

# Ten Things I Learned Before I Was 21

by George Verwer

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*George Verwer shares 10 key lessons he learned before the age of 21 that have enabled him to live for Jesus 100% every hour of every day all his life.*

**Duration:** 1:00:46

**Scripture:** Isaiah 6:8, Matthew 6:33, 2 Timothy 2:22, 1 John 2:1

**Topics:** "Lessons"

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## Description

In this sermon, the speaker reflects on their struggles and the topics they have been sharing about in their previous sermons. They mention talking about Jesus and bringing messages from the Bible, particularly focusing on the story of the Good Samaritan and its implications for people with HIV, abused women, children at risk, and the globally poor. The speaker also mentions preaching from Acts 13, highlighting the role of the Holy Spirit in sending Paul and Barnabas on world missions. They mention a book by John Maxwell called 'Falling Forward' and discuss the importance of accepting oneself and committing to serving those with the least opportunity to hear the word of God. The sermon emphasizes the hunger for the Word of God and the importance of memorizing scripture.

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## Transcript

Just pray together. Father, you've challenged our hearts from these great worship songs. You've challenged our hearts throughout the day, throughout the weekend, in this great Mission Fest event, and we just want to respond.

And Lord, we would reach out. We would reach out to some of these nations we're reading about in the papers, the land of Iraq, to get there. We would reach out and touch that nation.

The fighting, the death, the kidnapping, the chaos. We pray for the election that's coming up there. We believe, God, that somehow you're going to overrule that incredibly difficult situation.

Then we'd reach out to the neighboring land of Iran, which Christians are being persecuted, where there's so little freedom. And we thank you, God, for what's happening in that country of Iran, and for Iranians in other parts of the world that are coming to know you. Many hundreds, many thousands, we worship you.

And we reach out, Lord, to Afghanistan, just a little further to the east, where the church does not yet really exist, except a few individuals, a few scattered little personal Bible study groups. We reach into

Afghanistan. We pray for workers.

As the door is open for tent makers, we pray, Lord of the harvest, Lord of the harvest, send forth workers to this great harvest field. And God, we would also reach out at this time to the nation suffering from the tsunami. We'd reach out to South India, to Sri Lanka, to the Nicobar and Andaman Islands.

We'd reach out to Thailand and to Sumatra, the Maldives. Oh, God, for this part of the world, those are involved in rescue, those involved in feeding the hungry, finding some kind of housing, even a little plastic to put over their heads. We think of some that have just been shot and killed in some kind of misunderstanding over in Sumatra.

Oh, Jesus, we reach out to that needy crisis part of the world. And and Lord, we would also reach into Africa, the great crisis of AIDS. It's hard to me to realize just a week ago I was walking through this slum in Kenya of a million people living in extreme degradation and poverty beyond words.

Oh, God, reach into that slum, those few churches, those few believers. And as as we pray for that slum, we would reach out to all of Africa connection with the the pandemic of HIV and AIDS, strengthen those who are battling that we're attempting to reach and help those people. Oh, God, what can we say as we think of places like Saudi Arabia, North Korea, Tibet, Turkmenistan, Libya, places where there are hardly any believers, places where there are hardly any churches, even 2000 years since you gave that promise and that command that when the Holy Spirit comes upon us, we shall be your witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, the uttermost part of the earth.

Lord, wake us up to this challenge that we may be truly biblical people, that we may talk the walk and walk the talk. Go where you want us to go and do what you want us to do, we ask in Jesus name. Amen.

Man, well, this is a great privilege to come and share with you, I bring greetings from Peter and Melody Mead, who have joined our team in London, and I have the privilege of being his next door neighbor. So I bring you greetings are settling into life in the UK, the weather there seems to be a little bit like your weather here. I'd also like to mention the fact that when you go, there's a book table, you can meet Michael, my traveling helper.

We've just come from Kenya and Uganda and a lot of other places. We've got a book we'd like to give you free of charge about the word of God. It's called God's Word.

Unique, magnetic and eternal, written by my close friend Norm Lewis, who two weeks ago went to heaven, 80, pushing 90 years of age. Of all the people I've ever met committed to memorizing and knowing the scriptures, this man was way out in front. And so we want to give you that book, God's Word, and we hope you'll pick that up as a gift from us.

The other literature we have on our book table, it's more or less on a donation basis. We'd like to give you a little CD or DVD about the ship ministry. We're privileged to have Miles Taves, who's one of the leaders in the ship ministry here.

And Miles, why don't you come on up here and join me? I'd like to ask you a few questions, because Peter Meade, he met Melanie because he sailed into Portland on the Lagos II. Weren't you the director at that time? That's amazing. What do you think of this thing, guys sailing into ports and, you know, walking away with a wife? Is this something you're promoting? Absolutely.

It's a lifetime opportunity. Hang in here, Miles. I just want to mention these books.

There's Forgotten Factor. One of the first books to ever be written on the challenge of dealing with impurity in the life of the believer. Very unusual book by Roy Heshin and his other amazing book, We Would See Jesus.

And all of these are available on that on that literature table. And a friend of mine who was a really wild newspaper reporter in London gave his life to Jesus. And the story of this man is amazing.

It's called From Tabloid to Truth, The Story of Dan Wooding. So there's some very unusual books there, cassettes. And what's the CD that you had? Do we have a copy of that here? Well, I may have left it on the chair, but tell us about that CD or DVD.

OK, there's a CD out there. Oh, there it is. And you pop this thing in your computer and it'll it's interactive and it'll explain everything you ever wanted to know about the ship ministry.

And so we just I just picked those up just before we came. We printed 10,000 copies. We distributed about 500 at Missions Fest, which is awesome.

And so pick up one of those. And it'll answer a lot of your questions and expose you to the ministry of the ships. I think the thing I like to ask you, Miles, and you're a Canadian and you've been in OM for a long time.

What kind of people are they looking for this? We hear this new ship, Lagos Hope, it needs 400 people. I was just on the ship again recently in Copenhagen. What kind of people just looking like for captains, chief engineers? Is there any hope for like ordinary people who want to have some kind of exposure and training experience? Can you tell us about that? Yes, we need we need people who are ready to serve with in whatever way they can.

And that's that was my testimony. I'm a farm boy from Alberta. Never dreamed I'd be involved in missions.

But when I heard George speak in Mexico, what connected with me was him saying they needed truck drivers in India. And somehow I thought, boy, that's something I could do. And on the ships, there's just lots of that.

You go to any of the truck drivers? Never did. No. It's a story of my life.

But I went to the ships. I was going to go to India. And then they said, well, we're not sure you're quite ready for India.

Why don't you go on the Lagos? It's going to India. You'll get a little experience in India and you can see if you want to go there full time. Well, I we just fell in love with the ship ministry.

It's such an incredible opportunity, living and working together with people from 50 different countries and then visiting all these countries and ministering to them. And you get to know those countries like you wouldn't believe because you work with the people. It's awesome.

So we just need people who are willing to serve and learn that want to learn and grow that are interested in seeing if maybe God would have them involved in missions. Let's get to the bottom line here. The ship.

It's a lot of money, right? To buy a ship, people flying there to sail away on the ship. What does this ship actually do? Let's just pretend for a minute. I'm Joe ignorant, you know, ship, a lot of money.

I'm a bit cynical. What do you actually do when you come into a port? Is this sort of like an American Express cruise or what? It's absolutely anything but a cruise. And if you think it is after about a week on board, you will have that illusion wiped away.

It's very hard work. It's intense. And when the ship pulls into port, it becomes a very active ministry center because the public come on board to shop in our incredible bookstore, to attend conferences and seminars, to sit with young people in the cafeteria and chat.

We have sports camps. We've got incredible opportunity to reach out with artistic talent like music and drama. And so that the ship is just a neutral platform that people come to by the thousands.

And we go even to Muslim countries and we're welcome there because they you know, they see all these people from these countries, just a natural curiosity. So that answer your question. That's great, Miles.

Thanks. And I hope some of you, even if you're slightly, even itsy bitsy interested in the ship, get to see Miles. He doesn't get up this way much.

You know, California people are a little nervous coming this far north. So he's actually Canadian, lives in San Diego. That's generally the truth of our movement.

It's a little bit mixed up. Thank you, Miles. I took about 300 meetings last year, and as I launch into this new year, I've been having some struggles, story of my life.

Especially, what should I be sharing about? Last year, I talked a lot about, of course, I always talk about Jesus and I always bring messages from the Bible. I've been preaching a lot from the Good Samaritan. I touched on that last night, if any of you were there.

These people that are lying by the side of the road, which has led me to talk a lot about people with HIV. Women, women who've been abused, children at risk, the global, the globally poor. I've been speaking a lot about HIV and AIDS, I've been speaking, of course, a lot about, a lot from Acts 13, five men praying, boom, suddenly the Holy Spirit sending Paul and Barnabas out into world missions.

I've been speaking a lot about, from Isaiah, chapter six. We touched on that last night. I guess we had a couple hundred people stand last night and pray that prayer, here am I, send me.

But I was really wrestling with what I should share tonight, and I decided to take a little bit of a risk, share something that I haven't shared much, because I saw that so many of you are young people. The verse God put on my heart is, let no person despise your youth, but as a young person, be an example to the believers. That sounds a little way out, doesn't it? When you're young, I mean, you're supposed to just be learning.

You're supposed, somebody else is supposed to be mentoring you. You're not, the Word of God says, don't lay hands too quickly on someone, on a novice. So how, on the other hand, as a young person, are we to be an example? I thought tonight the best thing I could do in our limited time, and I so appreciate the privilege to share, I've been at this church before, I feel a real linking with you, is just share my own testimony, but a little bit different than I have in other occasions.

I want to share 10 things that God taught me before I was 21 years of age that enabled me from that age on to live for Jesus 100 percent every hour of every day all my life. I'm now 66. I don't need to apologize for that.

That's where it's at for me. That's where it's at. I have a grandfather.

I'm no longer the director of OM, and I'm mighty happy about that. He still let me go around and preach and raise funds and get involved in projects. I have literature projects in 100 nations.

It's a mom and pop operation, my little special projects ministry, and I'm just so excited about what I'm doing. I've never had a non-exciting day since Jesus saved me. He saved me in a Billy Graham meeting in New York City when I was 16.

I was moving at that time into the world of business. I owned three companies. My passion was really women.

I didn't always like to confess that. I'd gone steady with one girl from age 13 to about 16. Then I started to really play the field or 15.

And then I started to move into the world of pornography, which is a very sad chapter of my life, when a lady put my name on her Holy Ghost hit list and sent me a Gospel of John through the mail, we say here. In England, we say post. And she prayed for me.

She not only prayed that I'd be saved, she prayed that I would become a missionary. Can you imagine that? Do you have anybody praying that for you? Let me tell you, you've got a problem. You've got to sort that out.

Remember Jonah? He tried to run away from God's goal. How would you like that Jonah experience? You think that's some kind of virtual reality, pleasant experience inside of a big fish? Let me tell you, these fish don't use, you know, they don't use mints for breath. You're in there, it stinks.

You don't want that experience. You don't want to run away from God. You want to run toward God.

You want to embrace His will. So, this lady prayed for me and sent me a Gospel of John through the mail, and that really got me moving into a higher level of search for God. And the climax came when a business person gave me a free seat on a bus into New York City where Billy Graham was speaking for one night.

One of the things I believe the strongest with all my heart is the power of the Gospel. And when Billy Graham preached that simple Gospel message, the power echoed right across the whole of Madison Square Garden. And thousands of us got out of our seat and came forward, some of us weeping.

I was weeping. Others repenting of immorality. Who knows all the stuff that was repented of that night, March 4th, 1955.

Most of you were not born, but the Spirit of God did something in New York City that is felt to this day. I was only one of those converted that night. There were others.

I went back to my ungodly, drunken high school. I was about, in God's providence, to be elected as president of a really wild student body where a lot of things were happening, including immorality and drunkenness. That opened the door for me to share with the high school about Jesus.

That's illegal in the United States now. Right in the classroom, right in the main school auditorium, school time, preaching Jesus Christ. We had an extra meeting.

600 came to the meeting. I guess I was 18 by then. I went off to college and came back at the Christmas break at the high school.

I shared the Gospel and 125 stood and believed on Jesus. My own father was among them who followed Christ to 94 years of age. I discovered that at 16, 17, 18, God could use me and my friends.

We started prayer meetings. We got 1,000 students to read, to promise to read the Gospel of John. I don't know how the principal ever gave us permission to do that.

We distributed the Gospels in the high school only to those who promised to read it. And God's Spirit in that high school, right outside New York City, birthed a movement that became known in Europe when it really exploded as Operation Mobilization. Since those days, 130,000 people have been on OM.

Tens of thousands have come to Christ. In India alone in the last two years, we've seen 100 churches planted. God then gave us those ships.

At the time when the ships first started, we already had about 200 vehicles on the road, crisscrossing the world with millions and millions and tens of millions of pieces of Christian literature, so that today as we look back at what God has done, we know we've given the Word of God face to face to at least one billion people. One lady prayed, and one billion people received the Word of God. Over 100 agencies that are in evangelism and many individual churches traced their birth back to this same movement because someone came like Greg Livingstone or K.P. O'Hannan or Danny Smith, and I could give a hundred other names, and their lives were impacted and turned upside down, and instead of staying with OM, they launched out back to their church or to somewhere else.

We couldn't follow all of them, and they birthed other mission agencies and organizations. And now that I don't have to direct OM, I'm having the opportunity to reconnect with all these little spiritual children that were born out of OM, and it's exciting to see what God does in answer to prayer. But I want to add to my testimony and share about those first few years, from just before my 17th birthday when I found Christ, a couple months before, to when I went to Spain, married, ready to have our first child, because so many of you are young.

These principles are just as relevant as you're not young, and because you need to know God wants to use you as a young person. Being a young person is not just preparation for being an old person. Being a young person is being in one of the most important periods of your life, because among other things, young people can reach young people, and in some ways, one of the most productive, cutting-edge times of my whole life, between 16 and 21 years of age.

I reached my own peers. I reached my own high school. I reached into New York City with 30,000 pieces of literature.

I reached down to Mexico when I was 19, and a work was birthed there that continues to this day. I learned the Spanish language all before I was 21. Don't waste these valuable years.

One man of God said the great sin of modern young people is wasting time. And as I've interviewed young people, and as I've met with a lot of people around the globe, I tend to agree that a lot of people don't

know how to redeem the time. The book of Ephesians says, make best use of the time, because the days are evil.

That doesn't mean there's no time for small talk, no time for humor, to have a little fun. That's part of our humanity, but that needs to be with great moderation. Most of our time needs to be involved with ministering to people, laying down our lives, reaching out to touch the world with the gospel.

What are some of the specifics? Because as I was preparing this message, the word practical kept coming up to me, because I know many of you belong to this church. We have a lot of visitors here as well. You get great Bible teaching.

You have great worship. And I thought, what practical things can I share for my pilgrimage that may help you to be a long-distance marathon runner for the kingdom? My experience today as an older person, and I speak to a lot of young people, is not as many come up to me individually as they used to. They listen, they respond, but they don't find it easy to walk up to an old guy and start asking some kind of question.

Maybe that's the Lord's protection, because I'm often overwhelmed, and there's still more than enough people like last night coming up wanting to talk than I can even handle. And I want you to forget, if you can, my age, and try to go back with me to my high school. Try to go back with me as a baby Christian.

My grandfather was a drunk. My grandmother divorced him. My other grandfather was an atheist.

He came from the Netherlands with my father. My father came over when he was very young. There was very little spiritual heritage.

Yet in that Billy Graham meeting, Jesus saved me and sent me back to the high school. Ten things I learned before I was 21. Number one, I learned how to worship.

Worship became the priority in my life. In fact, at 17, I prayed a prayer, which is very unusual for my kind of hyperactive temperament. I prayed a prayer, Lord, I want one thing.

I want to learn to pray. I want to know you. I don't remember my terminology.

But I know we started nights of prayer in that ungodly high school. We started nights of prayer in my hometown. It didn't work very well because we didn't know how to stay awake through the night praying.

So some of them left, and I fell asleep. I remember another pastor arrived in the morning and woke me up, and we at least prayed another hour. Later on, as we got more understanding of spiritual warfare and the Word of God, these prayer meetings became more dynamic.

And these nights of prayer, which are usually just a few hours, have spread all over the world and have continued to grow for 45 years. And that's the explanation of what God has done through the ships and operation, mobilization. You can learn how to pray when you're 15, 16, 17, 18, 19.

You can be an example. Do you think most older people know how to pray? Do you think prayer comes automatically because you're old? Forget it. There are only a small percentage of people that I've ever met in the world, and I know a lot of people who are men and women of prayer.

It's a rough and tough and difficult calling. And especially in the world today, where there's such pressure on us to do this and do that and go here and eat this and buy this and shop there. And I believe God is

speaking to some of us tonight about our prayer life, about praying together with our husbands and wives, about praying together in our families, about our personal prayer time when we pray for the nations of the world.

This morning, I was fortunate. Through jet lag, I woke up at about 3.30 and got three or four hours of prayer before the sun even came up. But I can assure you, many mornings, it's not like that.

In fact, I'm as human as anybody else. When I wake up, often I have one passion, just roll over and go back to sleep. Fortunately, in my English culture, the cup of tea usually lures me out of bed, and I get woken up and can get to prayer.

God taught me a lot about prayer before I was 21. The second thing God taught me before I was 21, He taught me about this book. I had a passion for the Word of God.

I'm just being really honest with you that I don't have today. I have so much. I've memorized so much.

I've been in it almost every single day. On March 4th, I had my 50th spiritual birthday, that I'd be lying if I said to you, I had the same hunger and passion for the scriptures I had as a young Christian. I still love the Word of God.

I obey the Word of God. I'm in the Word of God most days. But those were unusual days in my life.

When you read these verses for the first time in your life, how can you explain that? It's sort of like your first kiss. I'm not sure if I remember my first kiss. I was only six, but maybe later on.

That was a poor illustration. I withdraw that. I want to ask you, do you have a hunger for the Word of God? Are you memorizing scriptures? Norm Lewis, in that book that I want to give you free of charge, teaches you how to memorize scripture.

Even if you forget it a few weeks later, it still will help you. The Word of God says, how will a young man, how will a young man cleanse his heart? By taking heed to the Word of God. In fact, one day I was selling books door to door.

I had this fire extinguisher business and two other businesses when I got converted. And I felt I should shift out of the firefighting equipment into selling Christian books. It took a while.

In fact, for a while, I'd go to your house and I'd light a fire on your front porch and take my little extinguisher with gasoline, by the way, and I'd put the fire out. It usually made quite an impact. Praise God, no houses broke down.

I almost did burn down a gas station. But he had to get his bigger extinguisher to put out the fire that I couldn't put out with my little Mickey Mouse thing. But anyway, I sold a lot of these fire extinguishers and I soon had 300 people selling them all over the country.

But eventually I shifted into Christian literature. I remember once going door to door. This is just before I went to Mexico, when this work was just being born.

I was 19 and a lady bought a lot of books for she warmed my heart. She looked at me and she could see she was a woman with discernment. She could see this kid's big on zeal and weak on wisdom.

She asked me to come in and sit down and she had a go at me. She said, young man, do you study the book of Proverbs? I don't think I had found the book of Proverbs yet. I can't remember.

But she said a proverb a day will keep the devil away. And then she showed me 31 Proverbs, one for every day in the month. From that day to this day, I've hardly ever missed the book of Proverbs in my daily time with God.

And I urge you to get the wisdom that you can get from the book of Proverbs. And so the second thing I learned before I was 21, I learned this book, the basic doctrines, the basic principles of the Sermon on the Mount, the greatest, the strategy of Ephesians chapter 6. I think it was when I was 19 or 20, I did the first orientation teaching series that everybody who joined OM who knew English listened to for the next 20 years that laid the foundation for a spiritual movement that was to make a gigantic impact around the globe. I learned and shared most of that before I was 21.

Because we have a great God, because his strength is made perfect in weakness. During this time, I had struggles. During this time, I occasionally had failure with the pornography thing.

During this time, I was still battling impatience, which was a huge problem in my life. This time, I still didn't have a total handle on my anger. I had a struggle with anger, especially getting angry with myself because of my idealism, because of high goals and even a commitment to holiness.

I would get angry with myself. Then I would get discouraged. And then the accuser of the brethren, Satan, the accuser of the brethren, he'd buzz in my ear, you're no good.

You're no good. Why don't you just go back to where you were before you got into this Billy Graham, Jesus kick. And in sociology classes and psychology classes that I had at university, they tried to explain away my conversion to Christ.

This is a psychological experience. Some of these books, psychology books, explain characters like me, choleric temperament, this problem, that problem, go to a Billy Graham meeting, have some psychological thing, and then you go out and start doing things. In the college that I went to after high school, many of the pre-ministerial students lost their faith in the first year.

But by God's grace, I came across some books that really helped me. And the third thing that I learned before I was 21 is that the Bible is absolutely God's Word. And I learned intellectual answers to tough questions.

Later on, I discovered that maybe some of my answers weren't as good as I thought when I was a young Christian. Maybe some of the books I studied weren't maybe as scholarly as books that later on came into my life. But I had answers for the reasons why I believed in the Word of God and why I believed in Jesus.

And that took a lot of reading. I devoured book after book after book. I got the Word of God on records.

You can tell how old I am. A phonograph, you know, goes around. And they had Bible teaching on phonograph records.

I actually started to sell those door-to-door as well. I'll never forget. Donald Gray Barnhouse, Other Great Men of God.

And then I tuned into Billy Graham on the radio. And then I got Billy Graham's book, Peace with God. Then I got Billy Graham's sermon on what the Bible says about sex.

One of the most important little sermons in my life. Because that was such a huge struggle in my life. And even after I became a Christian.

Now maybe your testimony is after you became a Christian, you had no more difficulties in the girl-boy romance thing. I am sorry to say that is not my testimony. I was so confused what I was supposed to do.

I knew I shouldn't have sex. I sort of found a few verses on that. But what about the kissing? I'd been kissing girls from age like five.

Was I going to, you know, cold turkey? No more kissing. And I didn't know what to do. And I won this girl to Christ once.

And then I went kissing her for the next two hours. I remember because it was under the Washington Memorial there in Washington, D.C. I was supposed to be selling fire extinguishers. And I was there kissing this girl.

We laughed, but it really wasn't so funny. And I felt convicted about this. And believe me, this method is not in the follow-up books of the Navigators or any other group.

And I realized I was hurting. I was hurting girls that I was dating. And I was saying things like, you know, I love you.

And it wasn't real. It really loved them in terms of wanting a long-term relationship. And I had to repent.

And in my case, I decided no more dating, no more kissing, no more girls. I'm not saying that's the route for everybody. But I knew I was so balled up in this area.

The next two and a half years, I never dated. I never kissed. I used to hug my pillow in real desperate moments.

And it was during those two years that God sent me to Mexico. And God taught me. And this is the third thing.

God taught me the disciplined life. He taught me how to deal with this high level of testosterone that was pumping through my body. He taught me how to say no to that pornography, which at times looked so appetizing.

Especially when I wasn't doing any dating. And God taught me the disciplined life. He taught me from Ephesians 6, the sword of the spirit, the shield of faith, the helmet of salvation.

He taught me from verses like, if any person come after me, let him deny self, take up the cross and follow me. And I believe that message. And the lack of teaching and preaching on that message in many of our churches is the reason we have so many defeated Christians.

We have so many who say, well, it's impossible for me to live and not have sex. I can't possibly wait until I'm married to have sex. Our society is trying to tell us that.

The film world is trying to tell that. I want to tell you, not only is my testimony that I did not have sex before marriage, I know hundreds and thousands who have that testimony across the world because they found something much greater than sex, communion with the living God, being used in spiritual battle, understanding spiritual life, learning how to deny self, take up the cross and follow him and embracing. This is my fourth thing.

Forgive me if the numbers get mixed up. But the fourth thing is I learned about the Lordship of Christ. That was so crucial.

We're self, which so easily rules the self life. I, my, me, even when we're Christians, that can happen. The day that you and I will be honest about our self-centeredness will be a day of spiritual revolution, including in our marriages.

My own marriage was revolutionized when I realized I was a self-centered husband. Even in the sexual area, I was looking to get the big kick, not really worried whether my dear wife was getting much out of the whole affair. And of course, she was just trying to be the best possible woman.

And God showed me I was thinking of myself first. And when I started to put my wife first and Jesus first, it revolutionized my marriage. And in the very early days.

And so I learned about the discipline life. I learned how to deny self, take up the cross and follow him. I'm not talking about perfection, friends.

I'm talking about reality. Which means that when I sinned, I knew what to do. And that's the fifth thing I learned before I was 21.

I learned it really well. I was like a professional at, guess what? Repentance. Because that's the only way that I walked for Jesus.

I had to keep repenting. And when I read chapters like 1 Corinthians 13, loving all these people. I found so many of God's people such a pain in the neck.

I got to love all these people that are sitting there in church, bumps on a log, boring people older than me that I don't even want to talk to. I got to love them. I developed a prayer when I met people who were a pain in the neck.

Thank you, Jesus. I'm not a giraffe. And that didn't really work so well.

And so then I just had to repent. I had to repent of wrong attitudes. I had to repent of lack of love.

And God accepted my repentance. And my favorite verse became 1 John chapter 2, verse 1. Sin not, but if you sin, you have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. I learned how to repent.

Repentance is the key to reality and revival. Repentance is not penance. Not a matter of just saying, Oh, Lord, I'm sorry to do the same stupid thing the next day.

Repentance means, as Billy Graham says, you're walking in one direction. You stop and you go in God's direction. You may somehow lapse back again.

You have to stop and turn around again. It's an act of the will. I thank God.

I thank God for so many people that were a model for me. Billy Graham, who I only knew at a distance. I watched his life like a hawk.

I read everything I could get about him. I talked to people who knew him personally. And I knew, I had that deep confidence that my spiritual father, though I didn't know him personally, he was real.

And here he is, 85, 86 years of age, still 20 years ahead of me. And he's still a model. He's still an example.

Not that God has led me into that same kind of ministry, or that I'm similar to him. That's not the case. But he was a faithful spiritual father.

I'm so fortunate. That's why I can assure you, though I share about the victorious life, and I share what God did in my life before I was 21. I do not judge people who have a very different story from mine, whose life before they were 21 was just one fiasco after another, who led no one to Christ and accomplished very little.

When I meet such people, I do not look at myself as being better than them. I just share what God has done. And I know that God has used them.

And that's why I've had the joy of seeing a few hundred thousand people these 50 years stand up or come forward in my meetings and surrender to Jesus. And the one thing about meetings, and I find meetings sometimes difficult, it's just like life. You only have to have one meeting at a time.

And if you're finding the Christian life difficult, you need to realize you only have to live one day at a time. And that's the sixth thing I learned before I was 21. How to deal with anxiety.

How to deal with worry. First Peter 5, 7, casting every care upon him because he careth for you. Now, I have to be honest, by the time I got to India and I was analyzing my Christian life, I realized in this area I was still failing.

I was engaged, even by the time I was in India, I think I was 22 or 23. By the time I got to India, I was still too easily worrying about things. And I picked up a book, I'll never forget it, The Psychology of Jesus and Mental Health.

It's a Christian book, The Psychology of Jesus and Mental Health. And it was about the Sermon on the Mount. And the teaching of Jesus about worry in the Sermon on the Mount.

I wonder if there's any of you, if you're honest, you're going to lay down tonight when you go to sleep and you're going to be worrying about something. You're going to be worrying about something. Even sitting here, you might be finding it hard to concentrate because you're worrying about something.

If God hadn't taught me how to deal with worry, I would not be here today. Casting every care upon Him because He cares for you. The seventh thing I learned, and this was just life transforming, I learned how to accept myself.

I had real struggles with myself. I remember as a young kid seeing an ad of a skinny guy like me, and I was still pretty skinny in high school. You can see I've got a lot fatter since then.

And the ad was a picture of this skinny guy, looked like me on a beach with a really beautiful girl. And at that time in my life, I don't know what happened there, but in that time in my life, girls were a big thing. And as I saw that ad, I thought, wow, that's going to happen to me.

And the bottom of the ad said, you can be a real man. Right in today for Charles Aspen, this muscle building, weight gaining apparatus. I thought, wow, this is for me.

I wrote in and I got into this program, extra food, weight lifting. And after six months, I gained about half a pound. It was only after I became a follower of Jesus and saw verses like Ephesians, you are accepted in the beloved and love your neighbor as you love yourself.

And other verses that clearly show we need a balanced, sensible understanding of God's love for us and to be able to know that love on the inside. Have you ever read Floyd McClung's book, The Father Heart of God? There's some books, I read a lot of books. There's some books I don't read.

I get such a blessing from the cover. I fear if I go in the book, I'll get overdosed. And so I just meditate on the cover.

I was doing the same thing with Erwin Lutzer's book, Failure, the Back Door to Success. What a tremendous book. I never read it.

Just the cover, Failure, the Back Door to Success. I picked up another book actually in the home where I'm staying. It's this Maxwell, John Maxwell's book, Falling Forward.

Have you seen that book? It's for leaders. You don't need to read the book. The index has a summary of every chapter.

Just look at the cover and read the index and go for it. Falling Forward. And so somehow, somehow I learned how to accept myself.

My big nose, my skinniness, my loudness, my New Jersey culture. A lot of things I didn't like about myself. I remember even later on as a missionary, I was in Thailand.

And in Thailand, if they don't like you, they sometimes call you a long-nose foreigner. If you have some Oriental friends, you realize their nose are a lot nicer. They're a lot safer.

You won't get stabbed to death generally by an Oriental nose. But if you've got some English friends like I do, you know, when they come at you, you sort of back up a little bit. And I never forget, I was giving out tracts in the streets of Thailand.

This is a true story. And a man, instead of reaching for my tracts, he just looked at me and he was looking at my nose. And right in the streets of Thailand with a lot of people watching, he reached out and stroked my nose.

Have you ever had that? The in-street stroke-the-nose experience? Let me tell you, you don't want that experience. But by God's grace, I somehow eventually accepted my nose. Now, you know, I want to be open to negotiation if some of you got some good ideas.

But I don't want to pay a lot of money for plastic surgery. I want to ask you this question. It may seem trivia.

Do you really know in the depth of your soul tonight that Jesus loves you? Jesus loves you. If you were the only one, he wouldn't have gone to the cross for you. And he wants your fellowship.

He wants your love. We cannot comprehend that. But that's what God's Word teaches.

That's why worship is so important. And so before I was 21, I learned that God really loved me. And therefore, I learned to love and accept myself.

And I believe in a common sense down to Earth way. It revolutionized my life. Took away a lot of insecurity.

Took away a lot of wrong reactions. I had struggles later on as well because of the way I was reacting. Reacting to my wife and hurting her.

Reacting to other OM leaders and hurting them. Reacting to my board. I've always had a high level of accountability in boards of directors.

And, you know, I'd be sitting there and in my brain, I thought this board member just spoke, we say in England, a load of rubbish. And I'd react. And some of my board members were actually quite quiet.

I found out later some of them were actually frightening me. They were older, but they were shy. They were English.

And here's this, you know, they're hearing me preach one minute. And then they're looking at me in the board meeting. And I'm coming out.

I'm like, you know, I'm attacking, tackling a flying pig. And they came and said they were afraid of me. I thought, give me a break.

Afraid of me? Then I found out my wife was afraid of me. That's always nice, isn't it? Let me give you a little background on that. After two and a half years of fasting, I moved to Moody Bible Institute from a more secular college.

I find out all these girls are born again. I thought, whoa, I'm safe. I was in love with about seven of them in the first week.

I was really confused, wondering whether I should break my fast. I went to rent a Moody science film. And I saw one of the most beautiful girls on planet Earth sitting behind the desk, renting the science films.

I broke my fast, immediately moved in on the target. She became my wife. That's a miracle.

Didn't happen overnight. In fact, I think I scared her because I said, look, you're probably not going to be a missionary, are you? First thing I said to this little girl, total stranger, you're probably not going to be a missionary. She looked at me, little quiet country girl from Iowa.

Why do you say that? I say, well, all the really attractive girls, hint, hint, hint, all the really attractive girls, they're all hunting pastors. None of them are looking for missionaries. She really didn't catch it.

So I took her out for sort of a date. It was sort of more of an interrogation. This is absolute truth.

I sat down with her, this loud, aggressive New Jersey person. She had never met anyone like me. And I said, look, probably nothing going to happen between you and me, but let's get the cards on the table.

I'm going to be a missionary. And if you marry me, you're probably going to be eaten by cannibals in New Guinea. She told me later she was not in love with me at that time.

You think that's bad? The next week, you heard of the fleece thing? The, you know, testing to see if something's God's will? The next week, the ultimate test. I don't know what was in my mind. I can't remember.

But I gave her a bag of vile, dirty laundry, including underwear. In those days, I wasn't big into washing. I used to sleep with my clothes on.

I thought that was redeeming the time. And so I gave her this bag of underwear. And I said, would you wash this as unto the Lord? I was big into the unto the Lord, you know, philosophy.

She reminded me not long ago that she's been washing my underwear, not for 45 years since we're married, for 47 years since that week at Moody Bible Institute. And then I gave her the key scriptures right from Ephesians 5. She thought I was a Bible teacher. She thought I was a man of God.

She was beginning to fall in love. I mobilized a lot of prayer in connection with that. And so we looked into Ephesians 5, and I gave her that key verse, Submit unto your husband as unto the Lord.

And she swallowed it hook, line, and sinker. And we got married, and we went to Mexico. And she put up with all kinds of extremism, including just sleeping on the floor, not spending money for hardly anything, even food.

And the marriage was absolutely fantastic for a couple of weeks. And she sort of read the other verses there. Husbands, love your wives as Christ loved the church.

I always felt that needed to be brought into balance from other scriptures in the book of Revelation and other places. The truth is, at times we've had a pretty rough marriage, mainly because of me. But also because of her tough background and losing her father in the war and other things she went through with her stepfather.

And I just say this to all of you who are married and any of you who are thinking about marriage. Don't go into marriage with unrealistic expectations. Go into marriage with biblical reality, total commitment to Christ, total commitment to one another, determination to work out the problems, whether they're in the sexual area, the communication area, the prayer area, the psychological area, the emotional area, always realizing the bottom line.

Jesus loves you. And Jesus gave his life for you. And so I learned.

I learned so much when I was still a teenager. Just two final things I'll say as I learn how to win people to Jesus. Now, in my temperament, I found that very easy.

Other people don't. I was so aggressive in evangelism. You accepted Jesus with me whether you wanted to or not.

And I had to repent of that and realize some of those people were never really born again. But I took a course on personal evangelism as a young Christian. I started these prayer meetings.

I started to preach when I was just, I guess, about 17. And I started to call people to make decisions for Christ. And sometimes every week I was seeing people come to Christ.

That brought such reality into my life. It gave me faith in my high school to see so many come to Christ. Greater faith, perhaps a greater faith than I have today.

Because when you're young, you're a bit naive. You can sometimes exercise greater faith than when you've been in the battle 40 years and there's a lot of unanswered prayer and a lot more disappointment and a lot more mystery, a lot more mystery in my faith today than when I was 19. But I had the joy of winning many people, including school friends, to Jesus.

I learned a lot by God's grace from His Word before I was 21. And the 10th thing I learned, I learned that there's a huge world out there. There were millions of people that have never heard.

And I got this vision, this vision for Iraq, this vision for Turkey. I think I might have been 21 by that time because I had a vision for some countries while I was still at college, and I'll just leave the globe. And when I went to Mexico, but some of the other countries like Turkey, Iraq, Afghanistan, I think by that time I was at Moody Bible Institute with this tremendous exposure to different missionaries and workers from all over the world.

But needless to say, at a very young age, I had this vision for the nations. I had this vision to go and preach the gospel where Christ was not needed. I knew that America was a needy place, but I also knew there were millions of people and hundreds of thousands of churches that were at least attempting to preach the gospel.

And as I read about Iraq and Libya and Afghanistan and many other countries, including the communist bloc in those days, I discovered millions, millions, and never even heard the gospel. So I made or reaffirmed my commitment before I was 21 that I was going to spend my life among those who had least opportunity to hear. If 10 people are carrying a log, and this is an illustration from Oswald J. Smith, and nine are carrying one end of the log, and one poor soul is carrying the other end of the log, you as a thinking, compassionate person, what end of the log are you going to help with? When I think of my brothers and sisters in Afghanistan, in Tibet, only a few there, in Mongolia, in Libya, in Turkmenistan, in the Maldives, in Socotra, in different countries, I talk about these in some of my CDs and tapes and videos.

We're happy to send some of them to you. When I see how few people are there, how in some cases the church doesn't even exist, as in Tibet, that's where I want to go. Now, I say strongly when I share this now, you must get this confirmation from the Lord and you must get this confirmation from the church.

In God's mercy, I got that confirmation very quickly. It doesn't always happen that quick. God gave me this vision that's been my whole life before I was 21.

It doesn't always happen that way. But those of you who are younger, take this to heart. Get serious now.

Don't, don't, whatever you do, waste these key years in your life. You can be winning people to Christ. You can be starting a spiritual movement.

You can be building up your own spiritual strength. You can be mentoring others. All during this period, I was winning and mentoring others.

And operations growth, though it looks big today with three and a half thousand of us, it's actually been very slow, but it multiplied. And for every hour I ever gave preaching, I put five, six, seven hours into individuals. Either face to face or by phone and by letter.

And that was happening back when I was 19 and 21 years of age. Operation mobilization, that's our name. But our secret has been operation multiplication.

God multiplying your life, my life through other people, who multiply it through other people. And pretty soon, instead of three, you've got 300. And when you have 300, it's very easy to have 3,000.

And we've always challenged people not to stay on OM. Go back to their local church, seek the face of God, then come back to us or go out through some other channel. We have a great God.

And if he can take a character like me, a rough character from New Jersey, and somehow change me, even before I was 21, and then keep me every day on that same path, my whole life. Can you imagine the hope for you? Some of you are way more talented than I was. You're certainly more emotionally stable, I hope so, than I was.

You probably don't have the same number of problems. You think you have a lot of problems? Send me your list. If I can't double it, I'll send you 20 free books.

His grace is sufficient. His strength is made perfect in weakness. Let's pray.

Let's just pray. Let's have a moment of silence. These wonderful musicians, I hope they're going to come back and lead us in one or two other songs that we can use for prayer and commitment.

Let's just have a moment of silence. I wonder if there's some of you, God has spoken to you. God has spoken to you about being more diligent.

God has spoken to you about his lordship. God has spoken to you about maybe one of these 10 areas of growth of biblical reality. And you'd like to take a step of faith.

You'd like to make a greater commitment to Jesus. You'd like him to fill you afresh with his Holy Spirit, as it was in Acts 4.31. And so I'm going to give you this opportunity. I don't always do this, but I'm going to give you this opportunity to make an outward recommitment of your life to Jesus.

To stand up in a sense be counted. And if God has spoken to you, and I've done this a number of times before I was 21. And so it's only fair I give you this opportunity to stand up and say, Lord, I recommit myself to you.

I make that decision to deny self, to take up a cross every day to follow you. I embrace this global vision. I embrace this principle of dealing with worry.

I embrace this principle of the crucified life. If you'll pray any prayer along that line of surrender or commitment, I'd like you to just quietly stand up where you are as an outward expression of an inward transaction. And then I'd like to just pray a prayer of consecration, a prayer of commitment to you, a lot of people for you.

A lot of people are praying for this meeting. And I believe in a sense, when you take a step of faith, even a simple step to stand up, somehow you come to the pinpoint of their prayers and you will receive. Somehow you will receive some extra help from the living God who has brought all this together in the first place.

So God bless you. Take that step of faith. And let me pray specifically for you.

God bless you and you. I learned even in India with Brother Bhaktsingh to give people this kind of opportunity, an outward expression of an inward transaction. It may be a small step for some of you.

Every small step is important. We're dealing with eternal issues. We're dealing with your lifetime ministry.

And so I'd ask you to take that small step of deeper commitment and surrender to be God's man, to be God's woman. God bless you. Anyone else? Thank you.

I wish I had an hour to speak with each one of you. And I know there are others who have time. The church, leaders in the church, we're all willing to help.

If you feel you need extra help at the end of the meeting. Is there anyone else? God bless you. Lord, you see these folk standing before you.

You have touched their hearts. I know there are people that are remaining seated that are just sort of wrestling through this. They want a little more time to think about it.

And that's okay. But I pray for those that are standing before you. Lord, fill them afresh with your Holy Spirit.

Increase their understanding of spiritual warfare. Enable them to lay hold of these 10 dynamic biblical growth principles from your Word. So that they also may be marathon runners.

And someday they also at 66 years of age, or 70 or 80, will be able to look back at a whole lifetime of following you with wholehearted, dynamic, Spirit-led biblical commitment. For we pray, we pray with all of our hearts together in Jesus' name. Amen.

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