in when we imitate the ways of the world when Christian churches are run the way business enterprises are run when money becomes the number one factor in Christian work I believe one of the very good things that we could ask ourselves is whatever calling you are in whatever organization you are running will it survive if money stops or will the whole thing come crumbling down the work of God uses money but it's not dependent on money it's dependent on the Holy Spirit and the Bible says the Spirit of God is jealous jealous when something else or someone else takes his place in the church it could

be music, I'm not against music I believe we should have the best possible music without imitating the world in our churches but we must not depend on music if we think that at the end of a meeting get the organ to play gently and we can move people to a decision what's that? that's psychology it's not the Holy Spirit if the word of God has been preached in the power of the Spirit like Jesus preached it and like Peter preached it we don't need any organ, you can have it if you like but it's not going to help but if you haven't got the Holy Spirit you can manipulate people psychologically and think you got them to take a decision superficial, emotional and you'll discover it in the long run the Holy Spirit is jealous for his place in the church you can't replace him with theology, you

can't replace him with music you can't replace him with money thank God for all those things use them all, Jesus used money, how could we be against it Jesus sang a hymn we read, how can we be against music we read in Hebrews 2 that Jesus is the one that leads the church in praise to God so when we praise him we're just following our leader we're not against these things it's a question of dependence dependence on great personalities, dependence on preachers no, the Holy Spirit is jealous he was made like his brethren in everything he became a servant everybody speaks about a servant lifestyle and servant books and so many things everybody speaks about being a servant but what does it actually mean, I'll tell you what it means brother, how do you treat your co-workers how do you treat the

junior most co-worker who joined your organization yesterday, is he really a brother to you does that fellow live in awe of you it doesn't matter if you preach servant lifestyle till doomsday you haven't understood, you haven't seen Jesus Jesus was so simple he never over awed people he said I'm a son of man, which just means I'm just an ordinary man he who was pure, he who was the son of God he who had lived with the father from eternity came to earth and walked just like an ordinary man he became in all things like his brothers isn't that what it says here, he was made in all things like his brothers and for that something in us has to die it says he humbled himself to the point of death death is the perfect proof of humility if a corn of wheat falls into the ground and dies, guaranteed

much fruit that's one of the things I discovered when I had this crisis of reality with the Lord 22 years ago I discovered that the greatest thing I could do for India was to fall into the ground and die to myself to my will, to what people thought of me to the opinions of people, to my ambitions to my goals, to my love of money to everything and especially to myself so that henceforth Jesus would be everything so that I could honestly look up at him every day of my life and say like the psalmist whom have I on earth beside thee Lord there are times when I have laid down in my bed and said Lord, even my ministry is not my God you are my God and nobody will ever take that place you are everything to me you can take away my voice you can paralyze me and let me lie in the bed I'll just lie

here and love you with all my heart nobody will take away my joy in his presence is fullness of joy it is from that font that rivers of living water must flow through us one last thing many many years ago as a young Christian the Lord spoke to me through a verse in 2nd Samuel chapter 24, verse 24 it says there David, I don't have time to go into all the situation there, the circumstances but David said these words when he was going to make an offering to the Lord he said I will never offer to the Lord that which costs me nothing and what the Lord spoke to my heart was that when he came to earth he offered that which cost him everything and if I were to serve him I had to serve in that spirit every service of mine must cost me something how is it brothers and sisters today has your service

for the Lord cost you something we have many people in Christian work today in India who are earning 5 times, 10 times what they would have got if they were in a secular job is that sacrifice I made a decision when I quit my job in the Indian Navy 31 years ago that I would never receive any money that would raise me higher than what I would earn in a secular job it's preserved me for 31 years ask yourself we don't have to judge others and I'm not here to judge you, most of you I don't even know so it's easy to speak, because I'm not judging anyone I'm just asking you, what would you have got today if you were in a secular job John Wesley used to tell his Methodist workers make sure that preaching the gospel has not become a means of making money you know where Christian work suffers, it's

here you cannot serve God and money and that's the issue we need to deal with we can talk about everything under the sun, but if you don't deal with this issue in your heart, your service will not be effective people relocate their residence from one place to another, there's nothing wrong in that Jesus relocated from heaven to earth but he relocated it was a step down it was because he had a genuine concern for people how do you relocate I'm not criticizing, I'm just asking have you relocated your residence because you feel that you could serve the Lord more effectively in this land of India where you have such a burden for is that true? can we live in the comfort of South India and have a burden for the villages of North India I suppose you can, but I don't see how it works in my case I

can't can you live in the United States and have a burden for India yeah, on paper yes, on paper you can do anything the devil is a great deceiver he deceives us thoroughly he makes us feel we've got great burdens when we've got nothing it's just hot air I want you to be honest I'm not presenting a paper, I'm just sharing my heart I hope it is God's heart I'm not judging you my brothers and sisters God showed me years ago if you judge others you'll destroy yourself I can stand before God today and say I'm not judging anyone I judge myself I repent my life, God is my witness is one of daily repentance because I see un-Christ likeness in my life, in many areas and I repent I say Lord, I didn't speak kindly to that person I want to learn how to speak if a man does not control his tongue his

Christianity is worth zero James says and I want to keep that before me always Paul said once concerning his co-workers not concerning the heathen in Philippians 2 he said verse 19 to 21 I want to send somebody to you in Philippi and I looked around and I found Timothy but I couldn't find anybody else what Paul, you couldn't find a single person among your co-workers I mean getting on to Paul's team itself would have been a tremendous honor Paul was the type of fellow who said John Mark, get him out of here, I don't want him he's not radical, if you got on to Paul's team that was a great honor but Paul looked around at his team and said Philippians 2 to 21 all seek their own they seek their own comfort but they are preaching the gospel they are seeking their own honor but they appear to

be burden for souls they are promoting themselves they are promoting their children they are promoting their family members to take over their work when they finish like Saul wanted to promote Jonathan and

God said it's not Jonathan, it's David who is God to take over Saul was furious, he wanted to get rid of David because he wanted to promote his own son you think that's not happening in Christian work today? yeah, when we serve the Lord, when we speak the truth if we judged ourselves we are not going to be popular but if we seek to please men, we cannot be the servants of Christ brothers and sisters I want to thank God for every brother, every sister especially those who labor in difficult circumstances who have made sacrifices that we will never know about until Jesus comes again who

are not known in Christian circles whose names are not heralded, who have no media coverage but God fearing, humble people who are sacrificially spreading the gospel of Jesus Christ in this land I want to salute them I'm not worthy to untie their laces of their shoes I praise God for such people many of them are working in our organizations let us follow in their footsteps Amen

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