

The Secret Of Fellowship With God

by Zac Poonen

The sermon focuses on the importance of fellowship with God and one another as highlighted in 1 John, emphasizing the need for vertical fellowship with God and horizontal fellowship with fellow believers to build the church. It discusses the hindrances to fellowship, such as a bad conscience, and the significance of maintaining a clear conscience to hear God's voice clearly. The speaker shares personal experiences and examples to illustrate the blessings of honoring God in decisions, speaking the truth, and choosing God over worldly opportunities.

Scripture: 1 John 1:3, 1 John 1:4, Psalm 139:23, Matthew 4:4, Luke 19:9, Proverbs 3:5, James 5:16, Colossians 3:23, 1 Corinthians 10:31

Topics: "Fellowship with God", "Building Community in Christ"

Description

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Transcript

I want to turn to 1 John. 1 John is a very good letter to read, the first letter of John. And there are many wonderful things, you know, there are many people who feel that, you know, these are the letters, unlike some of the other letters written by earlier, this is the last letters of the apostles, 1 John, 2 John, 3 John and Revelation and the Gospel of John.

And I think they were all written when John was about 90 years old. So he had all that wealth of 60 years of experience when he wrote this. But notice what it says in 1 John.

The reason why we are writing this in the middle is verse 3, 1 John 1 3, is that you may have fellowship with us and our fellowship is with the Father and His Son, Jesus Christ. So the whole purpose of this letter is that we'll have vertical fellowship with God and horizontal fellowship with one another. That is the essence of building the church.

If you only have fellowship with one another, it's not a church, it's a club where everybody cares for one another, loves one another. And if you have a whole lot of people who don't have any relationship with each other, but only have relationship with the Lord, then it's a congregation. But to be a church, you need fellowship.

Everyone has to have personal fellowship with the Lord and with one another. Same thing in a family. It's not enough that husband and wife have fellowship with each other.

They must have fellowship with the Lord first. Then their fellowship with each other will be much better. So he says, this is the reason why I'm writing this, that you can have fellowship with the Father and Son and with us.

And when you have that type of fellowship, one thing will be true. Verse 4, 1 John 1 4, your joy will be made full and complete. The secret of overflowing joy, freedom from discouragement, condemnation, is to fellowship with the Father and with one another.

What is the thing that hinders fellowship? Number one, a bad conscience. If anything in your life, if it gives you a bad conscience, you have to set it right immediately. It's like a speck in your eye.

The dust goes into your eye. You don't need two pieces of two bits of dust. One piece of dust goes into your eye.

It irritates you, irritates you, irritates you till you wash it off. Even if you're doing a very important work, you'll stop it and wash off your eye because it irritates you while you're doing that work. Your conscience must irritate you in exactly the same way.

Then you're walking with the Lord, where it irritates you so much that you stop everything and set it right before you proceed with your work. If you can continue with your work, with your conscience troubling you, I'd say there's something wrong with your prisma. That means you're not treating your conscience like your eyes.

You know what will happen if you ignore the dust that goes into your eyes? You'll become blind after a while. You know why your eye is always watering? I don't know whether you know that, that you blink so often because the blinking is to clean your eyes. Your eye, what you call tears, are God's method of washing your eyes.

The cleanest part of your body are your eyes because it's being washed so many times in a day, hundreds of times. Every time you blink, it's washing, washing, washing. And there is a message there.

Keep your conscience like that. No matter how careful you are in this world, dust can get into your eyes. And if you don't blink frequently, you won't be able to wash it.

You know, when people get leprosy, one of the things that happens is something dies here. They're not able to close their eyes. They're not able to blink.

Leprosy sort of kills something here. And so doctors have to do an operation to connect some other muscle to that, something like, you know, grinding your teeth or something. That muscle is connected to the eyelid.

So every time they want to close their eyes, they've got to grind their teeth. That's how a leprosy person closes his eyes. And the doctors tell them, do that frequently, otherwise you will become blind.

The blindness does not come because of the leprosy. The blindness comes because they're not blinking enough to wash their eyes. That is the reason many Christians are blind and deaf spiritually.

If you keep your conscience clear, you will have a much clearer vision of the Christian life, and you'll be able to hear the voice of God more clearly in your spirit. I don't know whether you realize that the most important thing for a human being is to be able to listen to God speaking. Because Jesus said, man shall not live by bread alone, Matthew 4.4, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.

That's not referring to the Bible. This proceeded from God 2,000 years ago. But there it says, which proceeds, present tense.

It means God is always speaking. That is a message in the first page of the Bible. What do you read in the first page of the Bible? On the first day, God said this.

On the second day, God said this. On the third day, God said this. The fourth day, fifth day.

Every day, God was saying something. And that is the message in the first page of your Bible. God is saying to you, every day of your life, I want to speak to you.

If you have seven days a week, I want to speak to you seven days a week. That's the message in the very first page of the Bible. But so many people don't hear.

Why don't they hear? Conscience is not clear. You've got sin in your conscience. Your ears are plugged.

Your eyes become blind. You don't hear God. And then what you call life is not life.

It's physical life. But God, Jesus said, man shall live, capital L-I-V-E, by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God. So the way to live is to have a heart that's always open to hear God speaking to me.

And there are many areas, you know, I like to hear God telling me, where should I do? What should I do today? I'm considering a particular decision. Should I take it or not? And you pray and pray. There doesn't seem to be a clear answer.

You know why? Because for all the days and weeks and months preceding that, you did not listen to your conscience. And then suddenly we are in a crisis and I want to hear God and I can't hear him because we become deaf. So it's a wonderful thing if you keep your conscience clear, be very sensitive, even little children.

As soon as you do something wrong, ask Jesus to forgive you. If you hurt your brother or sister, ask them to forgive you. Well, the wonderful blessing that will come to you from that is that in a time of need, when you say, Lord, what shall I do? In some way you will sense in your heart, God telling you what to do.

See, I'm so thankful that God has directed me like that in my life. One of the first things I sought to do when I was born again, I was baptized in 1961, which is 60 years ago, January 61. And I gave my whole life to the Lord.

I was still working in the Navy those days, but I learned to keep a good conscience. And as soon as I did something wrong, I'd ask the Lord to forgive me. I didn't have victory over sin, but I was trying.

But if I slipped up, I'd say, Lord, help me, cleanse me, forgive me. And little I knew, I was like a little child. Because I kept my conscience clear, one day I heard God saying to me through the scripture to leave my job in the Navy.

It's about just three years after my baptism. Now, God doesn't call, he calls only one person in a thousand to serve him full-time like me. The others are to be faithful in their own job.

All the other 999 people are to serve in the secular job and be faithful to Jesus. But one in a thousand God calls to full-time work. And, oh boy, imagine if I'd missed hearing that call.

I'd have been some big officer in the Navy and wasted my life. But God gave me something far more wonderful. So I'm very thankful that even when I was 24 years old, I could hear God saying something to me and I could respond.

And when I applied for my resignation, the Naval headquarters said, no, we can't let you go. We spent four and a half years spending so much money training you to be a Naval officer. And now after three years, you want to quit? Sorry, you can't quit.

And I was very discouraged. I said, Lord, did I hear you right? Yeah. I read those passages of scripture which God spoke to me and I was clear.

Then Lord, why didn't they accept it? You know what the Lord said to me? From scripture. It's not by this here I hear, I hear in my heart. What did Pharaoh say to Moses when Moses said, let my people go that they may serve me? Pharaoh said, no.

So did Moses say, oh, maybe God didn't call me. No, Moses didn't know. God called me, but Pharaoh was saying, no.

So the Lord said to me, what did Moses do? He went back to Pharaoh and said, you've got to let me go. And again, he said, no. Again, he went back.

He finally got out. I got my answer from scripture. So I put in my resignation again.

Again, he said, no. And sat like that. And finally, one day after two years of my trying, one day the admiral and the headquarters changed.

Some new man came in and immediately I was released. I believe God changed the admiral up there just to release me because the previous guy would not release me. So when you listen to God, it's a wonderful thing.

And not only that, through the years, I say, Lord, what do you want me to do? Different, different things. Even when it came to my marriage, I was praying in 1967. Lord, is this the right person for me? And again, by clear word from God, I chose the right person.

What a blessing it is to be married to the right person. Particularly when you have a calling from God to serve him, you need someone who's 100% supporting that. And that's really been true all these 52 years with all the struggles we've gone through in our first four years of our married life.

I was really rock bottom poor. I couldn't even afford house rent. We were very, very poor.

But my wife stood by me because called of God. So it's a wonderful thing to hear God in every step. And then when the Lord started planting churches, the Lord told me, you must not go to everybody who invites you for a meeting.

I get hundreds of invitations. If I get a peace in my heart, I'll go. I'll give you one example.

In 1983, January, I got an invitation from Kerala, from a huge Pentecostal church that were having their annual convention with 10,000 people. They wanted me to come and be the main speaker. And at the same time, I got an invitation from a very small church in Kerala of 15, 20 people were meeting together who also asked me to come.

And they were at the same time. Now, the average preacher will choose the 10,000 member conference. But the Lord said, no, I want you to go not to the, say no to the 10,000 member conference and go to this 15, 20 member church.

I said, okay, Lord. I wrote to that big Pentecostal group and said, sorry, folks, I can't come. And to the small little church, I said, thank you for the invitation.

I'll come. And so I went there in January, 1983. And that's how the church in Kottayam started.

It's a flourishing church today. And from there, so many other churches came up in Kerala. I said, boy, what I would have missed if I accepted the other invitation.

The same thing happened in Tamil Nadu when the Lord took me to Tuticorin first in January, 1983, around the same time and different, different places. I find that if you listen to God, God has a plan. And he knows better than me what he wants to do.

And I want to say to that, to all of you, develop the habit of listening. And you say, I can't hear God's voice. That's how it all starts.

Start with a good conscience. Forget about everything else. See, God may not be calling you to plant churches like me.

That's my calling. Your calling may be different. So don't worry about that part.

But you need to keep a good conscience and then little decisions, God will guide you. He's interested in every detail of your life. I mean, if he's interested in the hair in your head, like Jesus said, why won't he be interested in other details of your life, your children and your family life? And I remember when my four sons wanted to get married.

Boy, very big decision. Of course, we were praying for them. I had to advise them and guide them and say yes or no.

And today, when I look at their married lives, and I said, boy, each one of them you gave, Lord, you gave the right person for each one of them. And I'm very thankful. So I want to encourage you from a very early part of your Christian life, develop the habit of listening to God.

That is fellowship means you're listening. You're hearing God and you're obeying him. Hearing God, then fellowship deepens.

As man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word proceeds from the mouth of God. Remember that all your life, I have to live by every word that proceeds from God's mouth. And he primarily speaks to my conscience.

Other things, Lord, shall I go here? Shall I go there? That may take time to hear God's voice there. But the voice of conscience you can detect easily because you feel very, very important. If you say something to hurt your wife or your husband, listen to that voice and go and ask God's forgiveness and ask forgiveness from your partner or your children, from your parents.

Believe me, if you just listen to this advice of mine, and you know, for example, in your work, you're tempted to tell a small lie to escape some problem. Maybe you created some problem and nobody detected it. So you can escape by telling a lie.

Don't do it. You may keep your job, but you lose fellowship with God. Do you think if you honor God by telling the truth, he will let you down? Impossible.

There are so many people I know who come to the United States telling all types of lies to get a visa. I tell them, listen, brother, what is more important for you, a visa to the United States or fellowship with Jesus Christ? What I told my children too, when they were applying, I said, I'm not interested in going to a place which is not God's will for you, because something or the other will happen and your life will get messed up. I want you to go to where God wants you to be.

And you don't get to the place God wants you to be by telling lies. There are little situations like that, financial matters, office matters. You may escape a difficult situation by telling a lie.

That's where God tells you, man shall live by every word that proceeds from God's mouth, speak the truth. Do you think God will let you down because you spoke the truth? You know, the devil always says, you're in a tight spot, but a lie will save you out of this tight spot. Telling a lie will save you from this difficult situation.

And the Holy Spirit says, almighty God will save you from this difficult situation. Now you have a conflict. Am I going to trust an almighty God to save me from this situation? Or am I going to trust this lie to save me from this situation? You make a choice.

Man shall live by every word that proceeds from God's mouth. Now, unfortunately in Christianity today, such strong messages are not preached. And that is why Christianity has backslidden so much with the Christian world today.

It's full of, churches are full of divorced families and they call themselves Christians and then they go and divorce and break up and unconverted people getting divorced, I can understand. But those who say they are born again, pastors doing all that, it's an indication of the way Christianity has drifted. But where did that drift start? It started with maybe a small lie, something wrong.

You know, when the Lord Jesus was walking down the street one day, the Holy Spirit said to him, stop, look up in that tree. There's a man sitting there. His name is Zacchaeus.

Jesus was so sensitive to the Holy Spirit's voice, he could even know the name of the man sitting up there. So he looked up and said, hey Zacchaeus, come down. And Zacchaeus was wondering, how in the world does he know my name? Well, the Holy Spirit told him.

So he went with Zacchaeus to his house. And it's a very interesting verse. It says in Luke 19.

Let me show you that verse. It's a very interesting verse. In Luke 19, it says Zacchaeus and Jesus went to the house.

And you'll never find a word like this anywhere in the whole Bible actually. Luke 19. Zacchaeus was a short man.

He climbed a tree, verse 4. And Jesus came to the place and looked up because the Holy Spirit told him to look up. He says, Zacchaeus, hurry and come down. I want to stay in your house.

Not I want to visit you. I want to stay overnight at your house. And he was so happy.

But he was a crooked tax collector. But he was wanting to repent of his bad ways. And the people, everybody knew he was a crooked tax collector.

And they said, look at this Jesus going to the house of this man who was a sinner. And as they went to the house, listen, this is a word that is never found anywhere else. Verse 8. Zacchaeus stopped.

Try and find anywhere in the Bible where it says somebody stopped. It's not there. I see Jesus and Zacchaeus walking towards the house.

And as they come to the gate of the house, Zacchaeus stops. And I'll tell you the conversation. I believe there was a little more than what's written here.

Zacchaeus tells the Lord. I'm using my imagination a bit now. Lord, this beautiful house that you see has been built with money that I got in wrong ways.

I cheated people because I was a tax collector. They were scared of me. I took bribes from them to reduce their accounts.

And with that crooked money, I built this house. You say you want to stay in this house. I cannot allow you to come into this house.

It's built with filthy money. How can you, the Holy Son of God, come and live here? Before I tell you one decision I've made. All the money that I stole from people, I will give back with interest.

And he calculated it. I have to give back four times. And there are so many other people I cheated.

I don't know where they are. But I can't keep that money. So I will give it to the poor.

In those days, there was no church. Today, you give it to the church, the offering monks. Those days, they give it to the poor.

But he said, I don't want a single cent in my bank account, which is not righteously mine. Lord, now you can come to my house. And the Lord said, fine.

He didn't say, I'll wait till you settle it all. That may take years. Zacchaeus, I believe you.

I believe you meant it. And I know you'll do it. And so these amazing words, which is only found here.

This is the only place where Jesus said these words. Luke 19 verse 9. Today, salvation has come to this house. Because he is also a son of Abraham.

Why son of Abraham? If you read in the Old Testament, Abraham and Lot, their servants had a fight over property. And Abraham said, Lot, even though you're my nephew, you take the first chances. I don't love money.

Another time, Abraham had the right to take the money, which he had fought and won in battle. But the king of Sodom said, take it. Abraham said, no, king of Sodom, I won't even take a shoelace from you.

Read those two chapters sometimes, Genesis 13 and 14. His attitude to money, Abraham's. And here was the same man.

Here was a Zacchaeus who had the same attitude to money. And Jesus said, this is a true son of Abraham. And salvation came to that house.

And the son of man has come to seek and to save that which was lost. This guy was lost in the love of money. And Jesus saved him.

You know, brothers, just like telling lies is a very easy thing for us to fall into. Love of money is also a very easy thing to fall into. To have money is not at all wrong.

To love money is wrong. I'll tell you, whether you earn \$50,000 a year or \$500,000 a year, well, God blesses you, take it. But to love it is different from having it.

God allows some of his children to have little and some of his children to have more. That's his choice. I don't know why.

Christianity is not communism, where everybody has the same income. No. In Christianity, there are rich people, like, you know, there was a man called Philemon, who was a very rich man.

He had a slave in his house who was an essence. They were brothers in Christ, but one was a slave and one was a master. So God ordains such that there are rich and poor people in the church, but one who loves money cannot love God.

So it's very important when you earn money that you don't love it. Earn as much as you can. Don't waste it.

Glorify God. So these are little things, you know, which can hinder our fellowship with God. People tell a little lie to make a little money.

People will do something wrong. You're losing much more than you gain. You may gain \$10,000 there.

Okay. What have you lost? You've lost such a fellowship with God, which you don't know when you'll be able to recover, which is greater loss. So there are little things like this, and all comes back to conscience.

Your conscience will tell you when you're telling a lie. Your conscience will tell you when you're cheating somebody. Your conscience will tell you when you're signing a false statement to get a little more money or anything.

Just be honest, and you'll find amazing things God does for you when you're honest. I remember when, you know, when you seek to honor God in a little thing. When my son Sunil had finished his college graduation here in the U.S., he applied for jobs in his final year, and he was first called by, he had done well in his course, so he got first called by an investment banking company called Salomon Smith Barney.

It was a very big company in those days. I'm talking about the year 2000. And so he went for the interview, and they said, sure, he got the job.

But they said, in investment banking, you have to work seven days a week. You have to sometimes bring your sleeping bag and sleep in the office itself. Seven days a week.

He said, I have to go to church on Sunday. I said, no, seven days a week if you want this job. So he went back, and then he got another call from Oracle, because he had done software.

They work only five days a week. So, but the pay was only half. And he, I was in India, he wrote to me that I've got these two offers.

Now, I know what I wanted him to take. I mean, there's nothing wrong in getting double the salary, but if you don't have time to meet with God's people, every, every Sunday it's like that. I mean, one Sunday you miss or something's but year after year, you are busy with your work.

But I never told him what to do, because I wanted him to take the decision himself. If I had told him, I know he'd do it because he's an obedient son. But I said, no, I want him to take the decision himself.

And he told me when he wrote to me that I checked the investment banking job because I told him I can't work on a Sunday, sorry. And I took the half pay one in Oracle. I said, son, you're a man out of my own heart.

That's exactly what I wanted you to decide, but I didn't want to tell you. I was 2000, he took that decision. In 2001, the Salomon Smith Bonney office collapsed.

When the twin towers collapsed in New York, I said, so then see what happened. This is the office you're going to be working in. You honor God, God will honor you.

So I believe all of us must have some experience like that in our life. When I gave up something attractive, because I wanted to honor God. You know, I, that was such an experience for me when I gave up my attractive neighbor job to serve the Lord.

And I prayed for all of my four sons, Lord, all four of them must have at least one experience in life that they've given up something very attractive in the world because they chose the Lord. Because they spoke the truth or chose God like in a situation like this. And I'm very thankful to see that God has done that for all of them.

Pray that in difficult situations like that, you will choose, make the right decision. Your fellowship with God will become deeper. Other Christians are not, who are not wholehearted will give you all types of advice.

Come on, be sensible. And you're missing a golden opportunity. What golden opportunity? Is there any more golden opportunity than fellowship with God? We preach a high standard in CFC.

That's why many people don't want to join us. I thank God for that. I don't want to build a church of compromisers, most of whom will go to hell.

And most of whom will regret in eternity and turn around and blame me saying, brother Zach, you never told us the truth. You knew the truth and you never warned us. I've often said to people, you come to CFC, I'll tell you one thing.

You'll never turn around to me the day of judgment and say, I did not tell you the truth. You may have got hurt by what you heard, but it will be the truth. And you will have no regret in the day of judgment.

You know, in India, we have these coaching schools and colleges, which coach people for entrance into medical colleges, engineering colleges, IITs. And some people are so sure that they say, if you join our college, we guarantee you'll get an admission. So I say our coaching classes in CFC are like that.

I guarantee you will have no regret in the day you stand at the judgment seat of Christ, if you listen to what you hear here. But if you only listen and don't obey, you probably remain in a church. You may have a good testimony in your church, but you'll have a lot of regret when Christ comes back.

Be wise. God bless you all. Let's pray.

Heavenly Father, I thank you for these dear brothers and sisters and their families. Bless them, encourage them, help them to be your true disciples. We pray every one of them and build a church there.

In Jesus' name, Amen.

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