

# The Fear of God and Encouragement

by Zac Poonen

---

*Zac Poonen emphasizes the importance of the fear of God and encouragement through the Holy Spirit for spiritual growth and church health.*

**Duration:** 56:52

**Scripture:** Psalm 139:23, Matthew 11:28, Acts 9:31

**Topics:** "Church Growth", "Spiritual Maturity"

---

## Description

This sermon emphasizes the importance of living in peace, growing spiritually, and increasing in numbers within the church. It highlights the need for peace in relationships, spiritual growth, and the balance between quality and quantity in church growth. The fear of the Lord is discussed as a filter for decision-making and the encouragement of the Holy Spirit is emphasized as a source of hope and unity within the church.

---

## Transcript

I was reminded again this morning of a verse that I hadn't noticed for a long time, but I remember many years ago observing it in the Acts of the Apostles and chapter 9. It's a story of how the early church grew in numbers and spiritually. Acts of the Apostles chapter 9 and verse 31. So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria enjoyed peace, being built up, going on in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit continued to increase.

Now there are some wonderful things there that we would like to see in our churches, in all of our churches. One, we want to enjoy peace. That means peace between husband and wife and every family, peace between brothers, peace between sisters.

We want to live at peace with our neighbors. Peace is a wonderful word and above all we want to live in peace in our mind without fear and anxiety and to enjoy it. There's joy there mixed with the peace.

Imagine if it could be written of our churches, the people in those churches had joy and peace. That'd be a wonderful church. It doesn't matter what the world thinks about us.

It'd be a wonderful home and it would be a wonderful church. And being built up, built up means it was growing spiritually and that's another thing we want to see. We don't want spiritual babies to remain spiritual babies.

We are delighted to have people who are born again and come as spiritual babies in the church, just like every married couple would be happy to have a baby. We are happy too when new people are born again and become children of God. But we don't want them to remain spiritual children, just like no parent wants their baby to remain a baby.

We want our children to grow up strong, spiritually mature, knowing God. And one mark of spiritual maturity is that you don't have to be constantly fed by others. You can feed yourself.

You know, you don't depend on just the Sunday meeting. You can hear God's word, God speaking to you from the word yourself every day. Another mark of maturity in an adult is that not only you can feed yourself, you grow up and you're able to feed others.

You know, mothers and fathers, even older boys and girls can help their younger brothers and sisters. And that's the mark of being built up. And when I look around at Christendom, even among those who are born again, I'm sorry to say, it's very difficult to find adults, plenty of babies.

You know, we think we are spiritual just because we're happy to be fed every Sunday or Wednesday. That's good that you have a hunger for the word of God, like a baby cries for milk. It's a sign of health, very good sign of health that you have a hunger to hear the word of God.

But it should not be that you're always dependent on other people feeding you. We must learn to feed ourselves and grow up to be able to feed others. That is spiritual growth.

And I want to encourage all of you. I'm not trying to condemn anybody. There's no condemnation in the word of God.

There is no condemnation when we are in Christ. We want the spirit of heaven to reign in our church and there's no condemnation in heaven. But that challenges as long as we live on this earth, we need to be challenged.

No one ever accomplished anything without being challenged. See all these people who run the races in the Olympics, they train with somebody who can run very fast. You know, if they want to run a marathon race, well, they may be the world champion, but they get somebody to run just one mile very fast with them and somebody else to run the next mile and somebody else to run the next mile.

So they're being challenged by someone who's running very fast because they know that guy knows he's got to run only one mile. This guy's got to run 40 kilometers. So challenge is the way anybody accomplishes anything.

And we want our churches and the ministry in the churches to always be a challenge, never condemnation, to grow up spiritually. They were built up. And the other thing it says here is the last part of that verse, they continued to increase in numbers.

We don't despise increasing in numbers. We don't place quantity above quality. A lot of churches do, unfortunately.

They glory that we are a huge church of 10,000, 20,000, 30,000. Well, God bless them. I hope they're all disciples, but I have serious doubts because Jesus said, you've got to go and make disciples in every nation.

And I'll tell you, Jesus spoke to more than 30,000. He sometimes spoke to huge crowds, but he concentrated on 12. He made disciples.

He told them, you go and make disciples. Yeah, sure. Speak to the multitudes, but make disciples.

But when you make that multitude into a church, then you're corrupted the whole witness. And that's what's happening in many places, just because somebody likes to come and listen. We think they are disciples.

I mean, if Jesus had followed that rule, he would have had 30,000 disciples. He had only 12 because the conditions of discipleship were pretty straight. But we do believe in growth.

We believe in numbers increasing. God doesn't want just 12 disciples for 2000 years. He wants hundreds and thousands.

God loves the whole world and he wants everyone to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. That's what it says in 1 Timothy 2, verse 4 and 5. God does not only want people to be saved. It says he wants them to come to the knowledge of the truth and both verses mean saved from what? Not saved from hell, but saved from sin, saved from anger, saved from sexual lust, saved from the love of money, saved from bitterness, saved from an unforgiving spirit, saved from jealousy, saved from pride.

God wants everybody to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth about himself, the truth that will set them free. So that is the type of increase we look for where we want numbers to increase without sacrificing quality. Think of these cars that have made a name for themselves, really good cars, you know, the very expensive cars like the Mercedes-Benz and Rolls-Royce and BMW.

They would never want to sacrifice their name for the sake of producing more numbers. Say, no, we'd rather produce less and not sacrifice the wonderful name that we have built up over many years so that if somebody says Rolls-Royce or Cadillac or Mercedes-Benz or BMW, it's got a name and a church must have a name like that. Maybe they produce hundreds of thousands of Rolls-Royces, I don't know, but they don't sacrifice quality and that's very rare to find.

Most churches I find have traveled a lot, sacrifice quality to increase in numbers and we never want to do that, never. We'd rather have people leave our church just like a lot of disciples left Jesus in John chapter 6 saying, this is a hard saying. I've had people come to me and say, Brother Zach, we can't join your church, your standards are too high.

I said, okay, we're not going to lower our standards, sorry. I hope you'll find another church that suits you. We don't wish you any evil.

We wish you the best, but be a disciple of Jesus. Don't have any regret when you stand before the Lord in the final day, but we're not going to lower our standards. When they increased, and that's important, they didn't lower their standards.

In the middle of these phrases I just quoted are the two qualities by which they developed in this way and that's what I want you to look at. The fear of the Lord and the encouragement, the word comfort is the same word which Jesus used the word, I will ask the Father to send you a helper or comforter, somebody who's an encourager. And the meaning is somebody who comes alongside you to help you.

Like you're in a court and you've got the best advocate in the world standing beside you. Doesn't that give you confidence? You're falsely accused in court by somebody and you stand there helpless, but the best advocate in the world comes and says, don't worry, I'll plead your cause. And your heart suddenly comes to rest.

That is the Holy Spirit. One called alongside to help, not only called alongside, it comes right within. To help, helper, encourager.

So they went on, it says, in the fear of the Lord and the encouragement of the Holy Spirit. And those are the two things I just want to speak about this morning. The fear of the Lord and the encouragement of the Holy Spirit.

I find both of these are sadly missing in a lot of Christendom today. There's very little of the fear of God among today's Christians. And there's very little of the spirit of encouragement.

When was the last time you encouraged somebody? Can you think of it? When was the last time you encouraged your wife or your husband with some good words? When was the last time you found fault with your husband or wife? That you can remember quickly, right? But when was the last time you spoke a word of encouragement and appreciation to anybody or to a brother in the church or to someone else? That shows how little of the Holy Spirit we have, even though we think we may be filled with the Holy Spirit. I'll tell you, a man who's filled with the Holy Spirit will seek every opportunity to encourage others. God is a God of encouragement.

There's a lot of deception concerning being filled with the Holy Spirit. But a man who's filled with the Holy Spirit, he'll encourage you. You'll love to be with such a person.

You'll long to talk to such a person because you know that when you go away from meeting such a person, you're always encouraged, not discouraged or feeling condemned. We want all of us to be filled with the Holy Spirit. And the Holy Spirit is also called the spirit of the fear of the Lord.

So both these qualities are related to the Holy Spirit and the acts of the apostles. Some people have said it could be called the acts of the Holy Spirit. That's right.

Because right from the beginning, they were filled with the Holy Spirit. And then you see the acts of the Holy Spirit through the apostles and the other disciples. And there's no Christian, no proper Christianity unless we are filled with the Holy Spirit.

And the reason why there's so much of counterfeit of the Holy Spirit in today's Christendom is because the original is very valuable. Why is there so much counterfeit gold, counterfeit diamonds, but no counterfeit newspapers or counterfeit brown paper? Are you ever scared when you go to buy brown paper that you might get a counterfeit brown paper? You're scared if you're going to buy gold or jewelry or diamonds. Hey, how do I know this genuine? The more there is counterfeit of something, the more it proves the original is very valuable.

And that's why there's such a tremendous amount of counterfeit being born again, counterfeit being filled with the Holy Spirit. All types of gimmicks and stupid things people do today and say it's the Holy Spirit. And I always test it by Jesus.

Jesus is the perfect spirit filled man. And if I can't, when I see somebody doing something, I say, can I imagine Jesus doing that? No, then forget it. That's not the fullness of the Holy Spirit.

That guy's emotion. Maybe he's an emotional creature and he acts like that. I've got nothing against him, but brother, please don't call that the fullness of the Holy Spirit.

Don't insult the Holy Spirit by doing that. I can't imagine Jesus doing what you're doing. The same way a spiritual man will speak in a certain way.

And I say, can I imagine Jesus speaking like that? Boy, then it's spirit food. But if I can't imagine Jesus speaking like that, to me, it's not the fullness of the Spirit. And Jesus, I tell you, he wasn't always gentle.

He said, come to me, all you who are laboring a heavy laden. And he said, how shall you escape hell, you generation of wipers? It was grace and truth in Christ. A man filled with the Holy Spirit will be filled with grace and truth.

So let's look at the fear of the Lord first. Isaiah chapter 11, it says, referring to the Holy Spirit that's going to be upon Jesus Christ. This is a prophetic reference.

Then a shoot will spring from the stem of Jesse. That's the father of David. And Jesus called the son of David.

And from him, the spirit of the Lord will rest on him. That's referring to Christ. And he's called by the sevenfold title, you know, the sevenfold spirit you read in Revelation.

It's all here. One, the spirit of the Lord, the spirit, second spirit of wisdom, spirit of understanding, spirit of counsel, spirit of strength, and sixth spirit of knowledge and seventh, the spirit of the fear of the Lord. Did you know that the Holy Spirit is called the spirit of the fear of the Lord? That means the spirit who brings the fear of the Lord into our heart.

And this spirit was resting on Jesus. Did Jesus need the fear of his father? Yes. When he was on earth as a man, just like us, he needed the spirit of the fear of the father.

And this spirit, and out of all these seven things, characteristics of the Holy Spirit, one is picked out. And that is the fear of the Lord. Verse three, the Holy Spirit will make him delight in the fear of the Lord.

Now, a lot of people don't delight in the fear of the Lord. To them, you know, the spirit of the fear of the Lord is like some painful injection, which they have to take, or some chemotherapy, which they don't like, but they have to take because they've got to get rid of the cancer. It's not something they enjoy.

I mean, whereas here it's a delight. It's like having ice cream. I mean, there's a lot of difference between having ice cream and having chemotherapy, right? But here's something you delight in.

Delight in the fear of the Lord. If that hasn't happened in your life, I'll tell you, brother and sister, you need to be filled with the Holy Spirit. That's what you need.

The real Holy Spirit that filled Jesus. When you're really filled with the Holy Spirit and not some counterfeit spirit, he will make you delight. The fear of the Lord will be like ice cream for you.

Every day you delight in it. And one of the results of that fear of the Lord will be when you delight in the fear of the Lord, verse three, you will never again judge by what your eyes see. You'll never again judge, make a decision merely by what your ears hear.

I think it means merely. It's not that we shut our eyes and shut our ears and live in the world. Jesus didn't live like that.

He observed, he heard, but he didn't make a decision based on those things because he had recognized I may be deceived by what I see. I may be deceived by what I hear. There may be more to the truth than that.

So he would not judge, pass a judgment by what he saw or make a decision by what he heard. Just think of those two things. From the time we come to an age of understanding as little children, all of us, we have absorbed a lot of information into our minds from our parents, from our home, from neighbors, from good friends, from bad friends, from school, all the dirty things people taught us in school and all the good things we learned in school.

And we come to the church and we mingle with God-fearing people in the church and we mingle with hypocrites in the church and very often there are more hypocrites than God-fearing people in every church. And we are exposed to what we hear and see, critics, gossips, and the powerful messages. Now the question is, all this information that comes into our mind, it's on that basis, that information that we take decisions.

It's like a computer where you put in a lot of data, data, data, data, data, data, and then the computer gives you a result. That's how our brain works. We get all this information and we produce a decision.

Now if you feed wrong information into the computer, you know that you're going to get a wrong answer. You know that very well when it comes to computers. But it's exactly the same with our mind.

If I feed polluted, sinful information to my mind, you're going to make a wrong decision in life, which there'll be consequences years later. Think of some of the foolish decisions you made in the past and the consequences that lasted for a long time. Some of you got into debt and suffered for years.

If you had just listened to God's Word, which says, oh, no man anything, the life would have been saved from all that. People who get into credit card debt are the most foolish people on the face of the earth. They're just ruining themselves.

Their lust to buy something without having the money for it, neglecting the Word of God. If Jesus were living today, I'm absolutely sure he would never be in credit card debt. He'd have paid his credit card bills every month.

And if he couldn't afford something and he felt by next month I won't be able to pay this bill, he wouldn't buy that. Even though he had the opportunity with a credit card, he wouldn't do it. That's what the fear of the Lord brings.

It's very down-to-earth and practical. It makes our life happier. The early church grew in the fear of the Lord, and that's what we want.

He would not make a decision by what his years, all these advertisements that tell you in the newspapers, on the billboards, you can't live without this. Actually I can. Man lived without that for 5,000 years.

How did man live for 5,000 years? Don't believe all these ads that you can't live without this, you can't live without that. Yes, you can't satisfy your lust without that. That I agree.

But you can certainly live without it if you want to, if you want a peaceful life and a joyful life. You listen to that inner voice of the Holy Spirit and you make a decision in righteousness. And the same thing with what we hear about other people.

You hear somebody said so-and-so, so-and-so did this, so-and-so said this. I'll tell you honestly, I can't throw stones at anybody because I've made mistakes myself. I've sometimes heard something horrible about some brother in some church over which I have some responsibility.

And immediately I say, boy, that's terrible. You got to do something about it. And I've always regretted whenever I have acted immediately.

But I've learned through the years, there are three sides. When there is a dispute between two people, there are three sides. What side A says, what side B says, and the third is the truth, which is probably neither of these two or somewhere in between the two.

I've learned that through painful experiences for many years. And now I think I've learned it, that I'm not to believe what I hear. I'm not even to believe what I see.

Supposing I see a brother going into a bar on Brigade Road. Well, maybe going there to witness to somebody. But if you've got a polluted mind, you say, boy, I saw that man going into the bar.

What for? I know brothers who go into bars to witness for Christ. They usually get thrown out, but that's what they go for. So there could be many things like that.

You'll be very, very happy if you follow Jesus, who did not make a decision by what he heard or would not judge by what he saw, but waited for the Holy Spirit to tell him. He took that information in, but sifted it and filtered it and said, what is righteous, O Father? Now there's a verse in Romans chapter three, which tells us, Romans chapter three tells us a description of the condition of the world, sinful world. There are many things written there from verse 10 to 18, describing how all the world is guilty.

He's saying in verse nine, that both Jews and Greeks are all under sin. The last part of verse nine, Romans three, nine, as it is written. And there's a huge list of things mentioned there.

None righteous, no one who understands, no one who seeks after God, all have turned aside. Verse 12, no one does good, not even one, their throat is an open grave and so on and on and on. And he says to sum it all up, verse 18, it's like totaling it all up.

The sum of it all is, there is no fear of God before their eyes. They don't fear God. In that one sentence, you have summed up the sin of the whole world.

They sin because they do not fear God. So the opposite of that must be true. That if I do fear God, I'll stay away from sin.

Paul says, you know, some people think fear of the Lord. Hey, that's an old Testament concept. Isn't it grace of God in the new Testament and fear of God in the old Testament? See, there are two types of fear of God.

One is the fear that God may hurt me. And the other is the fear that I may hurt God. You understand that? The fear that a child has, my father may hurt me if I do this.

And the fear that an adult son has, I may hurt my father if I do this. That's another type of fear. And that's the type of fear we should have.

The fear that I may hurt God by what I say, the way I speak, the way I do something, the way I treat somebody. I don't think any loving father will hurt. And I don't think God hurts his children, but he's very disappointed with a lot of his children.

He's sad more than he's hurt. So our prayer is, Lord, point out anything in me that makes you sad. It's a lovely paraphrase of the last verse of Psalm 139 in the Living Bible.

Lord, point out anything in me that makes you sad. You remember we printed that out in a card and gave it out some time ago to a number of people. Lord, point out anything in me that makes you sad.

So that's a New Testament concept, all right, the fear of the Lord. And I'll show you that. It says about Jesus in Hebrews 5, very often we wonder why our prayers are not heard.

I think every Christian would have this question in his mind. I prayed so many prayers and a lot of them have not been heard. Why is it some people's prayers are heard more than other people's? Why does it say in James 5 verse 17, the prayer of a righteous man avails much before God, has tremendous power before God.

The prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much. Why? Because that man fears God. It says about Jesus in Hebrews 5, in the days of his flesh, this is verse 7, Hebrews 5, 7, in the days of his flesh and during those 33 and a half years, he offered up prayers.

Jesus prayed. Prayer is always a sign of weakness, need for God's help. People who are strong and don't need God's help, don't pray.

People who think their money is more than enough, don't pray. People who are powerful, strong personalities, think they can manage life, they don't pray. But people who recognize, Lord, I can't make it through this earth without your help, they pray.

The more self-sufficient you are, I can tell you, the less you pray. And if you didn't know it, put it the other way around. The less you pray, whether you know it or not, the more self-sufficient you are.

But the more we feel the need of God, like we sing that song, I Need Thee Every Hour. I remember hearing about a man who heard that song, I Need Thee Every Hour, and he said, no, that's not enough. And he wrote another song called Moment By Moment.

You know that song. He wrote it because he said, every hour is not enough. Moment by moment, I'm dependent on you.

It's like that. Prayer, Jesus prayed. And supplication means specific requests, specific requests with loud crying and tears.

And that's why he went off into the wilderness, so he wouldn't disturb anybody when he prayed. Why did Jesus on earth pray with such loud crying and tears? He was earnest. You know, when you're earnest, you really pray from your heart, even if you don't raise your voice.

Think if your child was seriously sick in a hospital, and the doctors are about to give up hope, how will you pray? Boy, you really pray with crying out to God. God, please heal my child, because you're desperate. Now your money doesn't help you.

You've got the best doctors because you're rich, and they can't help you. Now you say it's only God. He prayed.

He prayed like that because he felt his desperate need of help from the Father. And his prayer was not for money. His prayer was not for comfort.

His prayer was to save him from death. Now there are two deaths mentioned in the Bible, physical death, spiritual death. Physical death comes to everybody, believers and unbelievers.

Spiritual death is a result of sin. James 1 says, sin when it is finished brings death. Wherever there's sin, there's spiritual death.

Even if you touch it for a second, there's death. The Old Testament, the Lord taught the priests like that. He says, if your sanctified clothes, which you're wearing, or some sanctified vessel you're taking, according to the Old Testament standards of sanctification, touch something unclean, it's spoiled.

You know, like a surgeon, why does he scrub his hand for so many minutes and wear sterilized gloves because he's digging inside somebody's body? He doesn't want to take infection in there. And supposing his glove drops to the ground, do you think he'll pick it up and put it on again? No, unless it's some third-rate hospital. Otherwise, he'd say, get me another glove.

Boy, I wish we Christians would live like that. You know, death, there's germs there. I know it fell to the ground only for a second.

I can't pick it up. We can learn a lot from those surgeons because we can pass on infection. To others, when we are polluted ourselves.

So Jesus wanted to be saved from death. And we know that it was spiritual death because the next verse says his prayer was heard. His prayer was not heard to be saved from physical death.

He never prayed that prayer. He was not saved from physical death. He was saved from spiritual death.

He avoided sin throughout his life. Whenever he was tempted, Hebrews 4.15 says he was tempted like us, but he never sinned. Why? Because he prayed like this for help.

He could have come here on earth and lived as God. You know, temptation would have rolled off him like water off a duck's back. Then he would not have been an example for us because you and I know how what a struggle it is to overcome sin even for 24 hours.

You know that. I mean, to live 12 hours a day without sinning is tough. Never speak an angry word.

Never have a dirty thought. Never have anything but purity and love and goodness and humility in our mind. Can you keep that up? No.

And Jesus kept it up for 33 and a half years as a man because he was filled with the Holy Spirit, the spirit of the fear of the Lord. He walked around the earth and all this information was going into his mind with eyes and ears, but he filtered it out. No, that's not for me.

That's not for me. Suggestions like turn the stones into bread. No, I won't do that because the Father doesn't allow that.

Why don't you go to the top of the temple and jump down and test God to see whether he will protect you. Claim a promise like when you're sick, don't take any medicine, just jump off and claim the promise that the Lord will heal me or by his stripes I'm healed or something like that. Don't let the devil make a fool of you.

Jesus said, no, I will not tempt God like that. It's all tempting God trying to claim a promise and God has provided stairs. Why should you jump off the roof? Isn't that sensible? When God has provided food, why should we say God make me strong without eating food? Medicine is another type of food and God's provided medicine to say, heal me without medicine.

That's tempting God. Many things like that. Jesus, there's all these ideas people put into his head, perhaps he would filter it all out.

No, no, no. You cannot avoid information coming into your head through eyes and ears, but you've got to filter it out if you fear God. The spirit of the fear of the Lord made him not make decisions by what he saw and heard.

There was an inner filter. All of us need that. The fear of the Lord is like a filter.

You know, as I said, as long as you live in the world, you read the newspapers, you sit at the computer, there's information flooding your mind. You've got to have this filter, otherwise you'll be polluted and you will destroy yourself. And you may imagine that you're a disciple of Jesus Christ.

You're not. You're just a third rate Christian like all the rest of Christendom. It's not a question of what denomination you sit in.

Do you have the fear of the Lord inside? We're to be disciples of Jesus Christ. You know, I sometimes meet people who have left our church and gone to another church and say, God bless you, brother. I'm happy to meet you.

I don't care what church you go to. Are you a disciple of Jesus Christ? Are you following him every day? That's what I want to know. That's the important thing.

And if you are, I don't care what church you go to. Be a disciple of Jesus Christ in daily life, in your home, in your place of work, when you travel in the bus or the train, on the roads, when other people are full of road rage, that you behave like a Christian. That's discipleship.

For that, we've got to pray. And it says his prayer, this is the point I wanted to come to. He was heard, Hebrews 5, 7, because of his godly fear.

Why did the father listen to Jesus? Because of his godly fear. Why are our prayers not heard so often? God loves us as he loved Jesus. He'll treat us exactly like he treated Jesus.

And if Jesus' prayers were heard because of his godly fear, I believe my prayers can be heard if I have godly fear. And if I don't have godly fear, my prayers are not heard. You say, oh, father, why aren't you hearing my prayer? Because you're not like Jesus.

You don't want to be like him. You're being influenced more by the spirit of the world and by Jesus Christ. So you see how important the fear of the Lord is.

He's sensitive. I was studying the fear of God once. And I noticed that the first time in the Bible, the word fear of God comes.

It's very interesting. It's good to have a concordance to study the Bible. First time the word fear of God comes is in Genesis 20.

And it's in relation to sexual sin. That's the point I noticed. Abraham was in a strange place.

And he was afraid the king there would kill him and take his wife. Because even though his wife was 80 years old, she was pretty. And he told his wife, Sarah, please say you're my sister.

That's one of Abraham's mistakes. Like saying, it doesn't matter if they rape you, my life should be saved. So don't think Abraham was always a great man of God.

Sometimes he did some selfish things. God forgave him because he was under the old covenant. He didn't have the Holy Spirit.

I hope none of you say that. Anyway, Abraham explains to that king why he said it. Abimelech said, verse 10, Genesis 20, verse 10, why have you done this? Why did you tell me a lie? I could have sinned by having sex with your wife.

And Abraham said, verse 11, because I thought surely there is no fear of God in this place and they will kill me because of my wife. There is no fear of God. These fellows are sexually, you know, polluted and they don't have any sexual standards here.

So I noticed that it's interesting that the first time the Holy Spirit uses the phrase, the fear of God is in relation to sexual sin. As I meditated on it, the Lord showed me that it is through sexual temptation more than in any other area that I test whether men especially fear me or not. That was a great help for me to know that from scripture.

Because I asked the Lord, I said, Lord, why do you allow sexual desire to arouse, start, rise up in a boy when he's 13, 14 years old, when he can't get married sometimes for the next 10 or 15 years? Why didn't you let boys be like innocent sweet little two-year-olds till they are 28 years old? Wouldn't that be wonderful if 28-year-old boys were innocent like two-year-olds, mingling freely with boys and girls, and then they can get married at that age? And the Lord said, because I want them to conquer in the sexual area before they get married. Did you hear it? That's why the desire starts when you're 13. God who created us could have made the desire start when you are 25 or 28, but he started it at 13 so that we

battle it, battle it, conquer it in our thoughts before we get married.

What a wonderful thing it is. Many of us who are married, it's too late now, but those of you who are still single, you know, I'll tell you there are lots of things that I preach in this pulpit, which I learned the hard way, which I wish I had a spiritual father when I was converted at 19 who could have told me all this. I could have started the victorious life much earlier than I did.

That's the privilege many of you have, to hear the most wonderful truths in Scripture. Will God give us the power to overcome it? Sure, that's the spirit of the fear of the Lord, the spirit of power, the same spirit that lived in Jesus, enabled him never to sin with even one sinful thought. Believe that that is the Holy Spirit that dwells in you.

No wonder the devil has diverted the attention of people saying Holy Spirit is just excitement and noise and all that. No, it's purity. God could have called the third person of the Trinity by many names, humble spirit, powerful spirit, loving spirit, many, many names, but he called him Holy Spirit to teach us that the primary thing he imparts to us is holiness.

So remember that, take the sexual area very seriously. It says, Paul says, one day we'll stand before the judgment seat of Christ, 2 Corinthians 5, and give an account to him, verse 10. We shall all stand at the judgment seat of Christ, believers, 2 Corinthians 5, 10, so that we can be rewarded for whatever we did in our body, good or bad.

God's going to play a videotape of our whole life and say, there it is, there's your life, how you lived from the day you were born again. All that's before born again is cleansed. And everything that you did after you were born again that was wrong, which you confessed and turned away from is also cleansed in the blood of Christ.

Then we are rewarded according to what we did. Then he says in verse 11, therefore, therefore what? Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord, we urge other believers. Chapter 7, verse 1, 2 Corinthians 7, 1, since we have these wonderful promises, let us cleanse ourselves from every filthiness, not only of the outward things in the flesh, but the inner things of the spirit, thoughts, attitudes, motives, as much as our words and actions.

And how do we do it? We perfect holiness, not in the fear of man, but in the fear of God. There's a lot of holiness, which is holiness in the fear of man. Will somebody catch me? Like somebody said, there's only one commandment a lot of people live by, thou shalt not get caught.

Most believers live by one commandment, thou shalt not get caught. That's the fear of man. That's not holiness.

I've heard of one group where there was a guy who claimed he could prophesy about all the secret sins you did today. People were scared to go to the meeting because I don't know, maybe the devil told him some of the things that people did. The devil knows everything you did.

And if the devil gets into a man, he can tell you what all you did today. And people thought, this is a Christian group. People thought, boy, everybody there is holy because they cleanse themselves before they come to the meeting because they don't want to get exposed.

They asked me what I thought of it. This is a true story. I said, it's immediately, it's clear to me, those guys are perfecting holiness in the fear of man.

They're afraid of being exposed in the meeting. That's not true holiness. Here it says we perfect holiness in the fear of God.

That's why God doesn't tell me what you did yesterday. And I don't want to know. Be thankful.

I know nothing about your past life. Not even what you did this morning. I don't know who yelled at their husband or wife this morning.

I don't want to know. And even if I did, how does it help me? How does it help you? It won't make you holy. Perfect holiness in the fear of God.

God sees me every day, morning, noon, and night. Even when there's nobody in the house, the Lord is there. I must be careful about how I speak to the people in my home, how I speak to my neighbor.

When I'm signing a document in the office, I must see, is it correct? Am I telling a lie to make a little more money? Nobody's watching. God is a witness. I remember once a brother in CFC, not here now, asked me whether I would sign as a witness to a document.

And I looked through it and I said, I can't say this is obviously sinful here, the statement you're making, but I feel a little unease because there's a little bit of, I think, unrighteousness. So if you feel free in your conscience, go ahead and sign it. I don't feel free in my conscience to sign as a witness, so excuse me.

And he respected me enough to say, okay, if you don't feel free for that, I won't do it. And it turned out for his benefit, which he acknowledged later on, because it saved him from a calamity and God gave him something better. You'll never lose out by honoring God.

Second thing is the encouragement of the Holy Spirit. This is very, very important. And the great example is Jesus.

And you've often heard me say that Jesus was a great encourager and he didn't just encourage wholehearted believers. He would encourage people who are not even converted. Nathaniel, a Jewish person, you read in the end of John chapter one, the first time he meets Jesus, he says, there's a man in whom there is zero hypocrisy, no guile.

What would I do if Jesus ever said that to me? I said, boy, I'll frame that verse and hang it up in my house. Yes. What a commendation, what an encouragement.

That can keep me going for years. One word or take another military man, unbeliever. See, military men have killed a lot of people in war.

And you know, military men are pretty corrupt and crooked, but some of them are God-fearing, caught in a system which they can't escape. A Roman centurion, Matthew 8, he doesn't know the Bible, doesn't know head or tail about the true God. He comes to Jesus.

He just has a respect for Jesus and belief that Jesus doesn't have to come to his house to heal a child or a servant. Stand here and speak the word, because I know when I tell a soldier to go, he goes. And Jesus looks around at all the people and say, hey, fellas, I've never seen faith in all of Israel, like in this

unconverted, idol-worshiping, perhaps military man who's killed so many people, but he's probably turned and seeking after God.

He doesn't know anything. He doesn't know a verse of the Bible, but he's got faith. What do you think that Roman centurion did? I believe I'll meet him in heaven.

I think I'll meet him in heaven because that word of encouragement would have lifted his spirit. Jesus was like that. You remember how Peter cut off that soldier's ear in Gethsemane? And Jesus immediately picked it up and healed him.

I believe I'll meet that person in heaven. In fact, I believe that person went later on to Peter in heaven and say, thank you for cutting off my ear. Because of that, I'm here today in heaven.

Otherwise I wouldn't have known the goodness of Jesus and gone to hell. I praise God how Jesus makes the mistakes of his disciples turn for good. I've seen that happen many times in my life.

Something I did in sincerity, Peter did it in sincerity. He wanted to protect his Lord. Hey, nobody's going to come near my Lord.

Jesus saw that. And so he brought something good out of it. I believe Malchus, that servant, will be in heaven because he saw the goodness of Jesus in that situation.

He was a great encourager. I see that even in Revelation 2 and 3. Even to the churches that have got so many problems in them, except one or two, he always starts with saying, hey, I see so many good things in you. You're zealous.

You've got your doctrine pure. You're always seeking to keep away false teachers. You're persevering and not grown weary, but you have left your first love.

And if you don't repent, I'll have to just check you out. See how he says it. I hope the elder in Ephesus has repented.

I mean, if the Lord had spoken to me like that, I would have said, Lord, I want to come back to my first love. Look at the good things you say. I always tell people, before you correct somebody, ask yourself how much you have appreciated that person.

Have you encouraged your children? Or only corrected, corrected, corrected. Don't do this. Don't do this.

Don't do this. Don't do this from childhood. Like that little child, you know, who a teacher once, in a kindergarten, a teacher asked him, what's your name? He said, my name is Johnny Don't.

Because that's what he always heard. Johnny, don't do this. Johnny, don't do that.

He thought his name was Johnny Don't. What do your children think their names are? Okay. There are times, there are many times you say, don't do that.

Don't touch that for their own good. But Johnny, what a wonderful boy you are. Learn to say something good to your wife, to your children.

Follow Jesus, the spirit of encouragement. That's how, and encourage one another in the church. I remember when I was a very, very young man, insecure, defeated by sin.

And I was in a meeting once, and a much, much older godly man came to me, put his arm on my shoulder, and said, God's got a plan for your life. That's me. I was so encouraged.

Today, I haven't forgotten it after 40 years. It was one sentence. I forgot all the messages spoken in that series of meetings.

Everything. But I didn't forget this one sentence. It's like that, brothers and sisters.

Your children will remember one sentence when you speak to them. Encourage them. Encourage them.

God is a God of encouragement, and the Holy Spirit is called an encourager. There are many wonderful verses about encouragement in the New Testament. Let me show you Romans chapter 15.

Romans 15, it says here, verse 4, whatever was written in earlier times, Old Testament, was written for our instruction, so that through perseverance and encouragement of the scriptures, we might have hope. How many of you read the Old Testament and get encouragement through it? I get tremendous encouragement when I read the Old Testament, even though I know the Old Covenant has been abolished. It says, through patience and comfort of the scriptures, instruction through perseverance and the encouragement of the scriptures, we have hope.

Look what God did for those men in the Old Testament, how he honored them. God will do that for me. Even though they blundered and slipped up sometimes, God forgave them.

It's a hope for me. Much more in the New Testament when I read it. The whole purpose of the scripture is to give us encouragement.

Think of this phrase, the encouragement of the scriptures to give us hope. Read the Bible like that, and if you guys are mostly discouraged, it's because you don't read the Bible, or you don't read it in the proper way, or you think it's all condemnation, condemnation, condemnation. I've always felt in the early days when I didn't know much and I was a legalist myself, I thought the way to lead people to holiness was preach hard and make them feel condemned.

It never produced holy people. I've discovered now it's more by encouragement. The church must be a place where we never hear a discouraging word.

It's one of those songs I wrote some time ago. Church is my home. Where never is heard a discouraging word.

Imagine if our church can be like that. Where never is heard a discouraging word. Oh, the church is my home.

That's where I want to be, and I want our church to be like that. It says here further in verse five, may the God who gives perseverance and encouragement grant you to be of the same mind with one another. The God who gives perseverance and encouragement.

God is the one who gives encouragement. Let's follow his example. Let's be filled with this spirit, the spirit of encouragement, the spirit of the fear of the Lord, and I believe we will grow.

Our families will grow, and our church will grow. Let's bow before God in prayer. I hope what you heard today challenged you without any discouragement or condemnation.

With the faith that the Holy Spirit has been given, has been here on earth for 2,000 years, you just got to open yourself up to the Holy Spirit like you open the windows of your house to the sunlight and to the fresh air coming in. If you're going to a stuffy house, you say, let's open the windows. It's stuffy in here.

If your heart is stuffy, open the windows to the Holy Spirit right now and say, Spirit of God, let your fresh air come breathing. I've heard, had enough of stuffy, smelly stuff in my heart. I want to get rid of it today.

I want your spirit to come blowing through me, cleansing out everything and filling me with joy and peace, and make me one, an encourager in my home, an encourager to every brother, sister in the church. Heavenly Father, help us each one we pray. We have such a short time on earth.

We don't have time to just go around discouraging people and condemning them, certainly not in our own homes. Oh Lord, such a short time we live with our loved ones at home. Help us not to wait till they die to speak good words about them.

Help us to speak good words to them when they're alive. Help us to live in the fear of God in a world which has no fear of you, that we shall be a living testimony to you, for you, as we look forward to your coming in glory, to seeing you face to face. We'll have no regret in that day.

We pray in Jesus name.

---

Video: <https://sermonindex2.b-cdn.net/1t0KjavbBn8.mp4>

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/zac-poonen/the-fear-of-god-and-encouragement/>

# *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](http://www.sermonindex.net)**