

Some Foundational Principles Of Our Church

by Zac Poonen

This sermon emphasizes the importance of seeking greater spiritual heights by putting God first in every aspect of life. It highlights the need to prioritize Christ above all, including family, possessions, and personal desires. The message encourages humility, taking up the cross daily, and living with a clear conscience to overcome sin through the power of the Holy Spirit. The sermon stresses the significance of building a godly family and church, founded on God's perfect love and a commitment to follow Jesus in all areas of life.

Scripture: Acts 1:8, Matthew 3:11, Philippians 3:12, Hebrews 4:15, Luke 14:26, Luke 16:13, 1 Peter 5:5, Romans 6:14, Luke 2:40, Hebrews 2:9

Topics: "Prioritizing God", "Building a Godly Family"

Description

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Transcript

So, brothers and sisters, I'm delighted that we have reached the month. 48 years ago, in the month of August, on the 17th of August, we met for the first time. We didn't call ourselves CFC then, but it was the beginning of CFC, with only two families, Ian Robson and his family and myself and my family.

We met together in my house, and that was the beginning of CFC. And since then, in these last 48 years, it's amazing to see what the Lord has done, taking the message, not the name CFC, we don't care for that, but the message of Jesus Christ to many, many places, starting in Bangalore. We want to give thanks to the Lord for that.

So, it's good to turn to Acts of the Apostles in chapter 1 and verse 8. These are the last words of Jesus in this book before he ascended, because it says in the next verse, verse 9, after he said these things, he was lifted up and went straight up to heaven. So, we read these are the last words he spoke. You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and then you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the remotest part of the earth, and we include India and Bangalore.

So, this is the verse that challenged us, challenged me, challenged Ian also, as we were in a Baptist church then, and I was serving there, I was not the pastor, I refuse to take that title, serving freely without any salary, without any title, and sharing God's word Sunday after Sunday, and the Lord had baptized us in the Holy Spirit, both of us. So, I began to preach the baptism in the Holy Spirit. You know, that is the second promise in the New Testament.

The first promise is in Matthew 12:1, he shall save his people from their sins, and the next one is in Matthew 3, where it says he will baptize you in the Holy Spirit and in fire. So, we began to preach that, and for six months, and by the time the Baptist church, it is against all their doctrines, against their theology, they told me to leave, and I said, okay, and I spoke there one last Sunday, and they told Brother Ian, you don't have to leave, and but as soon as I stepped down, Ian got up in the pulpit there and said, if you don't accept what Brother Zach is saying, I'm also leaving, and that's how we both left, and that evening, that Sunday evening, we met in my house, and we just prayed together. We didn't know what the Lord had in store for us, absolutely not, but we knew we had stood for the truth, for the truth of the baptism in the Holy Spirit, where Jesus quoted here, when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, you will be my witnesses, and we can say in Bangalore, in Karnataka, in India, and to the uttermost parts of the earth, and we have seen that fulfilled.

In the beginning, it was only in Bangalore. We used to pray and seek the Lord and say, Lord, if there's anybody in this area who is interested in the power of the Holy Spirit to live a godly life, bring him to us, and like that, a few people would come. Some people would come and get offended and go away.

There was a lot of turnover those days, and then once we gathered a few like that, we prayed that the Lord would bring to us people from different parts of India. Six years, we met in our house, and then the Lord gave us a place to meet in a building, and we prayed the Lord would bring us other people from other parts of India, and we had conferences in the beginning twice a year, and then once a year regularly, and like that, the Lord enabled us to reach many, many places, and the Lord took us also to Tamil Nadu, Kerala for meetings in different places, and God gathered together little groups there, and then a few churches started getting formed there as well, and then we thought of these are the most parts of the earth, and much later, many, many years later, we found the Lord opened up the YouTube ministry where now there are 2,000 sermons of ours, and from there, with our work for the week ministry, it has actually gone to the outermost parts of the earth. It reaches more than 180 countries.

There are only about 220 countries in the whole world, so it's amazing how we never did that with money. We never believed in asking people for money. We are a very unique church right from day one.

We decided we will never take a salary, and all our more than 200 elders now, none of them take a salary, and in every country, the principle is the same. We trust God for our needs. We never take an offering in any of our churches, but we are interested in the spread of the gospel, the pure gospel, because when we look at the history of Christianity, what started in purity in the days of the apostles where they proclaimed salvation through Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit and the holy light, by the time the apostles had died, most of them, only John was alive, things had come to a terrible state.

Even by the end of the first century, you read in Revelation in chapter 2 and chapter 3 of the condition of the churches in those days, and out of the seven churches mentioned there, five of them were in a terribly backslidden state, and in the case of the last church, the Lord says, I'm going to spit you out of my mouth. I'm going to reject you, and many of the elders, he told them, you got a name that you're alive, but you're

dead. Even the elders of the churches were in a spiritually dead condition, and that was just at the end of the first century.

That is about 65 years after Jesus had ascended up to heaven. So you see how decline came into the churches very quickly, but here and there, God raised up little groups, just like CFC was raised up in those days also. There were little groups, and you read in each one of those seven churches, the Lord gives a message to the overcomers.

He who has a year to year, he who overcomes, this is what I promise him. So in every church, you see in Revelation chapter 2 and 3, there was a message to the overcomers. There was a small group of people who believed in overcoming sin and overcoming the world, not just in going to heaven, not just in escaping hell.

That's very important. Turn with me to Revelation chapter 2, and after he gives his rebuke to the elders in the first few verses, then he says in verse 7, if anybody's got a year to year, let him hear, he who overcomes, I will grant this promise. You go to the next church, again the same thing, chapter 2 verse 11, that is the church in Smyrna, if you have a year to year, hear, he who overcomes.

And next to the next church in Thyatira, to the church in Pergamon, sorry, the same thing in verse 17 and 18, 17 sorry, he who has a year, let him hear, to him who overcomes. The same thing for the church in Thyatira in Revelation 2.18, he says in verse 26, he who overcomes. Again, again, again, it's the same thing.

Then to the fifth church, Sardis chapter 3, he says in verse 5, he who overcomes, he who has a year to year, let him hear, verse 6. And to the sixth church in Philadelphia, again the same thing, verse 12, he who overcomes, and he who has a year to year, let him hear, verse 13. And to the last of the seven churches, Revelation 3.21, he who overcomes, verse 21. And verse 22, he who has a year to year, let him hear.

So, you see the message of the Lord towards the end of the first century was to backslidden churches, and in the midst of those backslidden churches, He was calling out those who would overcome, those who wanted an overcoming life, which is only possible through the power of the Holy Spirit. And that is exactly what the Lord led us into in the beginning, that there was a life of overcoming that very few Christians were interested in. That's why in each of these seven churches, the Lord said, he who has a year to year, let him hear.

And I say that to all of you sitting here today. Our church is interested in leading people to an overcoming life, not a life that just we go to heaven when we die, not a life to escape hell, but an overcoming life. Overcoming what? Overcoming sin, overcoming the devil, overcoming the world.

Sin, the world and the devil, those are the things we need to overcome. And that's why God gives us the power of the Holy Spirit. So, there was a distinct difference between what we were preaching and the rest of Christendom was preaching.

The rest of Christendom was preaching how you can go to heaven when you die or how to escape hell. And we were preaching more than that. Yes, we believe in forgiveness of sins.

We didn't preach how to go to heaven or how to escape hell. That was not our message. We believed in forgiveness of sins, which is to cleanse away the past and then to be an overcomer, which is very different from saying, do you want to go to heaven when you die? No, our question was, do you want to be an

overcomer here on the earth? Or like it says in 1 John and chapter 2 and verse 6, 1 John 2 verse 6, the one who says he abides in Christ must walk as he walked.

So, that was the question we asked people. Not, do you want prosperity? Do you want God to bless you? Do you want God to heal your sicknesses? That was not our message. Our message was, do you want to walk as Jesus walked here on this earth? 1 John 2 verse 6. And that is exactly the same question we asked today after 48 years.

So, our theme for this month is reaching new heights spiritually. What is this new height? What is the ultimate goal? The ultimate height that we want to reach? Yeah. We read in 1 John and chapter 3 that when Christ comes, it says in 1 John 3, 2, we will be like him when he comes.

So, 1 John 2, 6 says on earth now, we have to walk as he walked. And when he comes back, we will be like him. So, that is the goal.

The goal is to become totally like Christ. And our overcoming on this earth is to help us to become more and more like Christ in our character, not just in increasing in knowledge. The Pharisees had such a lot of knowledge of the Bible.

The knowledge of the Bible that the Pharisees had was far more than the knowledge of Peter, James, and John. Any day if there was a Bible quiz, the Pharisees would win but the Pharisees killed Jesus Christ, whereas the disciples followed Jesus Christ. So, knowledge of the Bible is not what we emphasize.

The brothers and sisters in CFC are not the greatest scholars of the Bible in Bangalore or around the world. But we seek to emphasize following in Jesus' footsteps more than wonderful sermons and a lot of Bible knowledge. There are many clever people who can preach wonderful sermons with PowerPoint presentations and many, many points, etc.

Our emphasis was not good sermons, but seeking to follow challenging people to follow in the footsteps of Jesus Christ to reach that goal finally where we become more and more like, where we become like Christ completely one day. And the Apostle Paul says in Philippians in chapter 3, reaching new heights spiritually. We want to think of that during this month and as we think of the future.

We never want to be satisfied with how far we have come. There is no such thing as a standing position in the Christian life. I think of it like an airplane flying in the sky.

You see, an airplane cannot stand still. I'm not talking about a helicopter. A regular airplane cannot stand still in the air.

It has to keep moving or it'll sink. Every airplane is like that. The Christian life is like that.

If you don't keep moving forward, you're going to go down and crash. And so we say we must keep pressing on. We must reach new heights spiritually regularly.

Every year must find us a little further on than we were last year. And that's the thing that I want to encourage and challenge everyone here to evaluate. Where are you now compared to where you were last year when we celebrated our anniversary? August 2021.

Sorry, 2022. Now we are 2023. Have you made progress? That's the important thing.

Have you overcome some sins in your life that you were defeated by before? Have you become more patient in your life? Is your home life, husband and wife relationship much better than it was last year? These are the questions we need to ask ourselves. This is what it means to be an overcomer. See, we live in a world where Christendom is satisfied with I'm going to heaven when I die.

I'll tell you honestly, my own longing, I have no desire to go to heaven. I mean that before God, zero. My desire is to be with Jesus Christ, my Lord, wherever he is.

That will be heaven for me. Not the golden streets and all the wonderful things that there may be in heaven. If Jesus Christ is not there, that's not heaven for me.

Heaven is where I can be with my heavenly father and the Lord Jesus Christ. And it doesn't matter where it is. I even said to the Lord once, Lord, I'm ready to go to hell if you're there.

I know it's not going to happen. But what I wanted to say to myself is, Lord, it's not the comfort of heaven that attracts me. The fires of hell don't bring any fear to my heart.

If Jesus is there, it will be heaven for me. And that I preached even in our life here on the earth. If Jesus is in your home every day, and if the husband and wife seek the Lord in such a way that the presence of the Lord is always in your home, heaven has already begun.

It has already begun for me. I can testify before the Lord that in my home, I've already begun to taste a little bit of heaven. The presence of Christ, the peace of God, without shouting or raising our voice or any such thing, forgiving and living in simple devotion to Jesus Christ, not finding our satisfaction in a lot of earthly things, but in devotion to Christ, seeking the Lord together, the presence of Christ in our midst.

That's what we long for. I want to say to all of you, my dear brothers and sisters, long for the presence of Christ in your life and in your home. And wherever you go, when you drive the car, when you go to work in the office, Lord, I want you to be with me.

You know, there's the last words in Matthew 28 are, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the age. It's the presence of Christ that we need more than anything else. But for having the presence of Christ, let me first read Philippians 3. Paul says here in verse 12, I have not yet obtained, I have not become perfect.

Paul was an overcomer, but he said, I'm running towards a goal which I'm not yet attained. I've not come to the finishing line. Finishing line is perfection.

Perfection is totally like Christ. Nobody is totally like Christ yet. But he says, one thing I do in verse 13, there's in the middle of verse 13, there's one single thing I do in my life.

And I want to encourage, challenge you with that statement. This is what it means to reach new heights spiritually. One thing I do, forgetting what lies behind.

Now there are two things that lie behind us. One is our failures. Forget them because the Lord has, if you have confessed them, the Lord has forgiven.

And he says, I will not remember. So you can also forget them. The second thing in our past is our successes, the things we have accomplished in life.

Some wonderful things you did for the Lord, forget them. If you want to move on, if you sit down and keep meditating what you did last year for the Lord or what you did in the past and how many people you brought to the Lord or what all you did for the Lord in your past life, you will not make spiritual progress. Forgetting the things that are behind, Philippians 3.13 means I want to encourage every one of you here, let a curtain fall right behind you so that when you look back, there's nothing there.

You can't see anything about your past, not your past failures cleansed in the blood of Christ and not your past successes or what you've accomplished for the Lord. Forgetting what lies behind. Make that, determine that today.

Make determining in your life today that you're going to forget what lies behind completely. Philippians 3.13, forgetting what lies behind. I press toward the mark for what lies ahead.

That must be our attitude throughout this coming year, forgetting what lies behind, pressing forward to what lies ahead. Every day, Lord, I want to live with a clear conscience. I want to follow you to the end of my life.

And every year I want to make progress. I want to be an overcomer and overcomer and overcomer. And it says here in verse 14, I pressed toward the goal.

I already told you the goal was to become totally like Christ, for the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. Now to get there, Jesus said in Luke and chapter 9 and verse 23, that if we want to follow Jesus, we have to take up the cross and follow him. Take up the cross every day.

Luke 9.23, if anyone wants to come after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross daily and follow me. Now that's another message which is missing in a lot of Christianity today. Take up the cross every day.

What does that mean? It means if I want to follow Jesus, please listen carefully, I have to die to my self-will in every situation that I face every day. And if you do that, I guarantee that by next year, this time, you would have made tremendous progress in your Christian life. Many people make no progress in their Christian life because their entire Christian life is coming to the meetings, sitting there in the meetings, and that's all, listening to the message, going home, coming back next Sunday.

You'll never make progress. You'll probably become a backslider that way. I want every single person in this church to say, Lord, I want to follow you in your footsteps and show me what it means to take up the cross.

I want to explain a little bit of that now. The biggest hindrance to our following Jesus is not your difficult wife or your difficult husband or your difficult boss or your financial difficulties or your sickness, none of these things. People have faced all these things and become tremendous overcomers.

It is your self-will, your desire to do your own will. If you can understand that, that the biggest hindrance to your spiritual progress is your desire to do your own will. And that, Jesus said, you've got to put that to death every day.

If you don't do that, you cannot make spiritual progress. So, that's the thing you must bear in mind. In the book of Malachi, which is the last book of the Old Testament, the Lord gave us a verse when we started CFC, and that was Malachi chapter 1, verse 14.

I want to remind you again because 48 years ago, the Lord gave us this verse. The Lord said, I'm going to have a pure offering in every part of the world, from one end of the world to the other. Till that time, the Lord only accepted the Jewish people in Israel.

But the Lord said, that's going to change. Now, it's going to be all over the world because it's the last book of the Old Testament and the next thing Christ was coming. And what was this pure offering which the Jews were not giving to the Lord? By pure, it doesn't mean just perfectly holy.

It means more than that. It means, because it says here in the earlier part, the people of Israel were offering to the Lord that which cost them nothing. They were supposed to offer, please understand this, it's very important.

They were supposed to bring offerings to the Lord, but they would bring Malachi 1, 8, sacrifices that were blind and lame. And when you look at the way Christians give to the Lord, you can say it's like that. They give that which costs them zero.

You ask yourself, my brother, sister, what has it cost you to follow Jesus Christ? I'm not talking about money. It may be money also, but that's secondary. That's not the main thing.

What has it cost you? There are many people for whom it has cost them their family. The families rejected them because they accepted Christ or because they stood up for Christ. They were dismissed from their job or transferred.

I remember when I was working in the Navy, I used to get transferred when I stood up for Christ in some way and my senior officers would create problems for me. But those are the things that made me strong. And I believe the Lord would not have called me to his service if I had not stood up in those situations.

So I want to ask you, are you willing to stand up for the Lord in your home and in your place of work and be known as a Christian, a disciple of Jesus Christ? That will bring situations where you have to give up something which is precious. You may not get the promotion you want because your boss does not like your Christian witness. I'm not saying you should go and preach to everybody in your office, but that you don't do anything wrong when your boss asks you to do something wrong and you don't do it.

You're standing up for Christ. And throughout these 2,000 years, the disciples of Jesus have always been persecuted. You know, there's that word, you shall be witnesses unto me, Acts 1, 8, which we read.

The word witness in the Greek language from which it's translated is the word martyrs or martyrs from which we get the English word martyrs. So what Jesus was actually saying was, you're going to be my martyrs all over the world. What type of martyrs? Not physical death, but spiritually, I die to myself all over the world.

The Lord wants such people all over the world. That is our calling. And when we think of the temple that Solomon built, you find something there which I want you to see.

We've looked at it before. I want to emphasize it again. In 2 Chronicles 3, when Solomon built his temple, which is a picture of our building the church, the place the Lord chose was Mount Moriah, where Abraham had offered up his son the greatest sacrifice he could give.

And it also says in 2 Chronicles 3, 1, the place where David had offered a sacrifice. You read about that in 2 Samuel 24, 24, where David made these amazing words, I will never offer to the Lord that which costs me nothing. That was another verse, 2 Samuel 24, 24, that the Lord gave us in the beginning of CSC.

And I remember it was the word that the Lord spoke to my heart when I first got it as a young man, about 21 years old, after my baptism. 2 Samuel 24, the Lord said to me, you must never in your life give me something that costs you nothing. You must never offer to me that which costs you nothing.

Because you're following Jesus who offered up everything on the cross. So I decided that day that I will not offer cheap gifts to the Lord, something which costs me nothing. Christendom is full of people who are offering cheap sacrifices, just like we read in Malachi, like the Jews did.

And that's why Jesus and the Lord says in Malachi, the verse we read, I want a pure offering, an offering where people sacrifice. To turn to Genesis chapter 4, you find immediately after man was turned out of the garden of Eden, the first thing you read was Abel and Cain bringing a sacrifice. And there you see a difference, two types of human beings, two types of Christians.

You can see in Abel and Cain. In Genesis 4, this is the first story after man was turned out of the garden of Eden. And see the difference.

And you'll see that difference in every church today. And here in CFC2, Cain, Genesis 4, 3 brought an offering. It didn't cost him anything.

He went to the fields and picked up something and brought it to the Lord. Whereas Abel was a shepherd. He brought the very best of his flock.

He brought the firstlings, means the very best. There's a difference between an offering and the very best offering. And that's the difference between two types of Christians in the world today.

Those who give to God the very best of their life, the very best of their time, and those who give the Lord something of their life, something of their time. I'm not talking about how many hours in 24 hours. That's not the point.

It's an attitude towards the Lord. The Lord must have the very best in my life. And I want to challenge you, my brothers and sisters, CFC will be built in the coming days by those who say, Lord, you're going to have the very best in my life.

I will from this day onwards, I'll never offer to you something cheap. See, if you are going to give a gift to the governor of the state, you wouldn't offer something cheap. Some honored guest comes to your house.

If you want to give them a gift, you'd give them something valuable. Think of somebody you love. For example, you'll give a gift to your wife or your husband on an anniversary day.

You wouldn't get something cheap. You'd get something valuable and give it. And when we really love the Lord, we will not offer to him something that is cheap.

We will not give him bits of our time, which cost us nothing. For example, I have met people when I was there with CFC years ago. I used to meet some brothers and I'd ask them a simple question.

Brother, do you read your Bible every day? I've had brothers who are regularly in CFC and say, oh brother, I'm so busy, I don't get time. I say, do you get time to eat your food? Yeah, that you never forget. Imagine a man or a woman who has time to eat food, but no time to read the Bible.

How much do you think such a person has loved Jesus Christ? I'll tell you, zero. Even if they come to CFC. And if they read the Bible, it is just pick up something and read one or two verses and ease their conscience.

Yeah, I read the Bible, let go. They don't eat their food like that. They're very particular.

They're very eager to eat good food. Dear brothers and sisters, let me encourage you, learn to take time with the Lord every day. Let that be, if you're not doing it already, make that a discipline in your life from today.

They're not going to happen automatically. You've got to discipline yourself. Just like we teach our children to brush their teeth every morning, to change their clothes, to take a bath or discipline and other things to be careful with our money.

We must discipline ourselves in this matter of giving God first place in our life. What are the first words in the Bible? The first four words in the Bible are in the beginning, God. And that's how it must be in our life.

If you want to make progress in our Christian life, you have to say, Lord, from now onwards, I'm going to live by that rule in the beginning, God. I'm going to begin my day praying to you. Even before I urge people before you get out of bed, pray to your father, talk to him, spend a few minutes with him, five, 10, 15 minutes at least, before you can get out of bed.

And then your day will be different. I'll tell you that. And in little, little things, when you come into situations, when you're provoked, for example, there are so many provocations we can face.

Even driving on the roads or in our place of work, saying, Lord, help me now to die to myself and not to respond in the way I have responded in the past in anger or bitterness. When people treat you badly, forgive immediately. You may not be able to have fellowship with that person, but forgive.

That will mean a little sacrifice. Offer to the Lord that sacrifice, that which costs you something, like Abraham offered up Isaac, the very best, and you'll find a tremendous progress in your life. This is how we have to constantly reach for new heights spiritually.

Don't we want our children to progress every year to the next class? We always challenge our children to do better in their math and their English and every subject. Do better, do better. We want you to be promoted.

I want to challenge the parents now. You need to be promoted every year too. Seek with all your heart by next year at this time to be a much better Christian than you are now.

And for that, if you really seek that, you'll find it is impossible without the power of the Holy Spirit. I remember that's what drove me to seek God for the power of the Holy Spirit. I found that I tried and I failed.

I tried and I failed, and I failed and failed. I could not overcome sin. I knew how it was to sin and ask God to forgive me.

And not external, external sins, even many unbelievers have overcome. There are many unbelievers who don't commit adultery, don't murder, don't steal, and some of them don't even tell lies. So that type of victory is not very great.

But inward, inward victory in the thoughts and attitudes towards people, there to get victory, we need the power of the Holy Spirit. So I want to encourage you in the coming year to seek to live an inward life of godliness. Pursue it.

Forget the past failures. Say, Lord, I want to press on to greater heights in the days to come. And I want to offer to you something costly.

I want to seek every year to be a little more Christ-like than I was the previous year. This is God's will for your life. And I believe God will lead you on step by step.

If you're serious about it, like we learned in that verse, I want to press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. Now the question comes, how can I overcome sin when it's so much pressing me down all the time? I want to show you a verse in Hebrews chapter 4 and verse 15 and 16. This is another passage that helped us in the early days.

I'm just reminding you of the things that helped us 48 years ago. And that was this great truth, Hebrews 4.15, that Jesus was tempted like us and did not sin. And therein, he's an example.

Do you know that Jesus did not overcome because he was God? Then he cannot be an example for us. That's one of the things I emphasized repeatedly in those days. If an angel wants to teach you to swim, he has to first get rid of his wings.

If he flies across the swimming pool and tells you, follow me, you say, I cannot follow you. Get rid of your wings and teach me to swim. So example, what I mean is if Jesus came to earth and lived as God and overcame sin, I'd say, Lord, that was easy for you.

You're God. I can't follow you. But the Lord opened our eyes in those days to see that Jesus became a man.

Though he was God, he never used his resources as God when he lived on this earth. Now some of you have heard this many times, but I don't know whether you're living by it. But many of you have not heard it.

Let me explain to you. I want to speak particularly to those who have not heard these truths before. Jesus Christ, though he's God, lived on earth as a man.

He refused to use his power as God to live on earth. As a man, he conquered sin. As a man, he was tempted.

We read in Luke chapter 4. The Bible says in James 1, God cannot be tempted. Very clear. But Jesus was tempted.

Shows that he was a man and he fought against temptation. How? Through the power of the Holy Spirit. And he overcame.

So Hebrews 4.15 says we have a high priest who can sympathize with us because he was tempted in every single point exactly as we are. What are you tempted with most strongly in your life? Jesus was

tempted in that area. And he did not sin.

Are you tempted tremendously by sexual thoughts? Jesus was tempted. He did not sin. Are you tempted by anger? Jesus was tempted.

He did not sin. And so therefore what? Therefore, it says in verse 16, we also can go to what is called the throne of grace. See, grace is another word we discovered when CFC began.

We began to understand the meaning of grace as different from mercy. Mercy refers to our past life, forgiveness of sins. Grace refers to the future, power to overcome sin.

I hope you all recognize this. It's not just a matter of words. In the Old Testament, there was no grace, only mercy.

Forgiveness, forgiveness, forgiveness. The New Testament, the word is grace. And do you know who was the first person in the New Testament to have grace? First of all, let me show you Romans 6.14. What happens when you come under grace? Romans 6.14. This is one of the verses that the Lord taught us in CFC right from the beginning.

Romans 6.14. Sin shall not be master over you because you're under grace. So grace is like a umbrella that protects me from sin or like a roof over my head. The rain will not fall on me.

So grace, if you're under grace, sin cannot rule over you. And how do we get grace? The Bible says in 1 Peter 5, God gives his grace to the humble. Any brother or sister sitting here, if you want to get grace from God, all you have to do is humble yourself.

Take the low place. Always be willing to go down. When somebody insults you, keep your mouth shut.

Lord, give me grace to keep my mouth shut. If you have a desire to go that way, the Lord will give you grace. Definitely.

So who was the first person to get grace and overcome sin? Turn with me to Luke's Gospel chapter 2. The first person who walked on this earth and overcame sin by the power of grace. Luke and chapter 2, we read in verse 40 about Jesus Christ. As a child, right from the time he was a child, he came to, like children come to a place where they begin to choose.

I don't know what age is. It's different for different people. But as children come to a place where they can choose, the grace of God was upon Jesus Christ.

So what happens when a man is under grace? Sin cannot rule over him. That is the reason why Jesus overcame sin right from childhood. And how do you get grace? God gives his grace to the humble.

So what we learn in following Jesus is that right from the beginning of his life, he walked the path of humility, of going down, taking the low place, not seeking to exalt himself over others. He came from heaven down to earth and humbled himself all the time he was on earth. That's what it means to follow Jesus.

So when we think of reaching greater heights in the coming year, this is the way. The way up is down. You go down and God gives you grace and lifts you up.

He exalts the humble. He gives grace to the humble. And that's how Jesus began his life.

Now you want to see how he ended his life. Hebrews and chapter 2. In Hebrews chapter 2, we read, how did Jesus suffer on the cross? That is the most painful death physically that anybody could suffer. But not only that, Jesus suffered the agonies of hell on the cross for three hours because he was taking the punishment of our sin.

How did he face it? How could anybody face that? The agony of hell, hanging three hours on the cross, forsaken by God. Here it says here, Hebrews 2.9, the last part, by the grace of God, he faced a death for every one of us. So we saw in the beginning, he began with grace and he ended with grace.

The entire life of Jesus, he was under grace. That's how he overcame sin. And once I understood that, I said, Lord, I want this grace in my life.

And that's the thing that's helped me all these years. How to get grace? Humble yourself. Always in relation to everybody, in relation to God, humble yourself.

When God tells you you did something wrong, humble yourself and say, Lord, yes, I did something wrong. Acknowledge your guilt. Humble yourself.

When people try to exalt themselves over you, let them go up. You take the low place. God's grace will be upon you.

And I can testify to that. The other thing we stressed from the beginning was a fervent devotion to Jesus Christ. What does that mean in practical terms? Taking up the cross in relation to family members.

Luke chapter 14. This is the other thing we emphasized when we started 48 years ago. Number one, Luke 14, 26.

If you want to be a disciple of Jesus, there must be a cross between you and your family members. That means you put Christ above everyone in your family. I want to ask every one of you sitting here, you say you're a Christian.

Can you honestly say to the Lord, Lord Jesus, you are more precious to me than anybody in my family. If you tell me something and my wife tells me something else, I'll do what you say. If you tell me something and my dad and mom say something else, I'll do what you say.

Nobody's going to come between you and me. I told my wife before I married her, you will always be second in my life. Christ will be first.

And I always want to be second in your life. I don't want to be first in your life. I want Christ to be first in your life.

And that's why we've been very happy all these 55 years. Christ must be first. Put Christ first in your family, dear brothers and sisters.

Put him first before your father, mother, brother, sister, wife, children. Christ is first. And don't just say that now and don't practice it.

You'll get a lot of opportunity to practice it when they want to lead you in one direction and the Lord Jesus is leading you in another direction. Don't fight with them. Say, I'm sorry, I don't want to go that way.

The Lord is leading me this way. In your office, put Christ first. Don't let your boss force you to go in a direction which dishonors the Lord.

And that's where you need grace, Lord giving grace to stand up for that. I had numerous opportunities to do this when I was working in the Navy. When my senior officer would ask me to do something which my conscience did not permit me to do.

I would say, sir, I cannot do that. My conscience does not permit me to do that. I'm a Christian.

You think he liked it? No. He would give some trouble to me in some way or the other. But the Lord helped me in strength.

That's what made me strong. And if you keep doing that, all of you young people and all of you here, I tell you by next year, you'll be a much stronger Christian. This is the way to make progress.

Put Christ above everyone in your family, all relatives and everybody else. And the other is what we considered earlier. Take up the cross every day.

Say no to yourself in your private life, different situations where nobody's around. You're tempted in your thoughts. Say no to yourself.

No, I don't want that thought. I'm not going to do that when you're by yourself. And thirdly, verse 33, Luke 14, 13, relation to your possessions.

Money is the great alternative master to God. Jesus said there are only two masters. Turn over the page.

Luke 16 and verse 13. There are two masters in the world, God and money. That's the other thing the Lord taught us right from the beginning.

You have to make a choice. There's nothing wrong in earning money. Earn as much as you can, but don't let it become your master.

How to know whether money is your master or God is your master? This is the way I used to test myself. When I pray about something and if God is leading me to this direction and money is leading me in the other direction, which direction do I choose? Two masters sitting in front of me, God and money. Both are calling me.

Which will I listen to? You will also face situations like that in your life where money calls you into one direction and God is saying, not that. That's unrighteous. Don't go that way.

Choose this way. You have to choose between God and money. And say, Lord, I never want to be attached to money.

I want to put a cross between me and money. God won't make you suffer. He'll provide you all that you need.

I'll tell you something from my 64 years as a Christian. If you seek the kingdom of God first and his righteousness, everything you need will be added to you and for your family. Your children will not suffer.

Put God first and be a demonstration to the world around that as a disciple of Jesus, God honored you. God says, those who honor me, I will honor. At the end of your life, you must have this testimony.

Every one of you. I sought to honor God in my life and God honored me. You must have this testimony.

I sought God's kingdom first and righteousness in every situation and everything I need in life was added to me. Financial needs, physical needs, health-wise, everything. And if you go that way, the wonderful thing is your children will watch you and begin to follow in your footsteps.

So that's the last thing I want to say. We emphasized in CFC what is not emphasized in much of Christendom, that we must live with a good conscience, following Jesus, and then we must build a family. We must build a relationship in our family, husband, wife, and children seeking to follow Jesus.

On top of that, we can build a church. So we said the church is a three-story building. Founded, the foundation is God's perfect love for us.

On that, the first floor, the first story is living with a clear conscience. The second story is building a godly family. And the third story is building the church.

So I've rushed through these three things, but I hope you will maybe listen to the message again sometime. But I want to encourage every one of you. Seek to reach a greater height spiritually in these areas.

Your thought life, your personal life, your family life, your professional life, a more godly life by next year this time. That will happen if you day by day say, Lord, I want to put you first in everything in my life. May God help you.

Let us bow before God in prayer now. I want to encourage you, my brothers and sisters. I've had to rush through this because there are a number of things I have to cover.

I encourage you to listen to it again sometime and slowly think through all the different things I mentioned and ask yourself whether you're going in this direction. You really want CFC to reach a greater height, which means every individual in CFC must reach a greater height in your personal life and in your family life. Heavenly Father, we thank you for all these dear brothers and sisters whom you've added to the church whom you've brought here.

I pray that they will press on in this coming year to greater heights and that your name will be glorified through this church much more in the days to come than ever in the past. Thank you, Lord, for hearing us. We pray in Jesus' name.

Amen.

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