

# Some Principles for Building the Church

by Zac Poonen

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*This sermon emphasizes the importance of building fellowship within the church community, highlighting the need for genuine relationships beyond just listening to messages. It draws parallels between the structure of a church and a body, emphasizing the significance of functioning together in unity. The speaker encourages a focus on obedience to God's commandments, humility, and a deepening relationship with God to be part of His inner circle of love and revelation.*

**Scripture:** Ephesians 4:15, John 14:21, Psalms 25:14, Proverbs 4:12

**Topics:** "Fellowship in the Church", "Unity in the Body of Christ"

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## Description

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## Transcript

First of all, for those of you who were here this camp, we in CFC Bangalore through the years, by the way yesterday we celebrated, yesterday means Sunday in India, we celebrated the 46th anniversary of CFC beginning in Bangalore. And from then, you know, it spread out to many parts of India, all over India, from north to south, east to west, and also to many other countries, at least 10 or 11 countries. So we are thankful for that.

And one of the things we emphasized in CFC through the years was we don't need just to listen to messages. We need to build fellowship. And fellowship is not built in many mega churches.

A lot of people go to mega churches with thousands of people. And they hardly know the person, it's like sitting in a movie theater. You don't know who's sitting next to you, next Sunday, somebody else is sitting next to you.

And we felt the thing that's lacking, not only the message of the New Covenant is lacking, but fellowship between people. Fellowship means, the example the Bible gives us in fellowship is the body. And the, I'll show you a verse before we go on in connection with fellowship.

Ephesians chapter 4. A principle that I have followed in studying scripture, Ephesians 4, 15 and 16. Speaking the truth in love, read every word carefully. I've often told believers to read the Bible slowly.

Speaking the truth in love, we have to grow up in all aspects unto him who is the head even Christ, from whom the whole body being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth for the body of its building up itself in love. And here it speaks about the joint in the middle of verse 16. You know, there are so many joints in our body.

Sometimes we don't think about that, think of the hand. There's a joint here in the shoulder, there's a joint in the elbow. There's a joint in the wrist, which makes you move.

And the fingers have two joints here, there's three joints. Each of these fingers has got three joints. Look at the number of joints just in this one hand.

And if any one of these joints don't function, you won't be able to bend or be stiff. The joint speaks of fellowship. If you have a strong forearm and a strong upper arm, but the joint is not functioning, can you think what you could do? Almost nothing.

You're having to be like this. The joint refuses to move. Stiff.

Very strong upper arm and a very strong lower arm, but a useless hand. This is how it is in many churches and in many families. Wonderful brother, wonderful brother.

Only problem is they can't get along with each other. Wonderful husband, wonderful wife, they can't get along with each other. The joint is the most important thing, particularly I think of the church.

I've seen this. Two very good brothers, maybe each seeking their own. Nobody's willing to go underneath the other.

See the wonderful thing about this joint is when the head says stretch, the lower part of the joint pulls and this upper part of the joint has to yield. If it refuses to yield, it's stiff, but the upper yields. And when it's pulling the other way, the other one yields.

It's a beautiful picture of fellowship. And we felt in CSC Bangalore when we were starting, we were starting something new because we were going into pioneering areas where other people hadn't built. We had seen a lot of evangelism in India, but churches that are built like a body, I had hardly ever saw one.

And that's the pattern we tried to communicate to CSC churches around the world, fellowship. And we found people come to church to listen to a sermon, to sing some songs. I said, we've sung enough songs and heard enough sermons for a lifetime of a hundred years.

In addition, you've got all these sermons on YouTube. What do you need on Sunday? Another sermon? You've heard plenty. We need exaltation.

But what if you keep on hearing sermons and never built fellowship? Then try to make all the arms strong and the joints are not being taught to function properly. And ask yourself if the problem in your case is not knowledge, but many of knowledge of so many things, but see how much you've built fellowship with others in the body. And so what we used to do, some Sunday mornings, we went for a picnic.

It's horrible in the eyes of other people. Sunday morning, I was going to church to listen to a message. I said, we've heard enough messages for a hundred years.

We're going for a picnic. I'm going to sit down and eat together and play games together and have fellowship. That's how we built the church.

We learned to work together, function together. And I tell you, there's nothing like playing games to learn to work together, not by sitting in a meal. So, but some people don't like that because their idea is the holy thing is to listen to the messages.

The holy thing is to build fellowship. So we've always, so some people don't not appreciate it. I mean, you see some churches, there's zero fellowship there.

Just a lot of clever people about a lot of head knowledge that doesn't work in their lives. And we must enjoy it. Some people told me that it was very dangerous for someone who was nearly 82 years old like me to go on that zip line.

So I'll tell you why I did it. Young children go on it for the thrill. I didn't go on it for the thrill.

Some people go on it to show off. I had no interest in showing off. I finished it all that long years ago.

I'll tell you why I did it. I did it for the sake of the children here who were urging me and urging me, come on, Zach, are you going to go there? I've got to encourage them. And going down the zip line was no problem.

It was climbing that 30-foot ladder. But then that was my exercise for yesterday, climbing up that ladder, because at home I walk one mile every day at a fairly good pace to keep fit. But I didn't get it there, so I got it by climbing that ladder.

So I'm thankful for it. What I'm saying is value times when you can have fun together. Good, clean fun and fellowship together.

I believe that if Jesus were here, he would have joined. That's my understanding of Jesus. Not always kneeling down and praying, but really fellowship.

There's a time to pray. He spent all night in prayer. He fasted for 40 days.

We got to do that too. I don't mean 40 days, but we need to learn to fast and pray. There's a balance in the Christian life.

It's not all this, not all that. Now, some people can get so taken up with this and they want to zip line all the time or play all the time. That's not true, because we elders know how much to regulate that.

Everything, there must be a place. My children need to go to school, but they also need to play. Every good school has games.

They're not learning arithmetic when they're studying games, but it's a very important part of development. So in the Christian life also, there are many things that build fellowship and development, and we must never think less of it. I was thinking of something when we were having a little time when we were all asked to pray, and we were praying for seeing if you have any sickness that was announced.

So as I was praying, I said, Lord, I want to also think of some people I know here who are not at least two or three children I know, so I pray for them. And it's always good when you pray also to think of somebody else outside your family. It's a good effort, and the Lord loves that.

I want to show you a couple of examples. Turn with me to Genesis and chapter 20. You know, Abraham came out of the land of Ur of the Chaldeans at the age of 75, and one told him, give her a son.

So Sarah, for nearly 25 years, had no sons. He made a mistake of trying to get a son through somebody else, and God said, no, sorry, that's a mistake. It's a blunder you've made, and you probably don't know that blunder that Abraham made.

The consequences of that we are suffering in the world till today. We won't go into that. But God said, no, I told you I'd give you a son through Sarah, and nothing's too difficult for me.

You don't have to help me. I can do it without your trying to help me. And Abraham went to another place.

We read in Genesis 20, where, you know, to save his own life, he said, Sarah's my sister. And he thought, if I say it's my wife, the king will just kill me and take her. So Genesis 20, verse 20, he said, it's my sister.

So the king said, oh, it's your sister. She's a pretty woman, and I'll take her. I remember she was over 90 years old when she was praying.

And God came to Abraham and said, you've taken a woman who's married, verse 3. If you see scripture, and if you read through it very quickly, you will miss out many, many things. Read the verse slowly, and the Bible says, blessed is the man not who reads the scripture. There's no such verse.

Blessed is the man who meditates, Psalm 1, verse 3, on the law of the Lord day and night. It doesn't mean you're reading the Bible day and night, but you read maybe 10 minutes in the morning. And whenever you got a little time throughout the day, you meditated on something in what you read that struck you.

Maybe you read only three verses, or a whole chapter, but one thing struck you, and you meditated on that throughout the day. Blessed may be blessed. How many of you obey that verse, Psalm 1, verse 3? Blessed is the man who meditates at day and night.

It means even if you wake up in the middle of the night, you can think, hey, this morning I read something. I have had the most amazing revelations of scripture, not when I'm actually reading it, but keeping it in my mind. And then sometime during the day when I'm doing something else, it suddenly hits me.

Some amazing things. Sometimes I've been listening to something in a meeting in the olden days, and it's in my mind. And after the meeting is over, while we're doing something else, suddenly it hits me, hey, I remember the first time I saw the New Covenant from 2 Corinthians 3. It was after a meeting where the words had been referred to.

And then the meeting was over, and I was doing something else, maybe arranging the chairs or something in my home. And suddenly it hit me, oh, this is the difference between the Old Covenant and the New Covenant. You know, it's like revelation that comes from God.

Revelation is a New Testament word. It's more than just understanding. Revelation is, what's the difference between understanding scripture and revelation? Revelation changes your life.

Understanding just gives you a little more information in the head, and you can preach it somewhere, or glory in the fact that you learned something new. But revelation changes your life. And the New Testament speaks about revelation.

The New Testament speaks about knowledge. The New Testament is about revelation. Very, very important.

So, Matthew 6, Jesus said, Don't pray like the Gentiles, verse 7, who use meaningless pretension. I've heard one particular denomination, I don't need to mention their name, in Christendom, that will keep on saying hallelujah, hallelujah, hallelujah, hallelujah. And sometimes they say hallelujah at the most awkward times.

And I've heard some funny stories that come out of that, I'm not going to tell you. Some really embarrassing things where they say hallelujah at the wrong time. Don't use meaningless repetition.

Have you heard that? It's a command of Jesus. Don't commit adultery. Don't use meaningless repetition.

Don't murder. Don't use meaningless repetition. Are you the one to decide which commandment is more important than the other? If God says don't, it is don't.

I take every one of them seriously. Don't kill, don't use meaningless repetitions. Take it very seriously.

I don't keep saying hallelujah, hallelujah, hallelujah. Many people say they don't even know what hallelujah means. How many of you know what hallelujah means? It's not English, but I hope you know.

It's Hebrew. Hallel, praise. Yah, the Lord.

Yah is short for Jehovah. Jehovah is not the New Testament name for God, by the way. The New Testament name for God is Heavenly Father.

I never pray to Jehovah. I pray to my Heavenly Father. But the Old Testament, they were even afraid to mention the name Jehovah.

Hallel, who Yah means praise the Lord. So there's nothing wrong in saying hallelujah, but at least you must say it with meaning, understanding the meaning. Don't use meaningless repetitions.

That means you don't even understand the meaning. Amen. What does that mean? I think to a lot of children, and probably to some adults also, it means you can open your eyes now.

The prayer is over. Amen. Open your eyes.

That's not the meaning of amen. Amen means I agree with everything that this brother or sister just prayed, and I believe it will be like that. Is that what you mean by amen? Whenever you say amen, does somebody pray? You probably didn't even hear what he said.

But when he said amen, to what did you say amen? You know how many lies we say to God in the church on a Sunday morning? We never do that in a court of law. If you go to a court standing for a judge, you would not say one word that you don't mean, because you can be questioned for it. I tell you this.

Please listen to me. The reason why I see many, many believers have not grown spiritually is because they fear some human judge more than they fear God. They would never use a meaningless repetition

before a judge, but they use it all the time before God.

I'm guilty, but I've repented, and I need to constantly repent because it can happen again. I remember many years ago when I used to be in a church where we used songbooks, like in the olden days before we had all this screen and all. And one particular thing was a hymn was announced.

That's a well-known hymn. I know it by heart. I know the tune.

I love the tune. I would sing, sing, sing, sing, sing. I don't even need to look at a book.

And they say, okay, that hymn is over. They're going to the next hymn, and everybody turns to the other hymn, and suddenly it hits me. What did I sing just now? What did I tell the Lord? I never speak to men like that, thinking about something else when I talk to them.

No, whenever I talk to a person, I'm thinking of what I'm saying to them. But here I'm thinking about something else, and I know the tune very well. I know the song very well.

I keep on singing, not thinking of the Lord or anybody else. I'm thinking my mind is somewhere else, and I'm singing the song. You know, we can do two things at a time.

You know that very well. And I said, Lord, I'm sorry. I would never talk to a human being like that.

I insulted you. I'm sorry. And so while the other people turned to the next hymn, I turned in my songbook to the old hymn, a song they were already sung, which I did not need.

And they were singing the other hymn, and I went through the words of this hymn slowly, the one that I sang already, without thinking of the meaning. And I went sentence by sentence before the Lord, and I said, Take my silver and my gold. Not a mite would I withhold.

Oh, you mean that? Take my lips and let me sing. Always, only for my King. Aha, did I mean that? Take my life, Lord, let it be.

Always, only, all for me. All to Jesus I surrender. Strong words.

I hope you mean a hymn when you sing it. So Jesus said, don't use meaningless prayer. Because that is how the heathen people pray.

If you've ever heard of Buddhist prayer meeting, we had a Buddhist living next to our house in Bangalore. We could hear there. And we learned it, what they were saying.

It was something to me like oranges and lemonade or something. And I don't know, there's some language, it's not in English. And it was just on and on and on and on and on.

Next door people heard what. I wonder sometimes whether we pray like that, or we pray like that. At least from today, say, Lord, I don't want to do it like that.

And I'll tell you something, you won't change tomorrow. A habit that you've built for years, may take a few years to go. It may take a few years before you cross this Jordan River.

But determined to cross it and enter the promised land, where you mean every word that you say. When you sing, when you pray, be a person of truth. Jesus said that you're a yes man, yes.

And you're not being no. Turn back one page, Matthew 5. Matthew 5, verse 37. Let your statement be yes, yes.

Or no, no. Anything beyond this is evil. Anything which is not absolutely truthful is evil.

If it is yes, mean it, say yes. If it's no, mean it, say no. Don't be a diplomat.

And certainly don't be a diplomat with God. Don't use meaningless repetition. Now I'm repeating that because we do use meaningless repetition and I want to emphasize that.

Because that is how the heathen pray. And they think because they pray for a long time, that's the other problem. If they pray for many words for a long time, God will hear them.

Have you heard of all night prayer meetings? I've been to all night prayer meetings. I remember once preaching it before the all night prayer meeting and I said, brothers and sisters, do you know Psalm 66, verse 18? Very important verse. Psalm 66, verse 18.

If I regard sin in my heart, the Lord will not hear me. If there's any conscious sin that you have not confessed to God, like for example, you haven't forgiven somebody consciously, you haven't asked forgiveness from someone consciously, the Lord will not hear me. He will not pick up the phone.

He used a modern expression because he sees whose name is on that phone. Aha, this guy has sinned in his life. I'm not even going to answer that phone.

You can keep on, you know, children sometimes pick up a phone and keep on talking. Nobody's listening. A lot of prayer is like that.

Before you pray, check up whether God's picked up the phone. How do you know? Is there any sin in your life that's not confessed? Anybody you have not apologized to? Anybody you have not forgiven? Put the phone down. Jesus said in Matthew 5, verse 23, when you're presenting your offering in the altar, that is prayer, you're coming before God, you know, prayer is an offering.

Those days into the altar, to the altar is invisible. We come in the name of Jesus, that is our altar. And as I'm praying, verse 23 in Matthew 5, I remember, oh, I heard that brother yesterday, or that sister, or my wife, or my husband, or the servant who works for me, I was rude to that person, somebody in the office, and I have not asked forgiveness.

Stop praying. Has any preacher ever told you to stop praying? Jesus did. Leave your offering there at the altar, verse 23.

Leave your offering there and stop praying. God's not picking up the phone. He's not listening.

What should I do, Lord? Go be reconciled to your brother, and come and present and pray. I'll tell you a story I'll never forget, true story, which I heard in a church, not a CFC church, this is the days before CFC existed, in a church, a brother, a God-fearing brother in another church, I was going there. We used to have long meetings in that church.

One meeting would last four or five hours, and before they break bread, there'd be a long message about half an hour or one hour. You could never predict, because it was with translation and everything else. So this brother gave a testimony to me.

One day, I was in the meeting, and they were going to break bread, and before breaking the bread, they had a usual sermon, and he had gone on, the sermon had gone on for about, I don't know, 20 minutes or half an hour. He was about to break the bread. Suddenly, this brother said, I remembered that I had not settled something with another brother who lived fairly nearby, not in this church, and I said, how can I break bread without settling with that brother? And I thought, Lord, as soon as the breaking of bread is over, I'll go and settle with that brother.

He was reminded of this verse, go first, verse 24. First, first be reconciled to your brother, and then come present your offering. I struck him, so he got up, and he said, well, I think I'll miss the breaking of bread today, because he's just about to finish his message, and he's going to break bread, and by then I'd go to that house and come back to New York.

But he decided to obey. He went, and this is a true story. He went, and my brother was, he was in another church, so he met him and reconciled, came back, and amazingly, he discovered that this man was still preaching.

Thank God for some long sermons. Sometimes you don't know why God made that man speak so long, because God was concerned about that one person sitting there who was obeying him, and he discovered later that just as he was about to break bread, he suddenly wandered off into another topic, and you know how sometimes preachers wander off into another topic, and in that particular church, that is a very common thing. They go from this subject to another subject and wander all over scripture before they finish the message.

So that happened that day, and as he came and sat down, that brother just finished his message and said, let's break bread, and he said, I'll never forget in my whole life how God honored me, because in a simple little thing, I decided to go not by human reason, but by simple obedience to God's Word. I've had some amazing experiences like that, where simple obedience to God's Word, God honors me. Have you had experiences like that, where you did something out of the ordinary, because that's what God wanted you to do? Yeah? Anyway, so Jesus said, don't use meaning as repetition, but when you pray, this is how you must pray.

He didn't say you must repeat this prayer every time. I remember when I was a little child, I didn't know how to pray. When my father was born again, and he taught me this prayer, Our Father, who art in heaven, you know what is called the Lord's Prayer.

It's actually a prayer for believers. The Lord's Prayer, by the way, is in John chapter 17. If you want to read the Lord's Prayer sometime, John 17, that was his prayer to his father.

But this is the believer's prayer, which is called the Lord's Prayer, where you talk to believers to pray. But this is the only prayer I knew as a child, and I remember every morning when I got up, I would kneel on my bed as a little boy and pray, Our Father, who art in heaven. Went through the whole prayer like a parrot or a tape recorder, and got out of bed.

There was never a day when I got out of bed without doing that. It was easy. It just takes a minute or less.

But that's not what Jesus meant. He didn't mean what he said. He said, when you pray, Our Father, who art in heaven, with the very first word, the very first word, he's saying, think about your brothers and sisters.

Not my father who's in heaven, Our Father. Joe prayed for his friends, and the Lord answered his prayer. Abraham prayed for those other men.

His wife gave birth. Our Father. The Lord is so interested in building the body.

That's what I talked about at the picnics. It's so important. Jesus said, where two or three are gathered in my name, Matthew 18, 20.

There I am in the midst. Lord, what about if only one person is there? There is no midst. How can you have a midst if there's only one person? For midst, you need minimum of two.

The smallest church is two people. You can't have a church of one person. Sorry.

One person is a lone individual. There's nothing wrong in that. But I often tell people, if you're a lone individual, I remember when my wife and I were led to Bangalore.

We didn't know anybody there. But we wanted to move from where we were living. We prayed about it.

And we moved to Bangalore knowing nobody. And somehow God led us there. And now when we look back, we moved there in 1972.

Nearly 50 years next year, it'll be 50 years ago we moved there, not knowing anyone. All the people who know the church today were near subsequent to God. God knew what He was going to do there three and a half, three years later.

We didn't know. And when we moved there, we were just both of us. Three years later, the Lord began to build the church.

And it's amazing how God leads. And when God led Abraham, He said, go to the land of Canaan. The God who lived in Abraham's time is just the same today.

It's a lovely song we sing. The God who lived in David's time is just the same today. The God who lived in Daniel's time is just the same today.

The God who lived in Abraham's time is just the same today. He tells you where to go. And Abraham went to Canaan.

Nothing happened for a long time. But then the nation of Israel was born one day. And Jesus came there.

It all took time, but Abraham obeyed and moved. It's wonderful to be led by God. God leads you to move somewhere.

Don't be impatient that the very next day some miracles must happen. In Abraham's entire lifetime, he never saw the nation of Israel. But boy, he's in heaven today.

We know that from the story of the rich man and Lazarus. Lazarus went and was Abraham's but Abraham sees what happens. Exactly like God said, through your children, the whole world will be blessed.

It's a wonderful thing to obey God and go. It's a wonderful thing to learn to hear God's voice. Man shall not live by food alone.

Don't think the most important thing for you every day is food. But children and babies, that's an important thing for them. But if you're a grown-up Christian, let me tell you in Jesus' name, you cannot live by food alone.

But by every word that, what? Proceeded or proceeds. Do you know the difference? Let me take a grammar lesson here. Proceeded and proceeds.

What's the difference? Proceeded is what was written in the Bible 2,000 years ago. Proceeds is right now. So it's not reading the Bible in the morning.

That's not what he's saying. For 1400 years, Christians didn't have a Bible. Bibles were printed only in the year 1460 or something.

God's words been proceeding right from Genesis chapter 1. On the first day God spoke, something happened. Light came. Second day God spoke, something happened.

Third day God spoke, something happened. And from that time onwards, till today, God's been speaking every day. But not everybody listens.

John listened in Revelation 1. He says, I heard God's word like a trumpet. And some people say, I don't hear it at all. God's still speaking like a trumpet, but if you're deaf, you will not hear.

Paul once told the Hebrew Christians were told that Hebrews There's so much I want to say in Hebrews 5, but you're dull of hearing. We become dull of hearing when we don't keep our conscience clear. Very simple rule.

You cannot hear God. Your ears are blocked and your conscience is not clear. Somebody you wronged.

You did not set it right. Somebody you cheated. You did not return that money.

Somebody you have not forgiven. You'll be deaf. You keep on like that, you become more and more deaf.

You know, deafness and blindness is a way of increasing and increasing like cataract. If you don't take care of it, then it's not going to get better. There's no sickness in the body that just gets better by itself.

You do something to cure it. And to cure spiritual deafness, very simple, keep your conscience clear. And you know what God speaks in your conscience.

So our Father who art in heaven. Very simple way to begin the prayer. Lord, you're one who loves me.

Nobody in the Old Testament could call Him Father. I wonder if it has gripped you. You know, in the villages, in the churches in India, I think probably here too, most people when they pray, they say, Oh God, good, He is God.

But that's how they pray under the old government. That's how I used to pray for many years, till about 16 years after I was born. The Lord showed me from John 17, 23, that God loved me just as much as He loved Jesus.

To me, that's John 3, 16 is not my favorite verse. John 17, 23 is. The Father loves me just as much as He loved Jesus, the eldest son.

So I don't call Him Jehovah. I never sing that song, guide me, O thou great Jehovah. When others are singing around me, I say, guide me, O my heavenly Father.

Not loudly, softly. I don't want to offend anybody. But He's not Jehovah too.

You say, isn't that His name? I say, one of my sons came to me and said, Mr. Poonen, I'd like to talk to you. I say, what's wrong with you? Are you angry with me or something? Isn't that what other people call you? Yes, but you call me dad, right? What do you call God? Be exactly like my son calling me Mr. Poonen. No difference.

I'm very strict with God and therefore God behaves with me exactly. When I'm exact with God, He's exact with me. He keeps His promises exactly.

If you're careless with God, He'll be careless with you. Do you ever know that God treats you exactly like you are yourself? You know the verse in Psalm 18 that says, with the kind He shows Himself kind? It's like that. If you're exact with God, He'll be exact with you.

If you're careless with God, He is careless with you. I do not call Him Jehovah. I call Him God, yes, but most of the time I say father because that's what Jesus taught me to pray.

I encourage you, my brothers, especially those of you who feel like orphans. Do some of you feel like orphans? Nobody cares for me. You come to the church seeking for fellowship.

If you haven't read Santosh's book, The Congregation, The Club, and The Church, I would encourage every one of you to get a copy and read it more than once. Many churches are congregations. Many churches are clubs.

Very few churches are true churches of Jesus Christ. If you don't know the difference, read that book. He illustrates it in a very simple way.

There are two arms to the cross, the vertical and horizontal. Some churches, they only have the vertical. People, I mean, not churches.

They all have a connection with God, but they have no connection with each other. You know, like these other churches, there may be some wonderful Christians sitting there, a good relationship with God, but they don't even know who's sitting next to them. They don't care for the other.

They don't even know the names of people in their own church, even though the church is so small. I remember in the early days, I was an elder in St. Bangalore up to 1998, and I knew the name of every person and every child. Of course, we were only about 100 people, but within 100 people, we can know the name of every person and every child.

Use your memory. Once it goes down 100, it's a little more difficult, but I think the young church is small enough to know the name of every person and every child. That's an interest in knowing others around.

Are you one of those people with, this is not a cross. This is a wooden bar. It's one part of the cross.

A relationship with God, period. The others, yeah, we see them, right? Good to see you. Not bothered about anything about their needs or any such thing.

That's not a church. That's a congregation, a group of individual people connected with Christ. Some of them not even connected.

It doesn't matter because nobody will discover. And then he said that other churches were just the horizontal part. No connection with God.

They didn't have a direct living relationship with God. But this is a good church to go to. They care for the children.

I'd like to take my children to this church. And they have picnics, you know. They even have a zipline there.

Good church to be in. Good church. They have picnics.

They have fun together. They eat together now and then. And they're so hospitable, so kind, so good.

I can take advantage of anybody. I can walk into anybody's house and live there as long as I like. It's a nice club.

Good club. They're very nice people. I don't have to spend any money because they care for me.

It's not a church. Is this a cross, one horizontal bar? If you are like that, you have no understanding of the church because you have no living relationship with Christ. The church is where hope and the other thing he emphasized in that book is when you're constructing a cross, tell me, even if none of us have made a cross, but if you were constructing a cross, which of these bars would you make first? Tell me.

Which one? The vertical one. Ah, he knows. The vertical one, right.

So, if this is your relationship with God and this is your relationship with your fellow believers, which one should come first? The vertical one, right, with God. And these children know, I tell you. Is that true in your life? Let me make it personal.

Did you come to this church, RLCM, or some of you from NCCL, to that church because of your relationship with God and you wanted to be with other people who had that living relationship with God where they took up the cross every day and died to themselves and followed? That's why you joined? Then you joined with the right reason. But if you say, these are such nice people. I get such a warm welcome every time I come there.

They demand nothing from me. They demand nothing from me. So good.

They give me free meals. They invite me here. They invite me there.

I can go wherever I like. You're a tourist, evangelical tourist, a hypocrite claiming to be a part of the living church now. And seriously, Bangalore, I drive off such people because I'm interested in building the church.

I know Paul once said, I have to present to God a pure church one day. I took that very seriously. God gave us that word of pure offering in Malachi 111 when we started CFC and I've taken it very seriously.

I want to present to God a pure offering. I don't care if it makes me unpopular or people get angry with me. I want to present to God a pure offering.

I want to present to people who deny themselves and pick up the cross every day and seek to have a relation with Christ. I preached that. I tried.

Some people now do that. Now they're answerable to God, but that's what I'm going to concentrate on. And those are the people I have fellowship with.

I'll tell you honestly, I don't have fellowship with every brother and sister in CFC. Do you know that Jesus had a closer fellowship with three people? Even though he had 12 disciples, he had close fellowship with three. Was that partiality? No.

Jesus had many circles around him. One was the big circle of a multitude who would listen to them. Yeah, I know that also.

When you speak on Zoom, there are so many people there. I don't know most of them. That's one circle, but they're believers.

They want to listen to God's word. Praise God. Jesus had a crowd like that.

That was the outer circle. Then inside that he had a smaller circle of 70 disciples. You read about it in Luke chapter 10, I think it is, when he would send out to preach.

Yeah, there are people like that who come to a smaller circle of fellowship. And you get to have fellowship with me also. And inside that is a still smaller circle of 12.

These are concentric circles. The big one, the smaller one is 70, and then there's a smaller one of 12. They were disciples.

And there was a crook among them, so there was a still smaller circle of 11 inside that one. And then inside that there was a smaller circle of three, with whom Jesus spent most of his time, Peter, James, and John. I had exactly the same in CFC Bangalore.

It's a big circle, smaller one, smaller one, and inner circle. People say you're partial, but it's exactly like Jesus. There's a holy partiality, and there's an unholy partiality.

Jesus had them. Why did he choose three? Because they were the most radical, the most wholehearted, the ones who really wanted to deny themselves, take up the cross. Naturally, he was close to them.

Because they were the ones who really wanted to get close to God. It's something like, you know, have you seen a bicycle wheel? You see plenty of these children driving around. Have you seen the spokes coming in from the outer end of the wheel to the center? Think of the center as God, believers.

The closer they come to God, the closer they come to each other. The spokes almost touch when they come to the center. And those who are far apart, you know, that spoke is so far from here, this spoke.

Yeah, that's a child of God, but it's far away from me. I don't have much contact with them. But those who come close to the Lord, I come very close to them.

I found that in Bangalore, and I found also with the worldwide fellowship at CFC churches. I'm not equally close to everybody. No, I'll tell you honestly.

The spokes that come wholehearted, radical to the center of Jesus Christ, to take up the cross every day and follow. I don't know what they're doing in their life, but I can discern, hey, this guy's coming close to the Lord, I get close to him. That's how Jesus is.

That's how we build a church. We love everybody, but Jesus was not close to everybody. There was a statement I read the other day, which sounds nice, that God loves everybody equally.

Is it true? God so loved the world that he gave his only son, John 3, 16. Absolutely true. God loved the world.

But does he love everybody equally? There was a statement that I read the other day somewhere. God loves everybody equally. He loves me just like he loves the heathen.

He loves the wholehearted disciple just like he loves the backslidden disciple. Well, I want a scripture for it. I said, before you tell me something, show me a scripture.

I'll show you a scripture, John 14 and verse 21. John 14 and verse 21. If you have my commandments and keep them, that's all you have to have them.

That means you've got to read them. If you're too lazy to read the scriptures, it doesn't include you. It's not for you.

But if you're one who reads and meditates on scripture, you're included here. You have his commandments, doesn't stop there, and keeps them. You read it, meditate on it, and keep it.

He is the one who loves me. Who all love Jesus here? I'll tell you, Jesus says, those who read and meditate on God's word and obey, those are the only ones sitting here who love Jesus. And you will be specially loved by my father.

God so loved the world, but there's some people he loves specially. Those who hear, meditate, and obey. I don't know who they are, but over a period of time, it becomes evident.

Supposing we decide one day, I think we're all getting a bit obese, or fat, as they say in the world. We need to be a little more fit and slim. Not because we want to be photographed, but because it's healthy.

Well, we're going to go on a course from today onwards of discipline, exercise, and discipline in eating and drinking, not just loading ourselves with sugar day and night. The children, that's okay, I'm talking about adults. You won't notice any difference in a day or two.

But wait 10 years, and I'm telling you, you'll see a world of difference between those who have practiced that discipline and those who have not. It is exactly the same spiritually. Physical discipline is good, it has got some advantages, but spiritually, you know, I'm not talking about physical fitness right now.

I'm talking about, as an example, Jesus, Paul used it as an example. He said those who run in the Olympic games, run to get a prize. We must discipline ourselves much more for a spiritual life, for a Christian's life.

So, if we have His commandments, meditate on it and keep them, the Lord will love me in a special way, and over a period of time, it will become evident. There will be a calmness about your life. It won't be tense all the time.

There will be a forgiving spirit about you towards people who hurt you. You won't hold grudges against people. You won't be in a panic when something goes wrong.

In other words, you'll be spiritually fit more and more. You'll be a wonderful parent to your growing children as you enable them to have the same faith you have. It's a wonderful life, the Christian life.

My father will love him, and I will love him, Jesus says. Does Jesus love some people more than others? Please read John 14, 21. He who has my commandments, heard it, meditates on it, and keeps it, I will love him especially.

My father will love him especially. This inner circle. Why does Jesus have these concentric circles, and down to three in the middle? Because he sees how much people love him and obey him in his work.

It's exactly that. He's the same yesterday, today, and forever. Even today, in NCCF, RNCF, everywhere, in CFC, he's got concentric circles.

It's not partiality. It's just his way. Why does one farmer feel that one person's garden is beautiful, with all the roses and all the flowers and so orderly and arranged, and another guy's garden is like a wilderness? Why is that? Is it because God was partial to this guy's garden? Is it because he sent more rain on his garden, or gave him better soil? Not at all.

When you look at a garden, beautifully cultivated, with beautiful flowers, and the other one next door to it, like a wilderness, you don't think God is partial, no. One person had took some pains to discipline himself and make that garden. It's like that when you see a beautiful life, a beautiful Christian life, a humble God-fearing life, or a humble God-fearing home, you know they paid a price to build that garden.

It was not overnight. That's how God wants every single home to be. That's how God wants everyone, every believer to be.

The primary requirement is humility. And I'll tell you one secret. You want to hear it? Don't get offended.

Listen carefully. There is far more pride in you than you think. Should I repeat it? There is far more pride in you than you imagine.

Ask God to show it, whoever you are. I practice what I preach. I have not yet become as humble as Jesus.

I want to be. I don't just sit back lazily and say I want to be. If you want to be physically sick, you can't lie down in bed and say, I want to be physically sick.

I want to do something about it. I got to do something about it. If I want to be as humble as Jesus was, then I know the Father will love me especially.

I know Jesus will love me especially. And gradually over a period of time, I will come into Jesus' inner circle. I will hear things that other people don't hear.

He will whisper secrets into my ear that he does not whisper into the ears of others. You know that Old Testament lovely verse, Psalm 25, 14, the secret of the Lord is with those who fear him or reverence him. Why doesn't he whisper his secret to everybody? Do you whisper your secrets to everybody? Don't you tell some secrets to your wife that you don't tell others? Why? Why not tell the whole world about it? No, there are secrets meant to be only for those who are very close to me, my wife, my children.

God is like that. So God loves some people especially. I'm praying that all of us will be in that inner circle when we have to pay a price.

It's like saying, I hope all of us will be physically fit. And not obese and unhealthy. But you have to pay a price.

He who has ears to hear will hear. Let's pray. While our heads bowed, I want you to think, don't think of 25 things.

Think of one thing to begin with, one step at a time. When we walk, we take one step at a time. Don't jump.

One step at a time. If the Lord told you three things, think which is most important. Then take that and then step two and step three.

Let's say, Lord, I want to do something about what I heard today. I want to do it. I don't want to miss this word you spoke in my heart today.

Something which I believe will change my life. Please help me to take my Christian life really seriously from today. Even if you're a young boy or girl, even if you're six, seven years old, you can be a wholehearted disciple of Jesus from that day on.

However young you are, little children can come to Jesus. We invite them to come. Say, Lord Jesus, I want to be your disciple.

I want to discipline myself. I want to forgive every single person who's hurt me in my whole life. Maybe when I go home, I want to think about it and name them one by one and say, Lord, I forgive you.

I want to ask forgiveness from anyone who I've hurt, even if it takes time. Even if I have to write a few letters, I'm going to do it. I want to return money that I've taken wrongfully or that I borrowed and not return, items that I borrowed that I never returned.

I don't want to be in debt to anybody. I don't want to be a legalist. I want to be full of love.

But I want to be close to you, Lord, my Heavenly Father. I want to be close to you, Lord Jesus. I want to be close to you.

And step by step, once you've taken one step, ask the Lord to show you the next one. And claim this promise in Proverbs 4, verse 12. Proverbs 4, verse 12.

The Lord says, as you go, step by step, I will open up the way before you as you obey me. As you go, step by step, I will open up the way before you as you obey me. It's a better phrase.

Heavenly Father, we pray that our lives will be radically changed from today onwards. We want to be in the inner circle of yours. We want to be specially loved by you and by our Father.

Thank you, Father, for these wonderful brothers and sisters. We're so eager to hear your word when you're brought together. Bless us all in Jesus' name.

Amen.

Video: <https://sermonindex2.b-cdn.net/Ui7prGvgr9w.mp4>

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