

# Secure in Knowing God as Our Father

by Zac Poonen

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*God has a specific plan for each of our lives, and we must trust in His love and mercy to overcome temptation and achieve spiritual growth and victory.*

**Scripture:** Matthew 11:28, John 1:18, John 17:23, Ephesians 4:31

**Topics:** "Identity in Christ", "God's Love"

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## Description

Zac Poonen emphasizes the profound truth that God loves us as His children, just as He loves Jesus, and this revelation is crucial for our spiritual security and growth. He explains that many believers struggle with insecurity and competition because they do not fully grasp their identity as beloved children of God. Poonen encourages Christians to recognize that God has a unique plan for each of their lives, just as He did for Jesus, and that true holiness is an expression of God's love rather than a burden. He warns against the lies of the enemy that distort our understanding of God's character and urges believers to embrace their identity in Christ to overcome sin and foster unity within the body of Christ. Ultimately, he calls for a deeper relationship with God, rooted in His unconditional love, which empowers us to live in freedom and holiness.

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## Transcript

John 1:18 speaks about one of the purposes Jesus had in coming to earth. Most people think He came only to die for our sins, but let's look at this verse: "No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him." Before Jesus came to this earth, people could not know God as their Father. You never see people in the Old Testament calling Him "Father." He was a great and terrible God who was to be feared. The greatest revelation Jesus ever gave to His disciples was that God was their Father. You can see how Christ labored to help them be able to find security in knowing God as their Father, but they didn't always respond the way He wanted to that new revelation. I believe that today God is seeking to reveal this unto us also. It is on this foundation alone that we can progress and grow in our Christian life, have victory over sin and build the body of Christ. It is in this revelation of finding God as our Father that we find the answer to many, many of life's problems. The reason for this is: When we do not know God as our loving Father, we have a false image of how God is. The devil is always trying to portray a wrong picture of God to us.

When I was young, the thing that changed me from an insecure person who was always trying to make a good impression on people into one who was secure was the truth that God loved me as much as He

loved Jesus Christ. If someone were to ask me what the greatest truth I have ever discovered in my forty years of being a born-again believer of Jesus Christ and studying the Bible, it is this. As far as I know, it is mentioned in only one verse in the whole Bible. John 17:23- "I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that thou hast sent me and hast loved them as thou hast loved me." This whole chapter is a prayer for unity amongst believers. But when we look at Christendom today, we see that this prayer is not being answered. We don't see Christians united together. This was the burden of Jesus' heart. Having unity amongst believers comes from knowing that God loves us as He loved Christ. I find it very difficult to understand or explain how this is, but it is something we desperately need to get ahold of, for when I saw it, it changed my life completely. It delivered me from my desire to impress people and compete with others. It helped me to overcome jealousy and my desire to compare myself with others and many of the problems that Christians have that bring disunity. Just this simple truth that God loves me as much as He loves Jesus. The very same way that He planned and cared for Christ's life is the way He will do for me.

I think of the many times in Matthew where it says that something happened so that the scripture might be fulfilled. He was born in Bethlehem, He grew up in Nazareth, He went to Galilee so that the scripture would be fulfilled, and all the way through His life you find that there was a plan that God had laid out and had prophesied of through the prophets of. Even while Christ was hanging on the cross, He said: "I thirst." John 19 says even that was done that the scripture might be fulfilled. There was such perfect planning in the life of Jesus. God had planned it exactly for Him- where He was to be born and all of these things. He couldn't have just been born anywhere. I believe He had to be born in that stable. This was all God's plan for His life. He couldn't have just lived anywhere. There was a reason for Him being raised in Nazareth. His life was so perfectly planned because the Father loved Him. When I realized how the Father loves me as He had loved Jesus, I realized that He planned my life too in exactly the same way. That took a lot of insecurity out of my life.

When I was a young Christian, I was a really shy, reserved and introverted kind of person. I would look at these other people who could go up and slap people on the back and say: "Hi! How are you?" and make friends with people so easily, and I couldn't do that. I wished I could be like that, but I wasn't. When I realized that God made no mistake in making my temperament the way He did, and it was He who determined the color of my skin, it was He who determined what country I was to be born in, and He determined every last detail of my life it was because He had a specific plan for my life, I realized I didn't have to envy everybody else. If I would try to be like someone else, it would ruin the plan He had for me that could only be fulfilled through the gifts He had given me. That brought such rest into my life. It delivered me from wanting to be like other people and competing with them. It gave me perfect peace. This was all from this simple truth that God loves me just as He loved Jesus and in the same way He planned Jesus' life, He planned mine. I was converted when I was 19 and baptized when I was 21, and in this time, God showed me that He had a plan for me, and if I would submit to that, He would direct my life.

When the Lord delivered the Children of Israel from the land of Egypt, He led them with a pillar of cloud. He just didn't give them a map of the wilderness and say: "Okay, go and find the Promised Land." No, He led them. He wanted to teach them to live by faith. It's the same way with us. God doesn't give us a map of our whole future. We don't really know what lies ahead of us. He wants us to learn to follow Him and put our trust in Him. God showed me that if I would submit my will to Him, day by day, and follow His direction and guidance, I will fulfill His plan for me. This helped me so much. I'm glad the Lord didn't wait until I was forty or fifty to reveal this to me. That's why I have a great burden for young people. I wish I

could drill into the minds of all our young people that God has a plan for their life. He's made a plan for your life, and you could never make a better plan than that. It's impossible. The devil's always trying so hard to convince us that: "If you give your life to God completely, He'll just mess it up and you won't be happy. Don't ask God what job you should do because He'll pick out the most difficult job in the world and tell you to do that one. Don't ask God which girl you should marry because He'll pick out the ugliest girl in the world and tell you to marry her." This is the picture that the devil has painted of God to so many young people. If it weren't so, why wouldn't every single young person surrender everything to Jesus? He's got them afraid to do it. Why was the rich young ruler so reluctant to give his money to the poor? Because He thought God was there to mess up his life. He thought God was there to make him poor. He didn't want to end up in the poorhouse. There are so many commandments in the Bible that Christians are reluctant to obey because they feel that God wants to mess up their life. God has come to spoil their fun and to take everything away. God is not come to take away, He's come to replace with something far better than they have. They don't realize that if they would only surrender their all, they could have the most fulfilling life that they could ever live. I'm so, so glad I realized this when I was 21. Today, more than 40 years later, I can testify that I could not have planned my life better than the way God did. He never showed me what those 40 years were going to be. He showed it to me day by day. He'll do the same for you.

When Satan came to Eve in the garden of Eden, we see that He tempted her to eat of the forbidden fruit, but behind it all, was the lie that: "God doesn't really love you, Eve. If He loved you, He'd allow you to eat of that tree. Why has He not given you that which is so attractive and appeals to your senses?" That's the way the devil comes to us even today. "Why hasn't God answered that prayer of yours? It's because He doesn't really love you. Why didn't He give you that other thing which you wanted so badly? Because He doesn't really love you. Why hasn't He made you like that other person? Because He doesn't really love you." It's only when Eve believed that lie in her mind: "Yes, it's possible that God doesn't really love me." that she sinned and ate of that fruit. Her failure was not primarily one of disobedience, although that was involved. It was the sin of unbelief. If she wouldn't have believed Satan, can you think of what the result would've been? She'd have told Satan: "Yes, it looks as though God doesn't love me. I don't know why He doesn't allow me to eat of this lovely fruit, but Satan, there must be a very good reason He doesn't that I can't understand. God's wisdom is far greater than mine. There's one thing I'm absolutely sure of, Satan. God loves me, and if He doesn't want me to eat of this fruit, it must be for my good; even if I can't understand it." That's the way to overcome temptation. There are so many things God had told us not to do. When Satan comes to us and says: "Why don't you just yield and enjoy yourself?" Can you say to Him: "I don't know why God has forbidden it, but there must be a very good reason. God loves me, and it is His live that has forbidden me from taking part in that."? In the same way, when God tells us to do something that looks difficult, we know that it is God's love that makes so we must do it.

Holiness is a word that frightens many Christians. I don't know why. Before I understood it, I would think: "I've got to be holy- all the time! Boy, what a terrible burden!" I want to ask you brothers, do you get frightened over the word 'health?' Being 100% healthy 365 days of the year? Do you think: "Oh no! Healthy!?" Why aren't we scared of health? It's because we know health is good for us. What are we scared of? We're scared of sickness. How many of you want just a little bit of sickness? Holiness is spiritual health. That's what it is. Why are we afraid of it? It's because the devil's fooled us for years. Holiness is an expression of God's love for us. Maybe my little child had leprosy and I would take him to a doctor. I'd tell the doctor: "Don't heal him completely. Just keep a little bit of leprosy. It'll keep him humble." There are people today who think: "I need to sin once in a while so I will be humble." That's the same as if I would tell the doctor: "Just keep a little leprosy there to keep him humble. He'll get proud if he's healthy."

No good father would tell the doctor to do that. We would want him to be completely free. If he's got tuberculosis, we'd want him to be completely free of that as well. If this were your son, how free of tuberculosis would you want him? 90%? 99%? Or 100%? How free do YOU want to be from sin? 90%? Maybe some of you only go 65% and you're happy already. Would you be content for your child to be delivered only 65% from tuberculosis? Why are you content to be only 65% free from sin? You say: "Well, it's better than it was before." Maybe it is, but are you happy to stay there? Holiness is spiritual health. Sin is spiritual sickness. But the devil has blinded our eyes into being afraid of holiness and thinking of all kinds of reasons why we should be able to sin. He tells us: "Well, it'll keep you humble." and all kinds of very stupid arguments like that.

When God calls us to be holy, it's the same desire that I have for my little children that I should become completely healthy. They should be free from all sickness. Maybe they have a little fever that concerns me. I don't want them to have a little fever. I don't want them to have a cold. That's the same care that God has for us. His love is so great that He wants us to be totally pure from all sin. He wants us to be free from dirty thoughts- not 65%, not 90%, but 100%! If the doctor says: "It's going to take a little time."

I say: "Let it take time, but I want him to be free 100%. He wants us to be free from anger 100%. These aren't just my words. It says in Ephesians 4: "Let him that stole steal no more." How free do you want to be from stealing? 80%? 90%? Or 100%? Would you be happy when you were only stealing 10% of the time? Would you have a good conscience? No. I don't think there's a single person here who would have a clean conscience if he were stealing only 1% of the time. Let's go to the next verse.

"Let no corrupt communication proceed from thy mouth." What's the difference between that and the previous verse? Are you happy when your speech is 90% good? How is it that we don't get convicted about a few unkind words that come out of our mouth, like we would if we stole- just a little bit? It's because the devil has made us selective in reading God's word. We take some things and say: "Now, that's important." Then, we go to the next verse and say: "That's not so important."

Let's go further down. Verse 31: "Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamor, and evil speaking (slander), be put away from you." Well, if we put away ALL anger from our life, how much will be left? Are we scared of that? "Let all leprosy, and all tuberculosis and all AIDS and all every other disease be put away from us." Are we scared of that? No! That's what we want. Let me tell you, that's exactly what God wants for us. Holiness is an expression of God's love. Think of how a father and mother will take their child to the hospital and long for it to be perfectly healthy.

That's how God longs for us to be spiritually healthy. Free from sin in the way we look, the way we speak, and every area of our life. The devil has succeeded in portraying holiness as a burden and something that strange, fanatical people speak about. People are afraid of the word perfection. I know it's true in my country. I have been criticized for 25 years by almost every single group of Christians for preaching one simple verse- "Let us press on toward perfection." I tell them: "It doesn't make any difference what you think of me.

God has told me to preach it, so I will until Jesus comes again." Let us press on toward perfection in every area of our lives. I want my relationship with my wife to be better than it's ever been before. I want my speech to be kinder this year than it's ever been before. I want the love of money to be more detached from my life than it's ever been before. To press on toward perfection is to go farther in every area of my life than I've ever gone before. Nobody will reach the top of the mountain in one day. It's pressing on

toward perfect spiritual health.

Think of the craze for health there is in this country. You see people jogging so their cholesterol level goes down. People are very careful of what they eat. Even with packaged food there's a health facts table written on the outside of the package. People are so careful about their physical health. Why are they not more careful about sin, which destroys one's spiritual health? Why are believers, who have light on this, not caring about sin in their life? How can someone have lust with his eyes all day, then sleep peacefully that night? How can this be possible? How can believers speak angry words to his wife and not weep on his pillow that night? I can't understand it! Jesus said: "Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted." When you've learned to weep over sin, you'll get victory pretty soon. When is the last time your pillow was wet by your tears because you've grieved God in some way that day? We can argue about doctrines, but it's those who mourn over their spiritual condition who will be strengthened and overcome and be filled with the Holy Spirit experiencing perfect spiritual health in every area of their life! I want to encourage you brothers, let your laughter be turned into mourning. There's a great need for mourning. Paul said in Acts 24:16: "And herein do I exercise myself to have a conscience void of offense before God and man." That was one of the great secrets of his life. It's not that he never made any mistakes. He made lots of them. He never wanted to give people the impression that he was a man who never made any mistakes. Do you know who wrote the book of Acts? Luke. Luke was Paul's closest co-worker. I can imagine that when he wrote the book of Acts he would have liked to leave out a lot of those mistakes that Paul made. Paul must have said to him: "Make sure you write every one of those things down. Make sure you write how I quarreled with Barnabas and we separated. Make sure you write that I acted like a fool and shaved my head like the other Jews after becoming a Christian. Make sure you write how I circumcised Timothy, and make sure you tell how I yelled at the high priest calling him a white-washed wall." That was Paul's humility. I cannot imagine Luke writing that unless Paul encouraged him to do so. He wasn't a man who wanted to give people the impression that he never made mistakes.

A lot of preachers are like that today. There's a lot of fathers who try to give that impression to their children. I've never wanted my children to feel they have a perfect father. That would only discourage them. I never wanted the people in my church to feel they have a perfect elder. I wanted my children to know that they have an honest father- one who is willing to confess that he has failed. I want the people in my church to know they have an honest elder who's willing to confess when he slips up. I've already had to go to one of the youngest brothers in the church and say: "I'm sorry, brother. I was a little too hard when I corrected you. Would you forgive me?" No, we're not perfect, only God is perfect. Even Paul made mistakes, but he was honest. He kept his conscience clear before God. He wrote in 1 Timothy 1: "This is a faithful saying, And worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief. Howbeit, for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might shew forth all long-suffering, for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on him to life everlasting."

I believe that when God sees we are honest enough to admit that we have come short, He will be better able to lead us to a greater height of holiness in our lives. I've been amazed at the work God has done in my life. I've been amazed at how it's really true that He is able to keep us from falling. I've already wondered "How does He keep us from falling?" If I am standing, I can fall. If I sit, I can still fall. There's only one place where you can never fall- that's when you're flat on the ground. If you are willing to keep your face in the dust before God, it is impossible to fall! Keep your face in the dust before God. "God resisteth the proud but giveth grace unto the humble." When we are secure in the love of God, we aren't afraid to admit that we slipped up there. We're not afraid to apologize to our wife, children or our younger

brothers in the church. We realize that Jesus wouldn't behave that way.

For many years I tried to get a good definition of sin from the scriptures. There are many definitions, but I finally found what I believe is the clearest one given. That was Romans 3:23. "For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God." I realized when I read that verse, that sin is anything that comes short of the glory of God. If I have something in my life that comes short of God's glory, it is sin. The glory of God was seen in Jesus. John 1 says that we beheld His glory in the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth. So, anything that is below what is seen in the life of Christ is sin. I'm very thankful for this definition of sin, because it helps me to see that nothing good dwells in my flesh. Since I have found this verse, my life has been one of continuous repentance because the Lord points out things in my life to me that are not Christ-like. I often need to fall on my face before God praying: "Lord, be merciful to me- a sinner." so that I can be cleansed from them. Do you know what you're missing when you don't deal with the areas of your life that God points out to you and you call sin by some more descent name like "mistake" or "righteous indignation" when it's really just plain, carnal anger? God will not deliver you from it. But when I call sin what it really is- sin, and say "Lord, that was an adulterous look." then God can deliver me from it. He can not deliver you from "admiring the beauty of God's creation." We've got to be honest enough to say "Lord, this is what it is." for Him to deliver us from it. This is what it means to walk in the light. Why are we afraid of calling sin what it really is? Because we're not secure in God's love to us as our Father.

Jesus said in John 14: "I will not leave you comfortless." And the word 'comfortless' was translated from a Greek word meaning 'orphans'. "I will not leave you as orphans." When I look at a lot of Christians, I see that they behave exactly like orphans. I have often met orphans in India. Children who never in their whole life have known the love of a Father and Mother and were brought up in an orphanage. I find the characteristics of orphans in these people even when they're sixty years old. Insecure, feeling threatened by others, wanting somebody's friendship only for themselves, and the characteristics I find in so many believers are feeling threatened by others, competing with others, trying to show that they can pray better, or sing better or preach better or do something else better. They are like orphans. They are trying to compete with someone else to show that what they are accomplishing is much better than the others, writing things in a way to show others that "God's really using me." They are as orphans. They're not content with the fact that the Father knows. Jesus said: "Your Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly."

As I was reading in John 7, I found something that really came home to my heart strongly. In verse 4 we read that the brothers of Jesus told Him to go to Judea and they said these words: "For there is no man that doeth any thing in secret, and he himself seeketh to be known openly." No one will do anything in secret if he desires to be known by everyone. How does this apply to us? Why is it that we don't do things in secret? Because we want to be known of men. Why is it that

our public life is so much more than our secret life? Why is it that the impression we give to other people about our prayer life is much more than what it really is? No one does anything in secret if he wants to be known of men, but if we do not desire to be known of men, we will do a lot of things in secret.

When I was a young Christian, I was in a group that emphasized having a quiet time with God. It's a good thing to do. I would recommend it to everyone. In the group I was in, we were taught to read the Bible on our knees every morning and evening. We had fasting and prayer every Saturday. We had all-night prayers. It was good, but in spite of all these hours spent on the knees, the people were still sour, hard to

get along with, critical, bitter, complaining, no victory over anger and hardly victory over any sin. This really puzzled me. There have been times when I've spent 15 minutes with a godly man, and the influence of that stayed with me for days afterward. 15 minutes with a godly man can change the direction of one's life. Could you imagine what 15 minutes with God Himself would do? If speaking with a godly man for a little while could do so much, can you imagine what spending even a little while with God could do? The reason that their lives weren't being changed even though they did all these things was because they weren't spending time with God, they were spending their time with a book. Whether it's a chemistry book, a math book or the Bible, it doesn't really make a difference. A lot of people who have a quiet time aren't really having it with God- they're just studying a book in the same way that a scientist studies his science book and becomes proficient in that particular area. That is not the way you get to know God! To know God, you have to be humble. You must have a sense of your own need. Christ said: "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of God. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God."

When I saw that, I realized I had to get out of all these rituals. I saw that what I needed was not a bunch of rules and regulations because all of those rules and regulations didn't help me to find God! They didn't help me to overcome the sin in my life! This is the illustration that came to my mind. "Is it possible for me to take a pig on a mile long walk through the dirt and muck and for it to come out clean on the other end?" Yes, it's possible. If I tie that pig with ten chains and every time it is attracted toward some mud over I quickly pull it back, and every time it heads for the mud puddle over there, I pull it back. With much struggle and effort I could probably manage to bring that pig out on the other end of the walk clean. Those ten chains are the Ten Commandments. That is how God kept men clean under the law. When they wanted to go this way, the law would jerk them back. When they were attracted the other way, it held them from going, and they were clean. But, it would be quite different to take a cat on that same walk. It doesn't need a single chain, and it will come out absolutely clean. Even if it were to accidentally fall into the mud, it would jump back out and lick itself clean before it goes any farther. And, it doesn't only lick itself clean when other people are looking! That would be a pig trying to make others think he's a cat. If it's a real cat, it will make no difference whether other people are looking or not. It detests that mud and licks itself clean before it even goes any farther. I've seen cats that you can't see a speck of dust on, but they're still licking themselves- trying to keep clean. I thought: "What an example for me." We are to cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God. Brothers, the cat doesn't need any chains. It doesn't need man-made rules and regulations. This is the mistake that many churches have made through the years. They want to keep the pigs clean, so they have man-made rules and chains to hold them back, and, of course they're clean! Some rules are written down, and some might be just a general impression given in the church. We shouldn't do this, we shouldn't have that, and don't go there, and people look on and say: "Boy, what a clean church!" Yes, they're clean, but their old, sinful nature hasn't been changed at all! People are afraid to disobey because they'd be in danger of being thrown out. They're afraid that they might not be accepted. If they do something, people might frown on them, and so that fear of being frowned on acts like a chain and pulls them back from something they always want to do.

Now, supposing we had a whole bunch of pigs and cats all together in a room and we locked all the doors and kept them inside, they'd all be clean- every one of them. But, if a preacher came along and opened up all the doors, there'd be quite the difference. The pigs would be dirty, the cats would be clean. And everyone would blame the preacher for opening the doors. No, those pigs didn't become pigs when the doors were opened. They were always pigs! This preacher made the dividing line clear. It's when the doors are opened that you discover who are the pigs and who are the cats. We're fooling ourselves into thinking everyone is a cat by keeping the doors locked. It is so easy to deceive ourselves and lock every

door saying that we're all cats because we're all clean. Well, let's test it. Let's open the doors and see. The cats will remain cats, and the pigs will be revealed. This has an application. God never intended for man to be constantly kept under rules and regulations. I realize that it's necessary for children. Children are under the law and we have to have rules and regulations for them because they don't have any wisdom or discernment, and it's our responsibility as parents to tell them what they may and may not do. But Brothers, it was not God's will that we should be children forever! He wants us to be sons who can decide: "I don't want that." He wants us to follow Him in obedience to His commands out of love for Him.

In the years that I had to lay out detailed rules for my children, my heart longed for the day when they see the wisdom of what I told them and choose it for themselves. Isn't that what we as parents desire for our children? That's exactly what God desires for each and every one of us. He doesn't want us to all our lives be tied up with chains in effort to keep us from sin. That's why He did away with the law. But He didn't throw out the law and give us nothing else instead. He gave us something better. Moses went up on the mountain and came down with the Ten Commandments, Jesus ascended into Heaven and sent us the Holy Spirit! If you don't have the Holy Spirit, you'll certainly need those chains holding you back. The trouble with a lot of Christians today is that they're trying to be freed from the Old Covenant and they end up with no covenant. It doesn't mean that everyone who has chucked the law is under the New Covenant. Not at all. Most "Christians" are under no covenant! The people who were under the Old Covenant had a certain standard of morality and godliness. I can not think of a single Old Testament preacher who would sink so low as many preachers do today. That's under the Old Covenant. And these folks today are preaching "grace." That's not grace! That's no covenant at all! I can't think of any Old Testament preacher who would run after money like the preachers do today. How is that? The Old Covenant people had a higher standard than they do! Brothers, it's a deception. There is false "grace" being preached around the world today. True grace delivers a man from sin! "The law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ." (John 1)

Let me ask you a very simple question. Who was greater? Moses or Christ? A child could answer that. If Moses could lift us that high, how high do you think Christ can lift us out of our old life of sin? Much more. How much more? As much more as Jesus was greater than Moses. That's the message of the gospel! That's why Jesus said: "Under the Old Covenant you weren't to commit adultery. I say to you: 'don't lust with your eyes.' The Old Testament said: 'do not commit murder,' I say to you: 'don't even be angry with your brother.'" He didn't lower the standard, that is for sure. But, it's like a verse of a poem I once heard: "Run John, the law commands, but gives us neither feet nor hands. Better news the gospel brings, it bids us fly- but gives us wings!" That's the gospel! It bids us to fly. The law, it told you to run, but it didn't give you anything to run with. Isn't it better to be commanded to fly if the gospel gives us wings? This is what the Holy Spirit is come to give. He has come to lift us from our past life into a relationship with Christ. And there we find security. We don't need to compare ourselves with others, we don't compete with others, we don't look down on others because it the work of God and His grace that has made us what we are. If you can be proud of your holiness, that's a good indication that you produced it yourself.

Supposing I brought here a wonderful cake baked by some of the sisters and I passed it out to you, and you said: "Wow, that's a fantastic cake!" I'm not even tempted to be proud because I didn't bake it. But if I had made it, and I heard all of you appreciating it, then I'd be tempted to be proud. We're tempted to be proud of that which we manufacture ourselves. The holiness you manufacture yourself is what you're proud of. That's why you feel good if someone says something good about your character. The sermon you manufactured yourself you'll be proud of, but if God truly gave it to you, you'll just say: "I'm just

distributing what God gave me." This is the gospel! I CAN NOT be proud because I realize: "What do I have that I have not received?" Tell me what it is that you have that you didn't receive. Not a single thing.

I've seen situations where a person can come to a church and feel inferior because he was a sinner. He may feel awkward because his children are wayward and the church is preaching a high standard. I have four sons. They're all born again and following the Lord, but I don't deserve one bit of credit for that. I fall on my face and I say: "Lord, it's all your mercy. I dare not ever think that I baked this cake." I didn't. We often make people feel inferior because of how good we have it in our life. "Come and see how it is in my home." That poor brother may think: "I could never make it. I better go to some other church." If it is like this, we've failed. That's not the spirit of Jesus. Jesus came to lift the fallen.

I don't have any daughters, and once I needed to give a word of correction to some of the young teen-aged girls in the church. As I was getting up to speak, the Lord said to me: "Remember, they're your daughters." That really struck me. Those were my children. They were not just somebody else's children. It's so easy to preach at other people's children. Then, as I got up, I spoke to them as if they were my own daughters. I saw that this is how it should be in the church. When you see that brother's son going astray, hear the word of the Lord: "That's your son." and then you won't point a judgmental finger so easily. This is the body of Christ. We say we are one family, but our attitude is: "See what I did over here in the corner with my family. Sorry, you didn't do so good." Why is this? We are not secure in our Heavenly Father's love. We want to show off. We don't recognize that every single thing we have is what God has given me. There's nothing we can glory in. THIS is what hinders the building up of the body of Jesus Christ. This is where we've come short. There is Pharisee-ism. There is looking down upon others because they've failed. One who truly recognizes that there is nothing good in his flesh can never point a critical finger at another. It's impossible. I often think of the verse in Ephesians 3 where Paul says: "Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given." Grace is given when one realizes that they're the least of all the saints. "Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ."

If you were to catch Paul by surprise and cut open his heart to find out what he thought about himself, you would find a deep conviction that he was the least of all the believers in the world because he saw his own corruption more than anybody else. He saw that nothing good dwelt in his flesh. I believe we need a revelation of that. I can honestly say that since the time when I realized these things and found security in my Heavenly Father I have not had much problem acknowledging where I failed or slipped up and sinned. I can see that God has given me others in the body of Christ to balance me because by myself I can be unbalanced. I need them. I'm not in competition with them. I thank God for the brothers He's given me who balance out the imbalance there is in my life. The areas of my life where I don't reflect the glory of God and the character of Christ, I've got brothers to encourage me in. And together we can manifest the glory of Jesus. I praise God for that. I praise God for a wife who is different than me who can balance me out at home and protect me from doing a lot of stupid things there in the same way that my fellow elders protect me from doing a lot of stupid things in the church. Do you recognize your need of your brother and your sister? Do you see that young person who is going astray as your son or daughter? The Bible says: "The love of God is shed abroad in our hearts." The same love of the Father, which He showered upon us, we begin to have toward other people. This is what it means to be filled with the Holy Spirit. "The love of God is shed abroad in our hearts." This is done by the Holy Spirit.

It is good for us to examine ourselves and see whether we have found security in God's perfect love for us. I want to say to each of you that there's not a single person here whom God doesn't love. Despite your

failures, He loves you just as you are. He's not waiting for you to change before He loves you. Just as you are right now, with all the blunders and failures you've made in life He loves you. He welcomes you. He calls: "Come unto me all ye that labor and are heavy laden, I will give you rest." And once you have been welcomed like that, remember to welcome your brother in the same way. May the Lord help us. Let's bow before God: "Heavenly Father, help us to honor you in our earthly life. Life is so short. Help us to be those who reflect the love of God in our relationships with one another. We think of those who are hurting, those who are suffering, those who have made a mess of their life, those who have failed as parents. Lord, we pray with compassion for them. We are no better than anyone else. We ask that you would comfort their hearts. Give them an assurance that you are able to change their lives that they might one day be found in your kingdom. Meet with us, and continue to build the body of Christ. We pray in Jesus' name, Amen."

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