

Thank God For The Past But Press On To Greater Heights

by Zac Poonen

This sermon emphasizes the importance of being filled with the Holy Spirit, seeking God's wisdom, and encouraging one another daily. It recounts the journey of CFC's founding through the baptism of the Holy Spirit, highlighting the need for discipleship, unity, and detachment from possessions. The speaker urges listeners to seek assurance of salvation and the Holy Spirit directly from God, not relying on man's testimony.

Scripture: Luke 11:13, James 1:5, Hebrews 3:13, Matthew 3:11, Ephesians 5:18, Galatians 5:24

Topics: "Holy Spirit Empowerment", "Discipleship and Unity"

Description

This sermon emphasizes the importance of being filled with the Holy Spirit, seeking God's wisdom, and encouraging one another daily. It recounts the journey of CFC's founding through the baptism of the Holy Spirit, highlighting the need for discipleship, unity, and detachment from possessions. The speaker urges listeners to seek assurance of salvation and the Holy Spirit directly from God, not relying on man's testimony.

Transcript

Dear brothers and sisters, it's a great joy to be able to speak to you today as we celebrate another anniversary from 1975, 46 years. We praise the Lord for his goodness to us in numerous ways and I want to turn to Isaiah and chapter 32 to begin with. Here he speaks about a time in Isaiah 32, 15, where the spirit is poured out upon us from high and the wilderness becomes a fertile field, Isaiah 32, 15, and the fertile field becomes like a forest and then justice or righteousness will dwell in the wilderness and righteousness will imbue the field and the work of righteousness will be peace and the service of righteousness, quietness, and confidence forever and my people will live in a peaceful habitation and secure dwellings and undisturbed resting places.

It's a wonderful passage in Isaiah 32, verse 15 to 18, which shows what will happen when the Holy Spirit is poured out. Why do I take that? Because CFC was born just like the early church through the baptism of the Holy Spirit. It was not born through any particular doctrine.

No, doctrines are good, important, but you can be dead. The Pharisees had right doctrines. Jesus said that whatever they said was right, but there was no life in it.

There was no power. There was no Holy Spirit and so we mustn't think because we teach the new covenant in the church, we mustn't think that that is the basis of our church. It was the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

We were in another church where we were desperately in need, particularly Ian Robson and myself, and we used to pray together seeking God in our need, desperate, struggling, defeated by sin, born again, wanting to serve the Lord in full-time Christian work, but defeated. And we sought the Lord for months and it didn't look as if anything was going to happen. And then one day God met with him and with me separately, almost one day apart, and that was the beginning of something new.

And then as we sought the Lord and began to proclaim this wonderful truth in that other church about the baptism of the Holy Spirit, power from on high, that church did not want to hear it. And a brother came there and prophesied once, brother from another country, that if that church did not listen to this message, God would remove us from there and start a work in Bangalore, start a fire at which people from many, many places would come and warm themselves. And that was like a prophecy, we never took it very seriously then, but as we look back now over 46 years, we can see how people from all over the world have come to warm themselves with the fire God lit in Bangalore 46 years ago.

We must never forget that and must always be grateful for what God has done. I'll never forget it, and I know Ian will never forget it either, because that is a beginning not only of the church, it was the beginning of a new phase in our own life, certainly in my own life. There's a turning point for me in my life.

I mean, if you were to ask the early apostles and disciples, what is the turning point in your life? It wasn't because, yes, of course, it was meeting with Jesus. Jesus breathed on them and they were born again. But then something happened on the day of Pentecost.

Children, they were scared and sitting inside closed rooms and suddenly the Holy Spirit fell upon them. It was not a gradual growth over a period of 10 or 20 years. Suddenly, they were different.

They got boldness and power to serve the Lord, and that's what happened to us. They didn't become perfect that day and we didn't become perfect either, but it was the beginning. It was like switching on power and then, you know, when power is there, so many engines can run and the light comes on in the house and so many things like that.

And in terms of the language here in Isaiah 32, it speaks of a barren field. And we were, Ian and I, were struggling with a barren field in our labors in that other church. And it says, when the spirit is poured out upon us from high, Isaiah 32, 15, the wilderness becomes a fertile field.

The fertile field becomes so full of trees like a forest and then justice will be, will dwell in the wilderness and righteousness, righteousness, righteousness. The next three sentences, righteousness in the field and righteousness, the work of righteousness will be peace, quietness and confidence forever. So that proclaiming of righteousness, which is the new covenant, began with us after the baptism in the Holy Spirit.

So many of you may have understood the truth of the new covenant in your mind. And if you have a clever mind, you can explain it. You know the verses and you can even probably teach it to others, but it will bring a result only if you're baptized in the Holy Spirit and remain filled with the Spirit.

It is to people who are baptized in the Spirit that Paul wrote in Ephesians 5, 18, be continuously filled with the Spirit. And if there is one exhortation I would give to all of you as we begin another year, at the end of 46 years of God's presence with us, it is not understand the doctrine better. It's good to understand the doctrine better.

But I feel that many of us could explain the doctrine better than those early apostles. We have a Bible to refer to and quote this verse and that verse. The early apostles didn't have a Bible.

They quoted a verse that was from memory and the people who listened to them never had Bibles. But what was it that made that early church so powerful? It was not doctrine. It was a baptism in the Holy Spirit and fire.

John the Baptist said, Jesus will save you from your sins, Matthew 1, 21. And Jesus will baptize you in the Holy Spirit and fire, Matthew 3, 11. Those are the first two promises in the New Testament.

And our church was built on the first two promises in the New Testament. Jesus can save you from sin and Jesus can baptize you in the Holy Spirit and fire. He will.

And those have responded to both those invitations that allow Jesus to do it in them, become a part of a living church against which the gates of hell can never prevail. And I pray to continue like that, my dear brothers and sisters. I hope those two first two promises in the New Testament will always be before your eyes.

That you'll never be satisfied in your life without experiencing the reality of those two promises. That Jesus will save you from your sins. Not only forgive you, thank God for that.

There's forgiveness in the old covenant too. Psalm 103 says, bless the Lord, O my soul, who forgives all your sins. And Psalm 32, where your sin is covered, blessed is that man.

And in our case, the sin is not covered. It is cleansed and blotted out. And the Lord says, I will not remember it anymore.

But beyond that, beyond forgiveness and beyond justification, beyond our sins being cleansed, are being saved, lifted up from the pit of a defeated life. And being baptized means immersed under, drenched under the waterfall of the Holy Spirit. I want to live under that waterfall all the days of my life.

I don't even want a little finger in my hand to be outside that waterfall. Every part of my being, I want to be completely under that waterfall every single moment. I don't want one single dirty thought ever to come into my mind.

I don't want to speak one rude, unkind word. I don't want to ever murmur or grumble or complain or ever get angry or ever lust after a woman. These are goals that we must have and we must proceed towards it quickly.

But this is the purpose of which the Lord says in the Holy Spirit. If you read the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew 5, 6, and 7, that is the fertile field spoken of here, a life of victory and God's blessing upon us and overcoming the sins that defeat us. He will save us from all those sins.

So when we began, we were initially only two of us, Ian and myself, but the wonderful thing is God united us. That's the other thing we found. The baptism of the Holy Spirit not only gave us personal victory, but

helped us to become one.

That is not only the truth of being saved from sin, but becoming one body. And it had to be true in our experience. And I found Annie, my wife, was 100% with me in this.

And so in our family life, she had been baptized in the Holy Spirit too. And so unity in the family life, bringing up our children, we had only three sons then, we have four sons now, but bringing up our children in godly ways is very, very important for her and to me, living simply, not wasting our money, but being frugal in our expenditure. It's all part of the result of being filled with the Holy Spirit and being united in the body with those who wanted to go this way.

And that's something we've experienced. I mean, my relationship with my wife has been glorious all these 46 years. And the way our children grew up, is wonderfully blessed.

And in the church, my unity with Ian has been amazing these last 46 years. We are so different, like Paul and Barnabas, completely different. You know that Ian is a tremendous encourager.

He's the finest counselor in CFC. He has spent hours and hours and hours blessing so many people. And our ministry is different.

Our emphasis is different, but we were one. We were like two halves of the body, a human body in our ministry. And God kept us united, despite areas where we may have disagreed.

If we disagreed, we waited until we agreed before we moved forward. I'm telling you how we worked all these 46 years. And that's the way it must be with all of you until Jesus comes again.

It's not like in some churches where there's a strong dictatorial pastor who just lays down the rule and everybody just bows down and does that. That's not the body. That's a dictatorship.

But we could express our differences. In the elders meetings, we had freedom to say, well, brother, why disagree with you? I mean, people would say openly that they disagreed with me. Good.

Then that means that they were free to express themselves. And then we'd say, okay, well, I'm not perfect. None of us are perfect, but God has put us together so that together we can understand the mind of God and move forward when we are united.

So we would move forward in an area when we were agreed on something. Until then we'd wait, but we'd never break the unity. And I can tell you this in 46 years that I fellowshiped with brother Ian, there's not a single day, and that's not an exaggeration.

There's not a single day in which I could not look him straight in the eye and say, I fellowshiped with him. And it's been like him with me, with him with me too. So this is very, very important.

I personally was defeated, but the baptism in the Holy Spirit and the fellowship of the church brought me into a wonderful life. One of my biggest sins was discouraging. I'd be frequently discouraged, frustrated, and that's gone from my life.

I can honestly say it's gone. Dear brothers, look for some area in your life where you are defeated. Let's not just gloat over we've finished 46 years.

Before we reach the next anniversary next year, think of some area in your life, make this a project where you want to overcome. Say, Lord, I want to be an overcomer. I want to experience Jesus saving me from my sin, not just forgiving me.

And Lord, make me more united with my wife. Help me to bring up my children in a more godly way than it has been all these years. Help me to become one with others in the body who are wholehearted, who may be different from me, but are wholehearted and seem to follow you.

And the other thing we found as the Lord built us together was that there was no distinction between rich and poor, educated or uneducated. All were the same. You couldn't come into CFC and find out who was a laborer and who was a PhD.

No, there was no such thing. We were one in the spirit and we were united. I pray to continue like that.

We've sought through the years to have a body ministry. When we started out, the verse that the Lord gave us, let me remind you, is from Malachi chapter 1 and verse 11. You can never forget this.

If it's not something we sort of hunted for, God gave it to us. Malachi is the last prophet. The old covenant was coming to an end and we didn't know that, but the old covenant was coming to an end in our life too at that time.

We didn't know about the doctrine of the old covenant and the new covenant and that all came much later. So reality of the power of the Holy Spirit came first. It's like a baby gets light first before it learns how to speak and how to exercise its parts of its body.

So here Malachi came, was sent as a prophet at a time when Israel was in a terribly backslidden state. In fact, so bad that they were offering to God the verse Malachi 1.8, the lame and the sick parts of the lame and sick animals from their flock. They were not giving the best to God.

It's an insult to give a lame and a sick offering to God. God wants the best. And Lord said there, I wish there was some priest among you, Malachi 1.10, who would shut the gates when somebody brings this lame and sick lamb or goat as an offering.

But there were not people like that who were bold enough to shut the gates and say, no, God won't accept. See, when we are baptized in the Holy Spirit and we want to build a church, there has to be a strictness. You see that also in the early church that they were so strict that when Ananias and Sapphira came and were just hypocrites, pretending.

What is their sin? They didn't kill anybody. They were not molesting others or hurting others. They were not shouting out in anger or making a nuisance of themselves.

They just were hypocrites and they died. And Peter was the one, and you know, he said, why has the devil made you tell a lie, Ananias? There was judgment there in the early church. So when you think of the baptism in the Holy Spirit, it's a spirit that fills our hearts with love, but it's first of all love for God, then love for another.

The first commandment is not love your neighbor as yourself. So it's not a wishy-washy type of love. And God filled our hearts with that.

We just were nice and good to each other and would never speak the truth to correct one another. We were ready to correct one another and remove especially all hypocrisy. And in this situation, the Lord was virtually saying that he was fed up with Israel and he was going to finish with Israel as a nation and Malachi was the last prophet.

But the Lord said in a prophecy in Malachi 1.11, but from the rising of the sun to its setting, which means from east to west, in other words, it will no longer be just Israel, one little nation. In every nation on the face of the earth, my name will be great, the Lord says. Among the nations in every place, there'll be a testimony to my name, an incense that is going to be the name of offering that is pure.

That's the emphasis that came to us. A pure offering in every place in the Lord's name will be great among the nations. It won't be great preachers.

It'll be a body in the name of Jesus will be exalted. But that pure offering is the phrase that came to us right at the beginning. And that's what we have stressed throughout these 46 years.

And we have not stopped preaching. We preach on that purity today, just as much as we did at the beginning. So right at the beginning, the first thing that we studied was Luke chapter 14, where the conditions of discipleship are mentioned.

Because we saw the problem in Christendom is they were making believers who are not disciples. They were obeying the command in Mark 16, which says going to all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He who believes and is baptized will be saved.

Good. There were people doing that. That's evangelism.

But they were not going on following on from there to Matthew 28, where it says, in the last verses, make disciples of all nations, then baptize them and teach them to observe, to obey every single thing I taught you, Matthew 28, 20, 18 to 20. So we felt there was something missing in Christendom, the message of discipleship. It's like bringing babies to birth and then ignoring them.

Imagine if a couple brought a baby to birth and just left her on the roadside, then brought another baby to birth and left her on the roadside. That's how Christendom was. Yes, babies were being born, but they were not being brought up to maturity.

And many of them, what will happen to a baby that's just left on the roadside? It'll die. And that's what's happening in a lot of Christendom. Lots and lots of people are born again and become backsliders.

I would say one day when the history of all born again people becomes evident, you will discover that the vast majority of them backslid, probably 50, 60% backslid. So what's the use of counting numbers? We have to make disciples and that's what we saw. We also saw that in Luke 15, where we read about a man having a hundred sheep and having lost one of Luke 15, verse four.

He leaves the 99 and goes after the one that is lost until he finds it. That's evangelism. Good.

And then he brings them back, brings that lost sheep into a fold. That's one thing. He doesn't just spend time with that sheep alone.

He brings that sheep back into the fold. And then the Lord says in verse seven, there'll be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over 99 righteous people who need no repentance. I want you

to see something here.

Here is 99 sheep in the fold and one sheep lost. That's the picture. But what is the meaning of that in spiritual terms? The one sheep that is lost is the one who has not repented.

One sinner who repents. I'm reading from verse seven. That's the lost sheep.

And what about the 99 sheep in the fold? You see how they are described. The church, 99 righteous persons who need no repentance. That's the church.

Show me a church where there are people who need no repentance. Not that they're perfect, but they are repenting every day. That's the type of church we wanted to build.

99 people who are seeking to be free from sin. Repentance means to turn from sin. And to have 99 righteous persons who need no repentance, 99 people who are really seeking to be free from all sin in their life.

This is God's will. And this is the type of church God wants. Not 99 people who are defeated and gossiping and backbiting and lusting and grumbling and complaining and loving money and doing all types of everything we are warned against in the New Testament.

That's how most churches are. So in such a case, that one lost sheep is better not to bring that lost sheep into a fold where you have 99 people who are fighting with each other and who are grumbling and complaining and who have so much sin in their life, where husband and wife are fighting with each other every day. What's the use bringing a lost sheep into such a fold? It's far safer out there all by itself in the wilderness than in the midst of such a group of people.

And that's how we saw so many churches. We're not here to judge others, but we found it was like that in our life and in the churches we went to. And we saw that the Lord wanted to do it differently.

He wanted a church where people did not need repentance because they were repenting every day. Not that they were perfect. It's not 99 people who are perfect, but who did not need repentance up to the current level of their understanding of sin in their life.

You see, every one of us, there's a current level right now. Just like you go to school and you find some are in the kindergarten, some are in the first standard, some are in second standard, third standard, 10th standard, or 12th standard. There are different levels at which people are.

They're on school and so in a church also. There are people at different levels spiritually. It's true of every church.

Those are newly converted like babes. There are those who've grown a little more, some more, and some more. There are people who are failing in one class, sitting in the same class for the next year, and some sitting in the same class for two years.

We don't turn them out of the school. We hope they will take their studies more seriously, but we're constantly teaching them, here's something you need to learn, and they don't need any repentance. This is what we're teaching you.

You should live a life where you don't need any repentance because you are repenting of every known sin. So that was our goal, where we seek to build people who are free from known sin, though unconsciously there could be so many areas in their life, in every one of our lives, where there's sin that we're not aware of. So we decided to make disciples.

We needed to know what the conditions of discipleship were, and that was described very clearly in Luke chapter 14 and verse 25 onwards. Three conditions of discipleship. We preached that.

We spent a long time meditating on this, but the first condition of discipleship was that we have to, Jesus used the word hate, father, mother, wife, children, brothers, sisters. It cannot be decided. In other words, a detachment from attachment, from a human attachment to our family members, even the brothers and sisters in the church.

In other words, my love for Jesus must be so great, so great that compared to that, my love for my fellow believers, I have to love my fellow believers, is almost like hatred. It's something like, I do love my fellow believers like the light of the stars. There is light in the stars, but when the sun rises, even though there's light in the stars, you can't see it.

It's so bright. So that's the example here. I love my father, mother, wife, children, brothers, sisters, but in the light of the love of Jesus, it's almost as though my love for them disappears.

It's so vast. It's like the sun blocks out, even though there's light in the stars, the sun blocks out the light of the stars. So that's the first thing, that we must be detached from a human attachment to one another.

Our love for others must come through Christ, and we must love the Lord supremely, more than anyone on earth, more than even our brothers and sisters in the church. And that is what God taught us first, and taught us to proclaim first. And then secondly, the second condition of discipleship, verse 27, when you take up your own cross and follow after me, that's a subject which is almost not taught in any church.

I remember once I attended a meeting many, many years ago of a lot of pastors were meeting together, and then they broke up into little groups to discuss what does it mean to take up the cross. And after about half an hour, they came back, and the person who was monitoring the whole thing got all the answers from all the groups, and the substance of the answers was, we really don't know what it means to take up the cross. Well, then you can't be a disciple.

I would say you go to the average Christian today, born-again Christian, ask him, what does it mean to take up the cross? He doesn't know. Well, then he can't be a disciple. What does it mean to take up not Jesus' cross? He carried his cross.

But our cross, and Jesus said in Luke 9, 23, you have to carry that cross daily. It's not just once. Every single day, it's not something I can do once.

We are born again once, but we've got to take up the cross every day. And that's the other thing we discovered, that there's a strong self-will inside us. It's the cause of all the problems in homes, in offices, in factories, everywhere.

Man's self-will. In churches, in prison, between Christian workers. And if that strong self-will is not crucified, if it's not put to death, there can never be a following of Jesus.

To be a disciple means to follow Jesus. You can never be a follower of Jesus if that strong self-will is not put to death. And so, that's the second thing we emphasize.

We have to die. In every situation, I have to choose the way of death. When I'm tempted, let me react like a dead man.

When somebody irritates me, let me be like a dead man. If somebody gets upset with me, how does a dead man react? This is what we kept teaching in the early days. The third condition of discipleship was our attitude to our possessions.

Luke 14, 33. You cannot be my disciple if you don't give up all your possessions. And we thought that possessions were what we possessed, held on to, faithfully.

And the Lord said, you can have things, don't possess them. What that means is keep your palm open. That there, possession is still there.

It's yours. The house is in your name. The car is in your name.

But you're not holding it tight as though it belongs to the Lord. Keep your possessions in an open palm and you won't possess them. Now, we've taught that from the beginning.

How many people obey it? I don't know. But those who do become disciples. And it's only disciples who can become one body.

The rest are spectators. So, we've had spectators in our church right from the beginning. But praise the Lord, in the midst of the church, there is a core, there is a body.

You see, Jesus had a number of circles around him. One was a big circle of all the multitudes who heard him. And in the midst of that was another circle of 12 people who were his disciples.

And in the midst of that were a smaller group of 11 who were utterly faithful. One was a cook, Judas Iscariot. Then inside of that 11 was a still smaller circle of three, Peter, James, and John, who were like an inner circle.

So, there were different degree, different concentrated circles around Jesus. And Jesus was increasingly committed to the ones who were closest to him. So, in the church also, we found not our relationship with everybody in the church was not the same.

It depended on their commitment to Christ and how serious they were about discipleship in their life. And that's true even today after 46 years. In CFC, there are these different circles.

Jesus is in the midst, but his relationship with everyone is not the same. There are those who are like the multitude who come and listen regularly, who are faithful. And then there's an inner circle of 12 disciples.

And sometimes there's a smaller circle of 11 with somebody who's a cook who comes here with the wrong intention. And then there's a smaller circle of three, wholehearted. I'm not talking about the numbers.

I'm talking about different sizes of circles in a church. So, I used to be disturbed in the early days that everybody was not a wholehearted disciple. Then I learned how Jesus also had these different circles.

And so, I recognized that naturally my fellowship will be much more with those who are closest to the Lord. See, I think of the spokes in a bicycle wheel. Think of a bicycle wheel with all the spokes coming in from the outer end.

In the beginning, they're all like spokes right at the outer end. And the center is Jesus. We come closer and closer and closer and closer to Jesus.

But you see, as we come closer and closer and closer to Jesus, this one spoke in the wheel, it becomes closer to another spoke in the wheel as well, which is also coming closer to Jesus. So, when these spokes come closer, they come closer to each other as well. But if there's a spoke there that does not come close to Jesus, it's only close to the other spokes.

So, our closeness to others is not determined by language, personality, which community you belong to, which state you belong to. No. It's determined by how close are you coming to the Christ.

I pray it will be like that in the days to come. I urge you, my brothers and sisters, come close to Jesus. Let this be a year in which you seek with all your heart to be a disciple, to love Jesus more than anyone on earth, your relatives, your family members, even the brothers and sisters in the church.

And where you decide from now on, you're going to ask for the power of the Holy Spirit to put yourself to death, to put the flesh to death. Those who are Christ have crucified the flesh with its affections and lusts, it says in Galatians 5.24, and who seek to be detached from possessions. Very, very important.

The second thing we took a lot of time teaching in those days was Matthew 5, 6, and 7. We spent weeks and weeks and weeks on Matthew 5, 6, and 7, beginning with being poor in spirit, recognizing our own needs, hungering and thirsting for righteousness, mourning for our sins, being merciful to other people, seeking purity of heart, seeking to be at peace with others, never fighting, because the Bible says that we don't struggle with flesh and blood. We found we had authority over Satan. That's another thing we discovered after the baptism in the Holy Spirit, that demons were afraid.

We could cast out demons in the name of Jesus. So many things happened, authority over Satan. But the Lord made it clear to us that if you fight with flesh and blood, you won't have authority over Satan.

Ephesians 6, verse 10 to 18 says we do not fight with flesh and blood, Ephesians 6, 12, but with evil forces. You have a choice. You either fight with Satan or you fight with human beings.

Fight with your wife or fight with Satan. Fight with your husband or fight with Satan. Fight with other believers or fight with Satan.

What about if other people come fight with you? You refuse to fight. You can go and try to fight with a dead man. He won't respond.

You can't stop other people from coming to fight with you. But it says, pursue peace with all men as much as it lies in you. Live peaceably with all men.

That's the command in Romans 12 and Hebrews 12. As far as we're concerned, we pursue peace. If the other person is not interested in peace, what can I do? I'm going to pursue peace.

So sometimes pursuing peace with all men meant that you avoid meeting certain people, avoid going to certain houses. Because there are such quarrelsome people that as soon as you meet them or go to their

house, there's an argument begins. And I hate arguments, even about doctrine.

I don't find Jesus arguing with anybody about doctrine. He proclaimed the truth and they didn't accept it. Fine.

I mean, if somebody is ignorant and wants an exclamation, I don't need to spend one or two hours with them. I've done that also. But if somebody wants to argue and prove that I'm wrong, then I'm not going to argue with him.

You say, no, I will not struggle with flesh and blood. And that's how I've preserved my authority over Satan. I want to say to you, dear brothers, this is another area.

Make this a coming year, an area where you have more authority over Satan. And decide you're never going to fight with flesh and blood in this coming year. There's no one in your family.

Maybe you fought in the past, but it won't be there anymore. Don't fight. Die.

And let the Lord do the fighting. Now don't misunderstand me. Parents have to discipline their children.

That's something that we were very strict with. We taught very clearly that if you can't bring up your children properly, you really have no ministry in the church. No.

But what are you going to teach others if you can't teach your own children to follow the Lord? Begin with your children. Begin with your family. That's another thing we emphasize very much.

So I just mentioned these are some of the things that we have emphasized right from the beginning, so that those who are here and who are not there in the beginning can understand. A lot of people left us. Hardly anybody left with us who was there right from day one.

And many are still sticking around with us today. We're not really wholehearted and radical. And ultimately, the ones who accomplish God's purpose are those who are radical.

You remember Gideon had a huge army, about 30,000 men or something, and God reduced it to 300 before he went to fight the battle. He said, no, this is, first he reduced it to a smaller amount of 10,000 or something, but also this is too much. They're not wholehearted.

Then he reduced it to a small number and defeated the huge enemy with that small number. That's how it is even today. Gideon said it was the sword of the Lord that won the victory, and it's the same today.

It's with a small number that God accomplishes his purpose. When Jesus wanted to evangelize the whole world and start a ministry that would last for 2,000 years, you know how many people he chose? 12. One dropped out and God found another.

I can admit it. And with those 12, he started a work that's gone on for 2,000 years and he's produced wonderful disciples in all these centuries. It was not with a big crowd or with a big advertising campaign, no.

God's work has always been done throughout the world with a small group of people. And we knew that God wanted us also to spread the news across the world. And so initially we used to pray, Lord, is anybody in this area of Bangalore who are seeking for a godly life, bring them in touch with us.

Then the Lord brought some in touch with us. Then we prayed that God would add more, bring more in touch with us, in India perhaps, and then gradually to the whole world. And now we didn't know how we would ever reach the world.

We don't have the resources. We don't have the people. But then God gave us YouTube and the internet through which we have reached people from the remote in every continent we have reached.

Our messages go to 180 countries. A word for the week and the messages on YouTube all over the world. We never did that.

We didn't have the financial resources, but God decided this is a message that needs to go everywhere. Dear brothers, I'm just trying to give you a history of all this so that you can rejoice in what God has done. But we don't sit back.

It says, like Paul says, we forget the things that are behind. So as we come to this beginning of a new year for our church, we're not going to sit and gloat over what's happened in the past. No.

Forgetting the things that are behind. You must know what the Lord has done. Definitely.

And I say this for the benefit of those who don't know. But we are not going to sit and thank God for all that's happened. We're going to press towards the future to do greater things for the Lord.

The other thing, there must be another generation that has to come up. Ian and I are in our 80s, and God needs the early apostles who died in their 60s. God's given us longer life than that.

We praise the Lord. But God needs another generation. Even if we live for many, many more years, God still needs another generation to do the work.

He needs wholehearted brothers in the 60s and 40s and 20s. And I pray that there will be folks like that at every age level who are wholehearted and radical and who really want to be disciples. You may not be able to preach powerfully like some others can, but who are disciples and seek to make others disciples by personal conversation.

You don't have to be a preacher to make your son or daughter a disciple. You don't have to be a preacher to share with your brother or sister something that will encourage them and challenge them. Make this a year when you will say, Lord, I want to make disciples in my home.

I want to make disciples wherever I meet. I want to be an encouragement to others, even if I can't make disciples. Let me do one thing.

Here's a challenge I want to give to you for the new year. In Hebrews chapter 3, if you have 365 days between now and the next anniversary date, let's obey Hebrews chapter 3, verse 13, as far as possible every day. Hebrews 3.13 says, encourage one another every single day, as long as it is called today, so that none of you will be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.

Maybe you got victory and you're not getting hardened, but maybe there's somebody living next to you or who you know in the church who's in danger of getting hardened. Don't say, I'm not my brother's keeper. That's what pain says.

I'm not my brother's keeper. That's the way of pain. If you're a child of God, you'd say, I am my brother's keeper.

And so I don't want him to be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. So how can I do that? I don't have to preach a great message to him. I want to encourage him whenever I get an opportunity.

Encourage others every single day, as long as it is called today. So keep that verse in mind and say, Lord, I want to fulfill that in this coming year. Encourage one another day after day, so that anyone who comes in touch with me will get encouragement.

Leave it to the prophets to rebuke and correct and do things like that. You say, Lord, I'm not a prophet. I want to engage in the ministry which every believer needs to engage in to encourage, to encourage, encourage, encourage.

Take that ministry seriously because around us are a lot of people, even in our own church here, who can be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. Sin is deceitful. And coming back to what I mentioned in the beginning, if you are not sure that you are filled with the Holy Spirit and receive power from on high, determine today to seek God until God himself gives you an assurance that you are filled with the Holy Spirit.

I'm talking about individual Christians, not as a group. You don't have to go to any prayer meeting. You remember what John the Baptist said.

He, the point of Jesus, he will baptize you in the Holy Spirit. Sometimes people come to me, say, Brother Jack, please lay your hands on me, pray for that I'll be filled with the Holy Spirit. I said, no, I can baptize you in water like John the Baptist said, but he's the one who baptizes in the Holy Spirit, Jesus.

Go to him. I went to him and I found that he's the one who baptized me in the Holy Spirit and the same one who baptized me in the Holy Spirit can baptize you. Go to him.

Dear brothers and sisters, any one of you is not assured that God, Jesus Christ has baptized you in the Holy Spirit, immersed you in the Holy Spirit, filled you with the Holy Spirit, whichever word you use. Go to him and say, Lord, I will not rest until you fill me with the Holy Spirit and until you give me an assurance. I will never take an assurance from man.

I'll get it only from you, Lord. I decided that. I took five, six years to be sure of my salvation and I took many more years to be sure to be filled with the Holy Spirit.

I thank God that in both cases that my sins are forgiven, I got that assurance from the Lord, that I was filled with the Holy Spirit, I got assurance from the Lord in my spirit. I would not take it from man. What's the testimony of man? He doesn't know my heart.

So, dear brothers, don't be satisfied that somebody else thinks you're born again. You may not be or somebody else thinks you're filled with the Holy Spirit. That's worth nothing.

You go to the Lord and say, Lord, you're the one who saved me from sin. Give me the assurance you've forgiven me. I'm a child of God.

You're the one who fills with the Holy Spirit. Fill me with the Holy Spirit and give me that assurance. I seek you with all my heart.

If you thirst, He will fill you. I want to close with an assurance of what God can do for you. Perhaps just a couple of verses.

One in Luke chapter 11 and verse 13. If you being evil know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more, how much more, how much more, how much more will your heavenly Father give the fullness of the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him? Think of how you would not deny your hungry child food. And you think you're thirsty for the Lord's power, the power of the Holy Spirit.

He'll deny you. Impossible. He will give.

And the other verse I want to leave with you is James chapter one. We face so many situations in life where we don't know the answer. Never mind.

James one says, if anyone lacks wisdom, let him ask God. James one five, can you give to everyone freely without reproach? It will be given to anyone, but let him ask in faith. Do you lack wisdom for some situation? He's coming here.

Keep these two verses in mind. Luke 11, 13 and James one, 5 and 6. For your own life and in your relationship with others, I told you Hebrews 3, 13. Can you remember these verses? Hebrews 3, 13, encourage one another.

Luke 11, 13, how much more your heavenly Father will give you the Holy Spirit. And James one, 5 and 6. If you lack wisdom in any situation, seek God. And I believe this coming year will be even better than any year gone by.

Let's pray. Our heavenly Father, please help us to be the church that you want us to be. That our families will be better families you can rejoice in.

That we ourselves will be true disciples walking in your way. I pray in Jesus name. Amen.

Video: <https://sermonindex2.b-cdn.net/TigOjSx73A0.mp4>

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/zac-poonen/thank-god-for-the-past-but-press-on-to-greater-heights/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net