

Religiosity or Spirituality #1 - Hungering for More of God

by Zac Poonen

Zac Poonen's sermon challenges Christians to hunger for a deeper relationship with God and to seek an abundant life through persistence and faith.

Duration: 47:13

Scripture: Matthew 6:33, Romans 6:14, Galatians 3:13-14, Hebrews 11:6

Topics: "Religiosity"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes that many believers are not living up to their full potential in their Christian walk because they are satisfied with mediocrity. He compares this to a student who settles for just passing an exam with the minimum required score. The speaker encourages listeners to have a mindset of striving for excellence in their spiritual lives, just as they would in material and physical matters. He highlights the story of Jacob in the Old Testament as an example of someone who persisted in seeking God's blessing and received it. The speaker concludes by urging listeners to pause and listen to what God is saying to them, so that their lives can become a blessing to others.

Transcript

Well, it's a great joy to be here to share the word of God with you. As a young Christian, when I was growing up in the assemblies I was moving around in, one of the things I noticed was that the quality of life described in the New Testament did not seem to be the quality of life I was experiencing as a Christian, and I didn't see very many people around me experiencing that type of life either. So, and yet, I found that most Christians I met seemed to be content with that, what I thought was a substandard type of Christian life.

And I know, today I know it is a substandard Christian life that most Christians are living. You know, one of the things I've discovered is that you'll never get any more from God than you really long for. The Bible says God is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.

And you can have from God as much as you want, but no more than what you want. If you're satisfied with a certain level of the Christian life, then that's all you'll have. In the Old Testament, there is an example of this.

If you remember the story, when the day when Elijah was supposed to go up to heaven, Elisha, who was his disciple, was following him. And we read in 2 Kings chapter 2 that at different stages, Elijah told him, okay, you stay here and I'm going on. And Elisha said, no, I'm going to follow you.

Then he went to another point. First they were in Gilgal, then in Bethel, then Jericho, then Jordan. And at each point, Elijah said, you stay here, I'm going on.

And Elisha said, no, I'm going to follow you. And so finally, they went all the way past Jordan. And then Elijah said, what do you want? And Elisha said, well, I want a double portion of your spirit.

And that is how Elisha went on to have an even greater ministry than Elijah. Now, he would not have got that if at any point he'd been satisfied with how far he had gone with Elijah. And to me, that's a picture of our following Jesus up to a certain point.

And at each stage, the Lord tests us to see whether you're satisfied with that. For example, a lot of people are satisfied that their sins are forgiven. That means they've got a seat in heaven now.

And that's about all they're looking for. And it's as it were, the Lord says, well, are you happy with that? And that's like Elijah telling Elisha, well, you stay here, I'm going on. And if Elisha had said, OK, that's good enough, he wouldn't have got any more.

So if I'm satisfied with the fact that my sins are forgiven and I've become a child of God, that's all I'm ever going to have. But the New Testament describes a standard of life way beyond just having our sins forgiven. We know that when a person is not in Christ, he is spiritually dead.

And so the Bible says dead in sin. And when we come to Christ, give our life to him, we become alive. But Jesus also said, I've come that you might have life and have it more abundantly.

And there's a lot of difference between life and abundant life. It's like if you go into a hospital and you see a patient with tubes in his nose and veins and all that, and just about barely alive, finding it difficult to take every single breath, we can say he's alive. But compare him with a young 20 year old running around on the soccer field.

And there you see the difference between life and abundant life. And there are some Christians like that patient in the hospital. Yeah, you can't say they're dead.

They're in Christ, all right, but they're barely alive, just about surviving. And then there are others who've experienced abundant life. And yet Jesus offers that to all of us.

Why is it all do not receive? Because like I said, in the beginning, we receive as much as we are eager for. If you're satisfied with something less than God's highest, that's all we'll ever have. Take a word like, rejoice in the Lord always.

You take a word like that, and you can either be satisfied with rejoicing in the Lord once in a while, or most of the time. Or say, Lord, I'm never going to be satisfied till I experience what your word says that I can live on this earth. Despite what happens to me, what what people do may do to me or not do.

It won't make any difference. I can rejoice in the Lord always. There is such a life possible.

And there are Christians, not many, but there are Christians who are living that type of life. And that can be possible for you and me. But if we don't see at least one or two examples of that, we're not challenged to that type of life.

And that's what I didn't find in my younger days. But when I read God's word, I found there was a life described here, which I just didn't seem to have. And I had a choice, you know, just the same type of choice that you may be facing right now.

I had a choice at that time either to accept my substandard level of Christianity or to say, well, even if I don't see other people around me living this life, here is a life described in God's word, which I want to have. Now, either it's possible to have that life or it's not possible. Either God's telling lies or always doesn't mean always, or it must be true.

And today I can say it's true. I want to say to you that God did not send Jesus to die on the cross and rise again from the dead merely that our sins might be forgiven and that we might go to heaven when we die. You remember, he said to his disciples, you shall be my witnesses.

And in order to be his witnesses, he told his disciples, if you wait in Jerusalem, you'll be filled with the Holy Spirit. And then you will be my witnesses. Your life will be a witness to people around of Jesus Christ.

That means the quality of our life is to be a challenge to people around us. When Jesus said to his disciples that you are the light of the world. And the Bible says the whole world lies in darkness.

So the way that's come to my own heart is that the difference between my life and the life of people around me should be the difference between light and darkness. It mustn't be just that I'm slightly better than the others or slightly more upright. The difference between a disciple of Jesus and a person who is not a disciple of Jesus must be so vast as the difference between light and darkness.

That's OK if a person in the world is not able to rejoice in the Lord always, rejoice always. He's happy only when things go well with him, miserable and grumpy when things don't go according to his expectation. Now, if a Christian is also like that, that he's also happy when things go well and miserable and grumpy when things don't go according to his expectation.

Well, then he's just like the darkness around him. He is not different. And if he's satisfied with that, there's something wrong.

I think of that story where the two disciples were walking to Emmaus, you know, and Jesus joined them after the resurrection. And there's a verse there which says that when they came to their house, Jesus acted as though he would go further. He did not show any great eagerness to go into their house, even though he wanted to.

It says he acted as though he would go further. And it says there that they urged him and then he came in. And because he came in, their eyes were open.

They got a blessing which they never got in that long journey from Jerusalem to Emmaus. Because of one thing, they said, Lord, we want you to come in. And I feel that there are times in our life when the Lord tests us also in the same way.

He acts as though he wants to go on and leave us by ourselves. We say, well, thank you, Lord, for all that you've done for me. We had a good time talking together all the way to Emmaus.

See you later. And we missed something. And the Lord was only testing us at that point to see whether you're happy with what you got.

This is not just in the New Testament. In the Old Testament, too, it's the same story with all the men with whom God was able to do something. We read in the Old Testament of this man, Jacob.

There was a time in his life where he met with God and it says God wrestled with him. And then it says in Genesis 32 that God said to Jacob, OK, now let me go. And Jacob said, I will not let you go unless you bless me.

Think of those words. I will not let you go unless you bless me. And because of his persistence, he got something from God which he wouldn't have got if he had allowed God to go away, because God told him, OK, let me go.

The day is breaking. Let me go. And God, Jacob said no.

And God was just waiting for that. He was just waiting to see whether Jacob would be satisfied with what he had already got or whether he'd want something more. And he said, OK, your name is going to be Israel.

For you got power with God and with men and you're not going to be the same person from now on. It was just that little eagerness that made all the difference in Jacob's life. And, you know, it's that lack of that eagerness to go on to God's best that can make you and me miss something that God has for all of us.

That persistence, you know, Jesus was always emphasizing that, even in the parables which he spoke of. You remember the story of the widow who wanted justice from a judge. And Jesus said that parable about how she went to the judge and the judge said, no, I can't give it to you.

And she went back again and said, give me justice against my adversary. Our adversary is the devil. And the devil may be harassing us in so many ways.

He could be harassing our children. He could be creating complicated situations for us. And it's not God's will that we should remain with those complicated situations.

It's not God's will that our children should be harassed like that. God's waiting for us to go to him and say, Lord, give me justice against my adversary. Wasn't he defeated? Wasn't Satan defeated on the cross 2,000 years ago? How dare he come and cause confusion in my home? He's not permitted to do it.

Give me justice. And it looks as though there's no answer. And the Lord said, men should always pray, not feign.

And that widow went back again and again and again and again. I don't know how many times she went, but she went until she got an answer. And at the end of that parable, Jesus said, this is how you ought to be praying.

And he said, shall not God answer speedily his elect who cried to him day and night? But when the Son of Man comes, will he find such faith on the earth? You know, a lot of us think we've got faith. Maybe you do.

But if you do, the proof of it will be that you've got that type of persistence that that widow had.

In other words, in that context, what did Jesus mean by faith? Faith was that persistence. The faith was manifested in that persistence whereby the widow got what she wanted. And Jesus said, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth among his elect? Meaning, will he find people like that who are convinced that if I lay hold of God, I am going to get what the Bible has promised.

I'm not going to get everything I want. God doesn't give us everything we want. Just like we don't give our children everything they want.

How many of you parents would give your children everything they want? You'd be a foolish parent to do that. The Bible doesn't say, my God shall supply all that you want. It says, my God shall supply all that you need.

Just like we do for our children. But even that, we have to go to God again and again and again and say, Lord, I believe that you are going to give me everything that the Bible says, promises for me. Sin shall not rule over your life.

In every Christian, either he's ruling over sin or sin's ruling over him. It's just like the Israelites under Pharaoh. There was a time when Pharaoh was ruling over the Israelites.

And then there was a time when Pharaoh was buried under the sea and the Israelites were triumphant. It's like that with sin. Either sin's ruling our life or we've seen sin buried under the sea and we are ruling over sin.

That depends on whether we're satisfied with something less than God's best. God has promised something, but it's not going to happen automatically. God's created man in such a way that he has to find some cooperation from us before he can do for us all that he's promised.

When God made Adam, he could have made Adam like all the planets that rotate. Those planets have obeyed God for so many thousands of years without disobeying God even for a moment. God could have made Adam like that.

You know, like a computerized robot just automatically obeying God all his life, never doing anything wrong. But he wouldn't have been holy. He'd have been just like those planets.

The planets obey God for thousands of years, but they are not holy. Why is it that an object that's obeyed God for 20,000 years is not holy? The planets have obeyed God. They've never disobeyed God for a single second, and yet they're not holy.

Because it's not the result of choice where obedience is forced. The planets are compelled to obey. They don't make a personal choice.

And if God had made Adam and you and me in such a way that we are compelled to obey him, we'd never be holy. We'd be just like those planets, even if we obey. It's when we make a personal choice and say, I choose to obey when I can disobey.

And I choose to lay hold of God to get his best when I could sit back and be satisfied with less than God's best. It's such decisions that determine whether we're going to live in God's highest for our life or something less than God's highest. It's very easy for us to be satisfied with something less.

You know, when it comes to worldly things, we always want the best. If we use our money, we want to get the best return for our money. We bargain for a house as to how much we're going to pay for it, because we want to get the best house for this much money we're going to invest.

In every area in life, we are very careful in material things and physical things to get the best possible return for what we're investing. Now, if only we had that attitude in our Christian life as well, in our spiritual walk with God, do you know that all of us would be way ahead of where we are today? And our life would be far more effective for God than it is right now. Have you ever read a promise like this? You know, that's challenged my heart and I want to share it with you because I believe this is a promise for all of us.

I want you to read it in Galatians chapter 3. It says in Now, it's a bit of a complicated sentence, but basically what it means is that the same blessing with which God blessed Abraham in the Old Testament is the blessing with which God wants to bless you when he gives you his Holy Spirit. And what was the blessing with which he blessed Abraham? There were two parts to it. One, he said, I will bless you.

And the second was, you will be a blessing and all the families of the earth will be blessed through you. So, it's not just that Abraham is going to be blessed by God, but the proof of that would be that all the families of the earth would be blessed through Abraham. And here it says that that promise is for me, you.

And that's the purpose of the gift of the Holy Spirit. That first of all, that God might bless me and you. And the result of that will be that every family on this earth that I ever meet, I'm going to be a blessing to them.

Do you want that type of life? Do you think every Christian is a blessing to every family they meet? I don't think so. I think a lot of Christians cause a lot of problems for other people. And I think a lot of Christians just don't do anything.

Why is that? Either they are ignorant of the truth, or the devils allowed them to be satisfied with something far less than what God wanted them to have. Aren't you disappointed when your children don't rise up to the full potential of what they could accomplish with their life? Supposing your child is very intelligent, but is lazy in school. I'm sure you'd be disappointed as a parent that here's a child of mine who's got such tremendous potential and he doesn't use it.

That's exactly how God feels about a lot of his children. Do you know that God wants you? It doesn't matter how limited you are. It doesn't matter how ignorant you are.

It doesn't matter how much you've made a mess of your past life. None of these things matter. If you have faith in God, He can cleanse and blot out not only your past life, but all the effect of that upon your life today.

And make you a blessing to every single person who ever comes across your path. But you must believe that, because it's God's word. You must say, Lord, I'm not going to leave you till that happens in my life.

Just like Elisha followed Elijah. And just like the widow went to the judge. And you remember another story where Jesus said about a man who came to visit his friend at midnight and he was hungry and there was no food in the house.

It says, the host went to his neighbor's house and knocked and said, Give me some bread for a friend of mine has come. And that neighbor said, Please don't disturb me. I'm in bed with my children.

But this man was determined to disturb him. He said, I'm going to keep knocking. I don't care whether it wakes you up and your children and everybody else.

Until you give me the bread, I'm not going to leave you. And he kept on banging away at the door. And that neighbor finally got fed up and said, Okay, here's your bread.

And Jesus said, How much more will your heavenly father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him like this? Those who keep on asking God and saying, God, there's a friend of mine in need. And I don't know how to be a blessing to him. Please fill me with your spirit so that I can be a blessing to him.

You knock once and there's no answer. You go away. No wonder we live at that same level.

What did Jesus teach in that parable? That if you don't get that answer immediately, you got to keep knocking again. You got to knock again until the door is open. And he gives you and you know what Jesus said in that parable, he'll give him as much as he needs.

He knocked and he got. I want to say to you, I want to encourage all of you from this day to a new level of life of the Christian life. There is something far more that God wants to do through you to bless other people who come across your path than he's been able to do so far.

I believe that. He wants to fill you with his Holy Spirit. He wants to make your life a blessing.

Think of Jesus was a blessing to everybody who came across his path. There are people in need. If they came in touch with Jesus, they were blessed.

I mean, they would just touch the hem of his garment and get blessed. What a way to live. I believe that's the will of God for every one of his children.

Just think of every single one of us. You know, we got a little circle. You got a little circle of people, you know, whom you meet, whom I'll never meet.

They'll never come to a meeting. They'll never probably come to a church. And probably a lot of other people sitting here also don't know the people you meet in your circle.

Your business contacts, perhaps your neighbors, relatives, friends who nobody else knows here except you. That's your little circle. You believe that God wants to make you a blessing to every single person in that circle.

I mean, whether they get converted or not, God wants to make you a blessing to them. But it's not going to happen if you don't persist and go to God, just like this man went to his neighbor and said, I'm going to leave you till you give me what it takes to be a blessing to this chap who has come to my home. We live in a world where so many people are under the bondage of Satan, oppressed, discouraged.

What a life we can live if we are a little more sensitive to the Holy Spirit. I remember once the Lord prompted me to visit somebody's home. He was a brother who had been coming to our church and stopped coming long ago, had backslidden and left the church.

Anyway, I decided to obey that prompting and go to his house. I hadn't seen him for weeks or months. And I later discovered that he was so much in debt and he was not able to repay his debt, that he and his wife and his three little children were planning to commit suicide that night.

Today, that whole family is a very blessed family in our church. Is it possible that perhaps the Lord wanted to take you to somebody who was needy, but you were too busy, perhaps, doing your own thing, wondering about your own pleasure, your own gain or something like that, that you were not able to listen to the Spirit's voice? There was a time when Peter, we read in Acts chapter 10, he was praying in Joppa, and the Spirit said to him, go to the house of Cornelius, see what happened, because he went. He just obeyed that.

And he went to the house of Cornelius and all those people in Cornelius' house got a tremendous blessing. We read of another time in the Bible where the Holy Spirit said to Philip, okay, you go from Samaria, go in that direction towards Gaza. He obeyed.

There was an Ethiopian eunuch who was on his way back home. He had come to Jerusalem to be blessed. He didn't get blessed.

He was going home and Philip blessed him, baptized him. And the Bible says he went on his way rejoicing. And we know that many Christians, finally, many people became Christians in Ethiopia subsequently.

Many thousands of Christians in Ethiopia, because that man went back to Ethiopia with the message of the gospel. And that's because Philip went and met him. I don't believe these things were just written for us to admire these wonderful things.

This is God's will for us. It's God's will for you, my brother, sister. Philip was just an ordinary brother.

You may be an ordinary brother or sister. What I want to say is, it's possible that you're not living up to the full potential of what God wants you to be, and what God wants to do through you. And the reason is that you're satisfied with something less, when you could do more.

You know, if past marks in an examination is 40%, and that's all a child aims for. Oh, well, I got 40%. Comes back home and says, Mom, I got 40%.

I passed. You're not happy. I know the child passed, it didn't fail.

But there's so much more that that child could have got if it just made a little more effort. And I think the way you would feel about your child, who could get 95, perhaps, and satisfied with 40%. I think that's how God feels about a lot of his children.

Okay, they haven't failed. They're not going to hell. They've passed.

They're going to heaven. Their sins are forgiven. But God is so disappointed that they're satisfied with 40% when they could be 95% or 100%.

So if we can be challenged by these examples in the scriptures, to something higher than we have experienced, to something more, you know, God's waiting to see that longing in our hearts. And then he responds to it. It's always like that.

If we don't pause to listen, we won't get his best. The Bible says there was a time, you know, for 40 years, Moses was looking after the sheep in the wilderness. And one day, he saw a bush on fire, and he stopped and God spoke to him.

In other words, he stopped in the middle of his work to listen to what God had to say. And God said to him, listen, Moses, I've got something far better for you than looking after sheep, a far greater ministry, if you'll only listen to me. And I've thought, supposing Moses hadn't stopped that day, supposing he was so busy looking after his sheep, that here was God trying to speak to him through a bush, but he had no time to listen.

Can you imagine what would have been the, what would have been in the book of Exodus? There wouldn't have been any Moses. He wouldn't have had the ministry that he did have, because he was too busy looking after sheep. And I think a lot of Christians are going to discover that when they stand before Jesus in the final day, that they were too busy looking after sheep or looking after your job or looking after whatever your earthly occupation was, because you didn't have time to stop to listen to whether God had a plan for your life to do something with your life to make you a blessing to other people.

I want to say to every one of you in Jesus name, that the blessing of Abraham is for you, that the families of the earth are to be blessed through you. I've taken that seriously myself. I've said, Lord, I may be weak, I may be stupid, I may be worthless as far as the world is concerned, but I believe it's your will that my life should be a blessing to every single person who comes in touch with me.

I want to do that. I can't do it myself, but I want you to do it. It was God who made Abraham a blessing.

God will make you that, but you've got to have that desire where there's no desire, God can do nothing. He's not going to treat us like the planets and make us automatically a blessing to others. No.

He works in us. The Bible says, God works in you and you got to work it out. You know that verse? Philippians, if you don't know it, it's a good verse to know Philippians in chapter 2. It says, what it's basically saying here is, work out what God works in.

I mean, God works something inside, you got to work it out. Philippians in chapter 2, the last part of verse 12 and the first part of verse 13, it says, work out your salvation with fear in trumps, very simple words, what God works in you, work it out. So there's something we have to do if God's will is to be accomplished.

If I sit back and say, well, Lord, do it, it won't happen. If God were to do everything, we'd all be great saints by now. We'd all be tremendous blessing.

See, when I was a young Christian and I heard different Christians speaking about being filled with the Holy Spirit and I saw, I heard some taking one position that it all happens when you're converted. Some others saying, no, it doesn't all happen when you're converted. You've got to go seeking God again after you're converted.

Some call it a second work of grace and things like that. I didn't know. I wasn't a Bible scholar or any such thing.

But one thing I knew, and that was that what the scripture had promised was not being fulfilled in my life. Jesus said, he who believes in me, out of his innermost being, rivers of living water will flow. And I said, Lord, I don't know whether I got everything when I got converted or whether I got to seek it again.

But one thing I know, rivers of living water are not flowing out from me. I mean, it's just a few trickles that are coming out, actually. And yet you said that rivers of living water are supposed to come.

I want to believe you. I want to believe you. There's no other condition.

He who believes in me. What does it mean to have rivers of living water flowing out? You know, if you go back to the old, soon after the Stone Age, the old days, you'll find that whenever people spread across the face of the earth, they'd always gather and build their homes near rivers. You know why they used to build their homes near rivers? Because water was a very important requirement for so many things in life.

So if we were to look at the earth from somewhere up in space, we'd see people gathered around rivers, because that's where they got water. And so many people were, are blessed by a river. And so I understand from this picture with Jesus used the rivers of living water flowing from my life, that it's going to be like those rivers where wherever it flows, people are going to come together there to be blessed.

To be blessed through something flowing out from some worthless person like me. That's Christianity. That's true Christianity, where God can take a worthless human being and bless him in such a way that rivers start flowing out from him.

You know, today we think of Moses as a great leader. But what was he actually? He was just the baby of a slave. His parents were slaves.

And he was a baby born to two slaves. And that's the man, that's the little baby that God picked up in the history of the world. Because he stopped to listen to what God had to say.

And if you can stop a moment today and listen to what God has, God is trying to say to you, to say to you, my son, my daughter, I want to make your life a blessing to others. If you will only hunger and thirst for that, not be satisfied. If I can create in you, if I can stir up in you a thirst and a hunger for something more spiritually than you already have.

If I can remove from your heart this craving for earthly things, which are not going to satisfy you finally. And instead, replace it with a craving for spiritual riches. God says, if only I could do that in your life, if only you would allow me to do that in your life, your life will never be the same again.

Don't let the devil deceive you. There was a time when the devil came even to Jesus and offered him all the glory of this world. And Jesus wouldn't even think about it for a moment.

He said, I don't want it. It wasn't attractive. He had come to earth to accomplish the Father's will.

And he was not going to be distracted by all those empty things the devil offered him instead. That was the temptation. The devil said, here's all this glory of the world, I'll give it to you.

Jesus said, no. Now, when the devil offers that to a lot of Christians, say, listen, I can give you this and I can give you that and I can give the other thing. Those Christians stop and listen, hey, I can get all that.

And they get their mind on all that. And miss what God sent them on earth to accomplish. One of the things that gripped my heart when I was about 20 years old was the fact that my Heavenly Father had made a plan for my life.

I don't know whether all of you are gripped by that, that God placed you on earth to fulfill a certain plan. And it's very easy for you to be distracted from that. If the devil offered things to Jesus, don't you think he'd try and offer that to you and me? Certainly.

But Jesus rejected them. He rejected it immediately. And that's what we need to do.

Say, Lord, I'm sorry that in the past I wasted so much of my life being occupied with things which don't really have eternal value. But I want to make it different from today. I want to be responsive to your voice when you seek to lead me higher and further in the Christian life than I've come so far.

If only God could create that hunger in our heart today, I believe that all of you would be set on a path from this day that would change the entire direction of your future. And I believe that when you stand before the Lord in the final day, you won't have any regret about the choice you made today. Let's pray.

Bible says, Call upon the Lord when he is near. And one way by which we know whether the Lord is near is if we heard his voice clearly, loud and clear. And if you've heard him speaking to your heart this evening, loud and clear, that means the Lord is near you tonight.

Take the opportunity to call upon him because he may not be so near in a few days. Call upon the Lord when he is near. Say, Lord, I've seen a vision of a life I can live on this earth which I haven't tasted of so far.

I don't want to waste my earthly days altogether missing what you have for me. I want this life, this abundant life that you came to give. Heavenly Father, I believe that there are sincere hearts here who are seeking you tonight.

And I pray that it won't be just a temporary emotion or a temporary response to what they heard tonight, but rather the beginning of a craving and a hunger for your very best in their lives. And I pray that the direction of many a life will be changed tonight. We pray in Jesus' name.

Amen.

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