

7 Things to Do Always

by Zac Poonen

Zac Poonen emphasizes the importance of consistently obeying God's commands and maintaining a sensitive conscience throughout the year.

Duration: 58:01

Scripture: Genesis 3:6, Matthew 6:33, 2 Corinthians 6:4, Philippians 4:4, Colossians 4:6, 1 Thessalonians 5:17, Hebrews 4:16

Topics: "Prayer Life", "Christian Service"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the need for believers to have a genuine and costly service for God. He points out that many people have a mindset of wanting to get as much as possible for free, but this leads to spiritual poverty. The speaker also highlights the importance of prayer, stating that Scripture instructs us to pray always, rather than specifying a certain amount of time to pray each day. Additionally, the speaker encourages believers to rejoice always, even in difficult circumstances, and to speak with grace and seasoned with salt in their interactions with loved ones.

Transcript

From the time God created man, one of the great aims of Satan has been to convince man that God's commands are difficult to obey or perhaps impossible to obey. And that's what he convinced Adam and Eve, that that one command God gave was very difficult to keep or impossible. And then, of course, also he convinced them that it wasn't serious if they disobeyed God.

That is only one command. And I find that lots of Christians have also got that somehow in the back of their mind the devil's convinced them. Yeah, you can obey some of God's commands, but all of them, well, that's impossible.

And if you don't obey all of them, if you obey most of them, it's okay. It doesn't really matter if you don't obey some of them. And you may be surprised to discover that in your own mind.

If the way to find out is how seriously do you take each command of scripture? When you read something in God's word, do you see it as something which God wants you to do? Or do you immediately look at it and say, well, it's not really possible. Or it doesn't really matter if we don't obey it exactly. I want to show you a few verses which teach us about something the Bible says that we are to do all the time.

You know, when we think of a year, I haven't worked it out, but how many minutes are there in a whole year? You know, there are 24 hours a day and 365 days in a year. So that's a great number of minutes and seconds in this year. And there's something the Bible says, there are certain things the Bible says we must do all the time.

Now when we look at these commands, many of us have been Christians for many, many years. And I want to ask you to examine yourself and see whether you have, in the past, taken these commands seriously, seriously enough to at least try to obey them exactly as written. Or have you, in the back of your mind, sort of made an assumption that it doesn't really mean what it says, or that it's not serious if we don't obey.

Well, then we're making the same mistake that Adam made. So the first one I'd like to turn to is Proverbs in chapter 23, where we read, even though it's an Old Testament commandment, yet we know that it applies to us in the New Covenant too. Proverbs 23, verse 17.

The latter part of that verse, it says, live in the fear of the Lord always. Now, first of all, let's ask ourselves, does that mean that every single moment of this year, I must live in the fear of the Lord, in reverence for God, every single moment of this year. And the Bible says the fear of the Lord is to hate evil.

And in New Testament terms, it would mean what Paul says in Acts 24, verse 16. If I live in reverence for God every single moment of this year, it will mean that I do my very best, like Paul says here in Acts 24, verse 16, to maintain a blameless conscience before God and before men, always. He uses the same word there, always.

We're not saying that we'll never slip up or not make a mistake or never sin. To live in reverence for God is not the same as saying I will never sin. The fear of the Lord is to hate sin.

The one who fears the Lord hates sin. He may slip and fall, but he hates it. And the proof that he hates it is in the fact that he always strives to maintain a conscience that is blameless before God and before men.

Every moment, as soon as he is aware that he has slipped up, he immediately seeks to set it right with God and he immediately seeks to set it right with man. That's the mark of a man who's living in reverence for God all the time. As soon as he's aware, he doesn't wait.

He doesn't postpone. The great danger of postponing something when God tells you to do something is that gradually our conscience gets hardened. When the Lord tells you to do something and you don't do it immediately, there is a certain hardening that takes place.

If you hurt someone and the Lord tells you to apologize or some money that's got to be returned and you don't do it immediately, the chances are you'll probably never do it because a hardening sets in. That's why it says, today if you hear his voice, it says in Hebrews 3, don't harden your heart because as time goes on, you may not hear that voice and you may think everything is okay. There are lots of believers in that condition.

They have ignored the voice of conscience so often that some years later, when they haven't set something right with someone or with God and they don't hear conscience troubling them, they think, oh well, everything is okay. Everything is not okay. Their conscience is dead.

It stopped troubling them. And that's the great danger of neglecting the voice of conscience when it speaks to us the first time. Today, if you hear his voice, a couple of times in Hebrews 3 and 4, that verse comes, today if you hear his voice, don't harden your heart.

Why is that? Because tomorrow, your heart may be so hard that you don't hear that voice. So that's the decision that all of us should take today as we begin a new year. I'm going to do what Paul says he did.

It was one of the great secrets of his life. Always to maintain a blameless conscience before God and before men. If we are proud, we will try to justify ourselves when our conscience convicts us of something and we will say, no, we didn't do anything wrong.

Yeah? You may feel like that because your conscience has become hard. When a person's skin loses sensitivity, you can poke him and he doesn't feel anything. He's being honest when he says, I don't feel anything.

Absolutely honest. He's not telling a lie. And some believers, when they say to me, I don't feel I've done anything wrong, they're absolutely honest.

They've got leprosy in their conscience, they don't feel anything. They're not telling a lie. They really don't feel anything.

But that's because for so many years they have neglected their conscience. So when you say, I don't feel I've done anything wrong, you're absolutely honest, but you're also thoroughly deceiving yourselves. I mean, I don't know if some of you have come to that state.

If so, it's pretty pathetic. But I personally feel that some in CFC have come to that state because I don't see a sensitivity to sin in some lives where even after a long time, you find that sensitivity hasn't come. And I don't believe they're telling a lie when they say they don't feel anything.

They really don't feel anything, but they don't realize they're dead. It's like the story I heard of a man who was preaching in the open air and said, well, you know, this burden of sin, Jesus can take it away. So there was one heckler in the crowd who was just trying to make fun.

He said, what preacher? I don't feel any burden of sin. What are you talking about? And he said, that's right. If you put a heavy weight on the chest of a dead man, he doesn't feel anything.

So the fact that you don't feel a burden of sin just proves you're dead. So don't go by the fact. I don't feel I did anything wrong.

Maybe. But it's probably because your conscience is so dead. In which case you need to really go to God and say, Lord, please don't let that happen to me.

And if it has already happened, please revive this dead conscience. Make it more sensitive so that the smallest little pinprick I will feel, just like you feel on your skin a little mosquito bite or a pinprick. Ask God to give you a sensitive conscience this year.

It's the greatest gift that you can ask God for. Don't ask him for a promotion or a better salary like a lot of Christians do. Ask him to give you a sensitive conscience and to show you whether in some areas your conscience has already died.

You know, a person's body may have leprosy only in certain portions. Other portions he feels it. Certain portions he feels nothing.

I don't want a conscience like that where some areas are completely dead. No. I want a conscience where I'm sensitive in every area.

Immediately sensitive to sin and I want to complete this year becoming more sensitive to sin than I was, than I am right now at the beginning of the year. I want to do that because I know that's the proof that I'm getting closer to God. I don't want to remain in the same class next year.

I hope you don't want to remain in the same class. I want to discover before the end of this year certain things that are sin which right now I don't see as sin. So, at the end of the year ask yourself whether you've discovered something in this year to be sinful which right now you don't think is sinful.

That will be one of the finest tests of spiritual progress. That's the meaning of walking in the light. If we walk in the light, we have fellowship one with another with God.

Now, fellowship with one another as believers also deepens. See, I have discovered when I meet somebody whom I haven't met for a long time. I find my fellowship with him is very deep.

Then I know he's been walking in the light. I haven't seen him for a year or two but in a few moments we are in very deep fellowship with each other because it doesn't depend on how often we see each other. The condition is not if you see each other often we have fellowship with one another.

No, if we walk in the light and then there are other people like a number here in our church with whom I don't have much fellowship at all even though I see them twice every week at least. And that shows me that I'm not here to judge them but in some area they're not walking in the light. Because if there was walking in the light, there'd be very deep fellowship.

And I believe that's one way by which God has given us an external check so that we don't fool ourselves. I can fool myself that I'm becoming holier. But if I am, my fellowship with others who walk in the light will become deeper.

So a sensitive conscience is one of the things that we must make a goal in our life this year. To fear the Lord always. To keep a sensitive conscience always.

To any moment, day or night, I must have a conscience that's absolutely clear. There must not be a single moment this year when I have to say, oh my conscience is not clear. Why should it be like that? What is hindering me from confessing my sin to God? What's hindering me from going and apologizing to somebody? It must be only pride, nothing else.

So that's number one. I want to say seven things. Number two is Psalm 16 and verse 8. Again it says, the psalmist says here, I have set the Lord always or continually before me.

That's another thing that we must do all the time throughout this year. Continually or always I've set the Lord before me. And that means in everything I'm seeking his approval in what I do.

If you were to search your own heart you may discover that a lot of the things we say and do are to get the approval of others in the church or our neighbors or relatives or all types of people. In other words, we set those people in front of us. And we think, what will so and so think? Many people when their children dress

in a particular way, the thought in their mind is not what God thinks but what will people in the church say if they see my daughter or son dressed like this? That may be a good concern but it is seeking your own honor.

What will the people in the church think if my children don't come for all the meetings? Oh, finish with that. Set the Lord before you. What will the Lord say? What will the Lord think? What does the Lord think of you? What does the Lord think of that activity? What does the Lord think of your children? Not what people in the church think.

Throw that in the garbage bin. I've set the Lord continually before me. All the time.

He's there. He's there. And his opinion is the only thing that matters.

You may think that you're already there. But I doubt it very much because it's a constant battle. It's a constant battle to have the Lord all the time.

Continually. Not even a single moment when somebody else's opinion matters. It's just the Lord.

Only him. Only him. And we have to practice it.

Like one of those old saints spoke about the practice of the presence of God. You know these folks who say that the Sabbath day must be holy or for some people Sunday is holy. This brother said there was no day that was holy for him especially.

Every day was holy. And this brother who wrote this book on the practice of the presence of God was a cook in a monastery. And he said when I'm washing the dishes I'm just as conscious of the presence of God as when I'm kneeling down and taking part in the Lord's table.

Can you say that? I mean we can despise these Roman Catholics as having not much light. But you may discover in the final day that this man, his name was Brother Lawrence, was probably a few miles ahead of you in God's kingdom despite some of his wrong doctrines. Doctrines are a matter of the head.

And you may be more right than him. God doesn't look at our heads. He looks at the heart.

And in his heart he was much closer because for him everything was to be done in God's presence. If he took part in the Lord's table, there he would sense the Lord's presence. When he was washing the dishes in the sink, that was his job.

He was conscious of the Lord's presence. It's like that lady who wrote on top of her kitchen sink, Divine worship is conducted here three times every day. It's great.

Whatever we do, we do all for the glory of God because I've set the Lord always before me. There's nothing on earth which is secular. Everything is sacred.

When Jesus was preaching a sermon or healing the sick, he was doing as holy a thing as when he was making stools and benches in the carpenter shop. He was doing the will of God. There's no such thing.

You don't think that preaching a sermon is more spiritual than cooking a meal. It's a question of what God's called you to do and what you're supposed to do. If a mother goes preaching sermons when she should be cooking meals for her children, she's disobeying God.

She doesn't have the Lord set before her. A lot of people who think that going and doing something for the Lord somewhere is more important. No.

It's that which the Lord has called you to do. I've set the Lord always before me. And in every single task, it's only a question of whether he approves and accepts and approves what you do.

That's all that you need to be concerned about. Everything else is really unimportant. Okay.

The third thing is Philippians 4.4, a verse that we've often quoted in the church. Rejoice in the Lord always. And you know, Paul realizes and the Holy Spirit realizes that some people will think that's a bit of an extreme statement.

But he says again, I say rejoice. I really meant it, he's saying. It wasn't an overstatement.

It's exactly what I meant. Always rejoice. Now when we read something like that, you have heard that in church for 25 years, some of you.

What has been your attitude when you've heard it? Have you, there could be a number of attitudes. You could have said, well, it's not possible. Not possible in my situation.

Maybe it's possible for Brother Zach, not for me. Or your attitude may have been, well, I suppose I'll try. Some of the time, most of the time, generally, but always.

Or your attitude could have been that, well, even if I'm not obeying it, it's okay. I'm pretty good in other ways. That's exactly what the devil wants you to think.

That some of these commands of God, it doesn't matter if you ignore. I mean, if there are commands in the scripture, which it doesn't matter if you ignore, then I wonder why God ever put it there at all. If he told us to do something always, and it doesn't matter whether you do it always or not.

Well, is it possible that I can disobey something God has commanded me to do, and not suffer spiritual loss? Now if you were ignorant, I can understand. There's a lovely verse in Acts 17, I think 26 or something, which says, The times of ignorance God overlooks. That's a great verse.

The areas of ignorance God overlooks too. There are a whole lot of areas where God has commanded something I don't know. God doesn't hold me responsible.

But those areas in my life which I know what God has commanded, there, if I don't obey, that's pretty serious. It shows a certain attitude to certain commands of God. Saying, well, it doesn't really matter.

Do I need to keep my conscience clear always? No, not really. Do I need to set the Lord before me always? Well, not really. Or, do I need to rejoice in the Lord always? Not really.

It's a certain attitude that you have towards God's word that the devil, you may not realize, is the devil who gave you that attitude. But the result is, it's like putting your foot down on the brakes in your car or scooter. Then you can accelerate as much as you like.

You're not going to go very far or very fast. Because this brake is being pushed down, the brake which says, it doesn't really matter if you don't obey that. I'm not going to make a serious effort to obey it.

Or, I'm not going to ask myself, why haven't I obeyed it after hearing it for 25 years? Why haven't I been disturbed? Why haven't I wept at night on my pillow and said, God, I don't seem to be able to come to this. Those are the ones who will attain this life. Because God is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.

When they see a command and they are determined to obey it, and they find they are not able to do it, they can ignore it and get nothing. It's like the man who went to his neighbor's house and knocked, asked for bread, didn't get it, went back home and slept. He would get nothing.

But like Jesus said, the man who went and kept on knocking, Jesus said, ask like this. For everyone who asks like this, receives. And everyone who knocks like this, to him it is opened.

There are many people who ask and receive nothing, because they don't ask like this. They don't ask until they get. They don't knock until the door is open, so it's never opened.

So they can sit year after year after year after year in the church and hear these wonderful truths and never experience even one of them. Because first of all, they don't believe that God will ever do it for them. Maybe secondly, they don't feel it's very important.

And third, they are not serious about seeking until they get. Then of course it doesn't happen. Maybe it's been like that in past years and maybe 2007 will also be like that for you.

You begin the year treating God's word lightly and you'll end the year treating God's word lightly, just like you've done in past years. Or, you can decide that it's going to be different this year. You are going to take some of these things much more seriously and you're going to knock until the door is open and you're going to ask until you receive.

The Bible calls God's word in Acts 20, the word of His grace. The word of His grace means with every word, there is a grace that comes with it to help you to obey it. You must believe that.

I believe that. I believe that with every word, because it's the word of His grace, there's a grace that comes with it to obey it. It's like if my dad told me, go and buy this, sends me a letter saying, go and buy this very expensive thing.

I say, how can I do that? Then I look inside the envelope, there's a check there, for that money. Oh, then I can do it. Every word is like that.

Do this. You look inside, there's grace there to help you to obey it. Rejoice always? Sure.

Can be done. Grace is sufficient for every need. Let us go boldly to the throne of grace.

Receive grace to help us in our time of need. Let's turn to 2 Corinthians 6 in this same connection. Paul speaks there about how he always rejoiced.

He went through many trials. He speaks about 2 Corinthians 6, about many afflictions. Verse 4, middle.

Hardships, distresses, beatings, imprisonments, tumults, labor, sleeplessness, hunger. I think most of these things, none of us have ever experienced. Beatings for the gospel's sake, imprisonments, sleeplessness and hunger for the gospel's sake.

And considered by, you know, people treated him as with dishonor, we're saying. Some people honored him. Some people dishonored him.

Some people said a good report about him. Some people said an evil report about him. Some people considered Paul as a deceiver.

Others considered him as a prophet. Verse 8. Completely unknown in certain circles. Paul is very well known in certain other circles.

Verse 9. Punished, but not put to death. Verse 9, last part. And then he says, Sorrowful, but always rejoicing.

How can that be? Can you be sorrowful and always rejoicing? Sure. Because joy is something of the heart. And sorrow, I don't allow any sorrow that comes to me to take away this joy.

The primary thing that we should all be sorrowful about is the fact that we haven't yet become more like Jesus. I hope that's the main thing you're sorrowful about. But that sorrow should not take away your joy.

Some people get so sorrowful about their sins, they even doubt their salvation. Then you can say the devil has succeeded 100%. With many people he succeeds only 50%, but with such people he succeeds 100%.

As sorrowful, yet always rejoicing. We can have sorrow if some loved one dies. We can have sorrow when somebody is sick.

We can have sorrow when we face a disappointment. But it should never take away our joy. We cannot live in this world and say that we'll never face any sorrow.

We certainly will. Because the world is an evil world. There won't be any sorrow in heaven, that's for sure.

We will shed tears on this earth. There will be no tears in heaven. But that sorrow will never, never take away our joy.

This is the true Christian life. Always. Always rejoicing.

Always giving thanks for everything. See Ephesians 5. It says in verse 20, Always giving thanks for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, to God our Father. The reason is because, why all things? Because of Romans 8.28 which says, God makes all things work together for good to those who love God.

Now if Romans 8.28 had said, God makes most things work together for good to those who love God, then Ephesians 5.20 will read, giving thanks for most things. I mean that's logical. If God's not in control of everything, then we can't give thanks for everything.

If God's only in control of most things, we can only give thanks for most things. So it's a matter of faith. Why do you actually in your life, give thanks only for most things? Because you don't believe that God is in control of everything.

There are certain things that happen in your life, which you believe God is not in control of. Some other weak man is in control of, and he controls that thing which affects your life, and almighty God is not able to do anything about it. That's why you can't give thanks for that, because, you see that's, I mean that's

something which almighty God can't do anything about.

Well, then you certainly can't give thanks for it. I mean if there's one single thing, that any human being on the earth, the most powerful human being in the world, or anybody, some one little thing that a man can do to me, or harm me, or do anything, which almighty God cannot control. How in the world can I give thanks for it? Impossible.

So if I see there are few areas in life, where almighty God cannot control these areas, then I will not give thanks for those areas. I will, you know, say well, we got to take care of ourselves, we got to do our best. Okay, fine.

But I'm not with you in that boat. You can sail alone in that boat. Not sail alone, you'll have a lot of company on that boat.

But I'm not going in that boat. Sorry. The name of my boat is Romans 8.28. God makes all things work together for my good.

Because of that, I can give thanks for all things. And that spirit of thanksgiving is what glorifies God. And the Bible says in Psalm 50, verse 23.

Psalm 50, and verse 23. And I want to read a paraphrase of this. Whoever offers a sacrifice of thanksgiving.

Do you know what a sacrifice of thanksgiving is? How is a sacrifice of thanksgiving different from thanksgiving? Have you thought of that? Sacrifice means it cost me something. When a man offered a bullock in the Old Testament as a sacrifice, it cost him a lot of money. I mean, a bullock may cost ten, twenty thousand rupees.

Quite a lot of money. To just give away on an altar in one moment. Whereas, just to get up and say, Thank you Lord for forgiving my sin.

That didn't cost me anything. See, that's the reason why some Old Testament believers were far more godly than many of us New Testament believers. Because their thanksgiving involves sacrifice.

For many New Testament believers, there's no sacrifice in their life. Their giving thanks to God costs them zero. Well, naturally, that Old Testament believer will be way ahead of you spiritually.

Because his sacrifice cost him twenty thousand rupees. Your thanksgiving cost you zero. That cost him a lot of inconvenience.

Three times a year he had to travel to Jerusalem. And that's one reason why Two times a year, those who travel to the conferences in Bangalore and spend four, five, six hundred rupees just for their train fare, and their whole family come, they have to spend three, four thousand rupees. Imagine spending five thousand rupees a year just to come to Bangalore with your family.

And here's another believer in Bangalore who just walks across the road to the conference. Who do you think is going to get more from the conference? Definitely that man who spent five thousand rupees. Not this person who thinks, I got it cheap.

You didn't get it cheap. You got nothing. You got knowledge.

He got something. I've really seen this. You know, in the early days, I used to be puzzled.

I used to say, How is it, Lord, that people who live in Bangalore, you hear these truths all the time? And I compare that to the lives of some of these other people in Tamil Nadu, and they seem to grow spiritually much more. And the reason is this. The people in Bangalore earn five to ten times more than those people, but they don't spend as much for the conference.

Those people earn twenty percent of what people earn here, but they spend so much of that just to come here. It costs them something. It's a sacrifice.

And God honors sacrifice made for Him. He's always done it. And that's the reason why they grow spiritually, whereas those who are miserly and tight-fisted, they remain spiritually poor.

The increase in knowledge. Sacrifice of thanksgiving means to give thanks when it's difficult for me to give thanks. When it's easy for me to give thanks, there's no thanksgiving.

It's a sacrifice. I mean, if somebody gives you an ice cream, it's not a sacrifice to say, Thank you very much. Or somebody gives you a gift of five hundred rupees, is it a sacrifice to say, Thank you very much? There's a sacrifice there.

A sacrifice of thanksgiving is where it's difficult for me to say, Thank you to God, but I still say it. God, I don't understand why it's like this, but I'm going to give you thanks because you're on the throne and you're making all things work together for my good. Let's learn to give thanks and rejoice always this year.

Learn the way of sacrifice, my brothers. I believe we have lost a lot in Bangalore in past years because we have had it so easy. Our service for God has cost us very little.

You see, man's nature is to get as much free as possible. And God sees those who have that attitude, they remain spiritually poor. They will continue to remain spiritually poor.

The other thing we need to remember is the fourth thing, is what Jesus told us in Luke 18 verse 1. To pray always. How often are we to pray? The various books that tell us about various people who prayed for half an hour a day or two hours a day or four hours a day. I'll tell you honestly, I'm never impressed by any of those books.

Because I never read anything like that in Scripture. Scripture only tells me that they prayed always. Have you read these books on prayer of some people who spent four hours in prayer, two hours in prayer, six hours, and it moves you? I'm sure you've read books like that.

But ask yourself, how long did it move you? Did it make any of you go and spend four hours in prayer? No. It's just a temporary feeling you get which stirs you, oh, I've got to do something about this. Don't fool yourself.

Go to Scripture. Scripture says pray always. Luke 18 verse 1. Men ought to pray all the time.

But what does that mean, to pray all the time? He also said in Luke 21 verse 36, in relation to the last days, Jesus said, keep on the alert at all times praying. Again, being on the alert at all times in praying. Now let me give you an example of a man who prayed always or continually.

Then we'll understand what it means. In Acts chapter 10, this is very different from the biographies of these so-called great men of God who prayed for two hours and four hours and six hours every day. Acts chapter 10 verse 2 is not even a man of God.

He is not even a Christian. He's a heathen. His name is Cornelius.

He doesn't know anything about the Bible. He doesn't even know about Jesus Christ. But it says about him that he prayed to God continually.

What was he doing? He was a centurion. If he was always on his knees, the Roman government would have sacked him. He was an army soldier.

He had to lead a hundred men to battle. How was he praying to God continually? There you understand what it means to pray to God continually. It's an attitude of constant dependence on God for everything all the time.

It's an attitude like the branch says to the tree, I can bear no fruit without you, not even for a single second. I may have borne fruit for 50 years, but if I get cut off from you, that's the end of my fruitfulness. I can't bear any fruit apart from you.

And that attitude, that's how Jesus lived. Constantly dependent on the Father. We have a humankind that's come out of Adam that says, I can do a lot of things without God's help.

They don't say it, but it's their attitude. Jesus was the opposite. He said, I can do nothing unless I see the Father doing it.

I'm dependent on the Father all the time. That's what it means to pray. Prayer is the mark of a weak man.

It's the person who is helpless who prays. And Jesus lived like that. To pray continually is to recognize one's constant helplessness as you lean upon God.

That's why he used the example of a branch in a tree. A branch is absolutely helpless without the tree to produce anything. Another picture of prayer is breathing.

We breathe continuously. We're not always aware of it. In fact, most of the time we're not aware of it.

It's only when you're sick that you're aware of your breathing, like asthma. But otherwise normal people are not aware of their breathing. They breathe all the time, they don't even know it.

And prayer must become like that to us. Where we are... You know, anything that happens, we immediately think of taking it to the Lord. Because we're in touch with him all the time.

It's like these walkie-talkies that these police inspectors carry around. It's always on. And you hear sounds on that, but all those messages are not for them.

But sometimes it may be for them. But it's always on. The antenna is always up.

Always on, never switched off. Not even when they're asleep at night, it's there on their bed table. Always on.

And that's what it means to pray continually. And that's how Cornelius did it. He had got his many duties in the Roman military, but he prayed always to God, continually.

Amazing example of a heathen man who didn't know the Bible, who didn't read any books on prayer, but prayed to this unknown God. And God said to him one day through an angel, Your prayers, verse 4, last part, have ascended before God as a memorial. That's the verse in the Bible that teaches me that God listens to the prayers of heathen people.

It's in the Bible. An angel said it. And I can tell you verses in the Bible that tell you that God does not listen to the prayers of many Christians.

Psalms 66, 18 says, If you regard sin in your heart, the Lord will not hear you. I'm absolutely convinced that a lot of Christians have got sin in their heart, unconfessed sin, people they have not apologized to, things they have not said right. They can pray.

God does not listen to them. They rejoice in the fact that they are blessed materially. Material blessings, The Marwadis have the most in India, I think.

You're in the category, you're in the same category as them. You're not even as good as them. Because you don't earn as much as them.

No, God does not listen to the prayers of many, many people. I'm absolutely convinced, after having moved around with many types of Christians, that more than 90% of the Christians I have met, believers, God does not listen to their prayers. Because there is sin, unjudged, unconfessed, unsettled in their life.

Too proud to say them right? Okay. But the Bible wants us to pray continuously. Especially in the last days, pray continually.

Number five, Colossians 4, verse 6. In Colossians 4, in verse 6, here's something else that we must do all the time this year. Here are goals that we must set before us. And say, Lord, I will not take your word lightly anymore.

I will not take your word lightly like Adam did, Adam and Eve did in the Garden of Eden. I'm going to take it very seriously. Colossians 4, verse 6 says, Always, our speech must be with grace.

Can we make that a goal this year? You begin at home, that when you speak to your wife, or speak to your husband, and speak to the ones whom you call your loved ones, those you love the most, that it will not be just words, loved ones, but you will speak with grace. Then they can receive something. And it says here that, as though seasoned with salt.

In other words, you know, you and I know, when you eat food, as soon as you put it in your mouth, you immediately know whether salt is lacking or not. You don't even need one second. You can't explain it.

It looks the same. Can you look at rice, or a curry which has salt, and which doesn't have salt, by looking at it, can you say? No. But as soon as it touches your tongue, you know immediately.

Speech is like that. You hear something from someone, immediately you know whether there is grace there or not. That person may explain, no, I didn't mean that, and this, this, this, yeah, all that, explain it.

It's all nonsense. You know immediately there was no grace there, and he's just trying to cover it up with some excuse. Maybe your wife, maybe your husband, maybe somebody else.

As one who is an elder in the church, I have heard every possible excuse that any human being can ever make. Because I've met enough believers who, when I tell them something, they've got some excuse. The devil is an expert at giving excuses to people.

For this and that, and the other thing, the rare believer who will say, yeah, that's right brother, my speech was not with grace. Almost never have I come across a person who will admit it immediately. My speech was not with grace.

I admit it. Always there's some justification. We've got this habit from Adam that it's not really my fault.

I'm not that bad as you think I am. I'm actually pretty good. And that's what prevents many of us from growing spiritually.

Paul said, my flesh? There's nothing good in my flesh. That fellow grew spiritually like anything. Because he acknowledged it.

But those of us who think there's some good in our flesh, well, what can God do? So, as though seasoned with salt, so that you will know how you should respond to each person. See, there's no standard law which says how to speak to people. I mean, in management schools and all, they teach you how to speak and win friends and all that, but Jesus wasn't interested in all that.

How to respond to each person? How to speak to this person? How to speak to that person? God must give us wisdom and grace to those who are serious about following the Lord. How do you speak to them? To those who are casual and careless, how do you speak to them? Those who are critical and judgmental about you, how do you speak to them? You must know how to respond to each person. Number six, 2 Corinthians 4.10 says, always, another thing that we need to do throughout this year, always carrying in our body the dying of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may be manifested in our body.

What that basically means is there is a dying which is called the dying of Jesus. Because he's the first one who practiced that dying all through his life. It's called the dying of Jesus.

You know, like they named some stars after the man who invented them, even some diseases after the man who invented them, discovered that disease. So the dying of Jesus, the dying which he had, it's not any other dying. It's not the dying in other religions.

It's the dying of Jesus. It's not the dying of Buddhism or Yoga, it's the dying of Jesus, where inwardly he died. He lived on earth as a dead man, inwardly, dead to his self-life, dead to his reputation, his own wishes and what would please him and what people thought of him.

He died. And it says here, I must bear this dying all the time. That's the way of the cross.

And let's seek to pursue this throughout this year and say, Lord, I want to go along this way of the cross every single day. I want to choose the way you went. If you think of it just as death, it's gloomy.

But when you look at it as the dying of Jesus, that's what brightens up the whole thing. It's not just dying. It's not dying to self, like people say, dying of Jesus.

Dying to self can look like a gloomy thing, but the dying of Jesus, that brightens up the whole thing. Just the word Jesus, he did it first. Finally, the last one, Corinthians 15 and verse 58, Always abound in the work of the Lord.

That's where everything we do must finally end. 1 Corinthians 15, 58 says, Beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord. Let's seek to do that this year.

Say, Lord, I always want to abound. Any opportunity I get to serve you, to be a witness for you, I want to take it. I don't want to miss it or lose it.

Always, 365 days of the year. I don't want to be in a bad mood one day and miss the opportunity to witness to somebody. Don't you think there have been times in the past when you could have had an opportunity to witness to somebody and you were in a bad mood and the opportunity was missed? That's why all the other things I mentioned earlier that we need to do always, we need to take heed to.

And here is where we realize our life is meant for serving others. The work of the Lord is the work of serving others. Jesus came to earth to serve others, to bless others and to help others.

Most of the other things we said was for ourselves. You know, my conscience and I rejoice in the Lord always and I pray always and I speak with grace. But ultimately the purpose is that I might be a blessing to other people in the world.

And the work of the Lord is the work of serving other people. If you are a servant of the Lord, you are a servant of other people. It's one of the things the Lord showed me when I decided to be his servant that if you be my servant, you are allowed to be the servant of other people.

That's not easy. They will take advantage of you. They will take advantage of your time.

Your life will not be your own. Your time will not be your own. Your house will not be your own.

It's not easy to serve the Lord. The tremendous privilege is an honor in serving the Lord but you've got to pay a price. Always abounding.

Never complaining, why are people taking, can't they be considerate and why are they taking advantage of me. Never anything of that. Abounding, overflowing.

Oh, here's another opportunity to serve the Lord. The only thing that limits us is we are human beings and we get physically tired. Jesus slept and we need to sleep.

I find my mind gets tired too sometimes. Then I need to relax and do something else to take my mind off, you know, the strain of ministry but always abounding and make it your goal till the day you die, till the Lord calls you home, right till your last day. You'll always abound in the work of the Lord, blessing other people and there's so many opportunities in the world around us to bless other people without making a nuisance of ourselves in an upright, decent way without making a nuisance of ourselves to be a blessing to others, to our relatives, neighbors, people we meet, just to smile at them perhaps, love them, bless them, be concerned about them, ask people if you can pray for them.

Don't feel that the first opportunity itself, you must preach the gospel to somebody. It may not be the right time. The ground has to be plowed before you sow the seed.

Many Christians are very foolish here. They just go sowing the seed everywhere. A lot of that seed is wasted.

Plow the ground. When you go to work in an office, you don't have to witness to every single person there the first day. You may witness to somebody only after one year.

Ask the Lord to open the door. Always be ready to serve the Lord. Let's make this year different from every other year before.

Let's pray. Heavenly Father, apply these truths to our lives that we can live in the light of them and that at the end of this year we'll be so totally transformed and so much of a blessing to others that's going to eclipse everything we have ever experienced in all our past years. We pray in Jesus' name.

Amen.

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