

Building the Body of Christ - 8 a Challenge for Young People

by Zac Poonen

The sermon emphasizes the importance of young people in the church and the need for them to be involved in ministry, while also addressing the challenges of being a young believer and the importance of spiritual growth and obedience.

Duration: 56:38

Scripture: Isaiah 40:31, Matthew 5:16, John 6:37, John 20:29, 1 Corinthians 15:58, Ephesians 6:1, Hebrews 12:1-2, 1 Peter 2:2

Topics: "Youth Ministry", "Spiritual Growth"

Description

This sermon emphasizes the importance of young people being active in serving the Lord, drawing parallels to the disciples of Jesus who were younger than Him and ready to lead the church. It addresses the need for young believers to have a personal assurance of salvation, the significance of reacting to sin with repentance, and the importance of growing spiritually by desiring God's Word. The sermon also touches on the challenges young people face in a worldly culture, the need to honor parents, and the encouragement to stand firm in faith despite worldly influences and the anticipation of Christ's second coming.

Transcript

I always like to tell young people that that on the day of Pentecost, the leadership of the church was in the hands of 11 people who were under the age of 33. See, Jesus was like the Jewish rabbis and they never took disciples who were older than them. They were all younger than him.

Just like in India, all the gurus and all always have people younger than them. The disciples are always younger than them, are younger than the master. So, when Jesus started his ministry at the age of 30, all his disciples were younger than him.

When Jesus started his ministry at the age of 30, all his disciples were younger than him. And they had so many wrong ideas. But they were totally yielded to Christ.

They were ready to be apostles, to lead the church. Why is it we don't find such people today? Why do people think you've got to wait till you're 50 or 60 before you do something for the Lord? Why do people

think you've got to wait till you're 50 or 60 before you do something for the Lord? I think that's the work of the devil. I want to encourage all of you young people that the Lord can lift you up and use you.

We need a lot of young people who are a witness for Christ. Because everywhere I go, I find young people are just drifting away from God. And they're going off into all types of worldly entertainment.

And they are turned away from church because they feel church is so boring. And they're right, a lot of churches are pretty boring. And that is the fault of the older generation.

And that is the fault of the younger generation. I will pray to the Lord that He will help me to change. So you must pray like that to the Lord.

So you must pray like that to the Lord. When I was 19 years old, I accepted Christ. And I prayed to the Lord so many times that He would come into my heart.

But I didn't have the assurance that He had come into my heart. Whether you're really born again. You're not sure.

So you must be sure, otherwise you won't be able to grow spiritually. I don't know the date when I was born again. But that's not important.

Those who are born in Christian families, very often they don't know the exact date. I have four sons, I don't think any of them know the exact date when they were born again. I have four sons, I don't think any of them know the exact date when they were born again.

Because when you are born in a Christian family, your parents teach you to give your heart to Jesus Christ. And we have asked the Lord 500 times to come into our hearts. There's nothing wrong in that.

But one of those times will be real. But we may not be sure. So I was also not sure.

I said, how do I know whether He has come or not? Because you know, some people used to give fantastic testimonies that some electric shock hit them or things like that. Or some people had a very wild, wicked life and then one day they went for a meeting and they were turned around. But I was like most of us, I never lived a wild, wicked life.

I didn't even have a good testimony to say, it was not very spectacular. I remember when I was a very young Christian, I heard a man testify in a meeting who had been a murderer. I'll never forget that.

He'd been a murderer, he was a gang of murderers. He had pulled out people's intestines and done all types of terrible things. And one day he was on his way to commit a murder.

And he saw some pretty girls, a number of them going in some direction, so he followed them. And they went into a church. And he sat there and he listened.

And he knelt down and he got converted and his life was changed immediately. And I was young and pretty stupid those days. I said, boy, I wish I had a testimony like that.

I wish I had murdered a few people and then suddenly got converted one day. But as I grew up, I said, thank you, Lord, I didn't murder anybody. You know, when we are young and we've grown up in Christian families, we wish we had a spectacular testimony.

But I think only one in a million have that type of testimony, that they were murderers and they got converted in one moment. But you know, I have found with my very simple testimony that I never did any gross evil. I didn't suddenly get converted in one moment.

I heard and responded and heard and responded 500 times. And one of those times I got converted. I don't know when.

You know what I found? More people were helped by my testimony than that man's testimony. Because most of us live very ordinary lives. I never had an electric shock in my whole life.

I mean, I did get one when I touched an electric wire, but other than that, I never got any electric shock. But I never had any spiritual experience like that. I've never seen a light or never seen Jesus physically.

I never heard God even once with these ears. My life has been a very ordinary, unspectacular life. My whole life I have lived by faith, not by sight, because I have never seen or heard anything.

I used to sometimes wish, I wish I could see Jesus physically. Oh, that would really solve all my problems. I suppose I would talk about that for the rest of my life if I saw him.

And then everybody else would get discouraged who hadn't seen Jesus like me. But the Lord gave me a verse which really encouraged me once. The first verse I'll tell you was John 6, 37.

John 6, 37. Where one day I just read this. I was 19 and a half years.

And I read here the last part, John 6, 37. Him it cometh to me, I will never cast out. I said, Lord, I've come to you about 500 times sometimes, I don't know.

The Lord said, according to this verse, I haven't cast you out, believe it. See, when I say the Lord said, I have to explain that. It was never with my ears.

It was not with these ears that I heard. I heard the Lord speak to me from this verse in my heart, that's what I mean. Because I believe this is God's word.

That also, some people ask me, you guys are blindly believing one book, who said it's God's word? I said, 50 years ago if you asked me, I would not be able to give you any proof that it is God's word. But today I can say, that I have read this book and claimed its promises for 50 years. And God has never once let me down.

I'm willing to risk my life to stand on the fact this is the word of God. I'm willing to risk my life to stand on the fact this is the word of God. For example, if someone asks me, if someone asks me, if someone comes and says, you can risk your life to say this is the word of God.

You can risk your life to say this is the word of God. I'd say no, I won't say that. If you can take my life, I believe the Bible is God's word.

That's how much I'm convinced today. I say test it out. Test and see if it works or not.

I've tested and found it always works. I'm not telling lies. I can honestly say, I have never found one promise that doesn't work in this book.

I have never found one promise that doesn't work in this book. But if I didn't take it seriously, But if I didn't take it seriously, then it won't work. then it won't work.

I find a lot of Christians, they go about God's word so half-heartedly. I find a lot of Christians, they go about God's word so half-heartedly. And then they don't experience the full blessing.

And then they don't experience the full blessing. But if you go at it whole-heartedly, But if you go at it whole-heartedly, then you'll find that it really works. Then you'll find that it's a true promise.

So I believe that word 50 years ago. So I believe that word 50 years ago. I said, Lord, I have no feeling.

I said, Lord, I have no feeling. I just believe today that you have not cast me out. that you have not cast me out.

And you know, now when I look back over 50 years, I never once doubted that Jesus accepted me. I believe he accepted me. And you can be sure if you just trust his word.

I discovered another thing, that until I was sure, I was always living an up and down life. Sometimes I would be interested in spiritual things, sometimes I would go down. Till one day, I said, Lord, I believe your word.

I believe you accepted me. I didn't become perfect that day. And I've committed many sins in the last 50 years.

Even though I turned from sin, I fell so many times. So that's another mistake young people make. They think if I'm born again, I'm never going to sin again.

Well, that's not my testimony. I've fallen many times. But something happened after I was born again.

That when I fell, I'd always feel very bad about it. I'd feel bad in my heart. Whereas before, I could sin and not be bothered about it.

So, I'd look at it something like this. You know, a pig, when it falls into dirty water, it's not disturbed. It's quite used to dirt and filth and all that.

And it doesn't feel bad that it's all dirty. But if a cat falls into dirty water, it'll immediately jump out. And for one hour, it'll be just licking itself clean.

I see that's a picture of the difference between a believer and an unbeliever. Can a cat fall into dirty water? Sure. Then what's the difference between that and a pig? The difference is that when they fall, after they fall, the reaction is different.

So, if you want to find out whether you're a believer or not, I won't ask you whether you fall into sin. Because we all fall. I want to ask you, what is your reaction when you fall? That'll tell me whether you're a pig or a cat.

I found that a comfort to know that it's my reaction to falling that determines whether I'm a child of God or not. Because some people get so discouraged. Oh, I accepted the Lord last week and now I've fallen again.

And I know some people in my church who wouldn't take baptism for a long time because they were afraid, after I take baptism, if I fall into sin, then it'll be so bad. And usually, these are children of Christian parents. I found that children of Hindu parents, they are quick to take baptism.

But the Christian parents' children, they would wait and wait and wait. Because the parents were very foolish. Because they know that once the child gets baptized, they can use that baptism like a screw to control them.

They say, ah, you got baptized, now look how you're behaving. They get the prize for the most stupid parents in the world. And their children don't get baptized because they don't want to hear that from their parents.

You know, I tell such children, go and ask your parents, after you got baptized, did you sin or not? So don't hesitate to take baptism because you're afraid you may fall. See, I've been a believer for 50 years, but I still won't say today, I will never fall into sin. I can say, I don't want to.

I could say that even 50 years ago. That is the proof, I'm really born again. That's the proof you're really born again.

That you don't want to sin. When people come to me for baptism, I ask them one question. Do you want to sin again? I say, now listen, I'm not asking you, will you sin again? You can't give an answer to that.

Do you want to sin again? And they all say, no, I don't want to sin again. Then I'll ask you another question. Do you want to sin even once again in your life? I say, no, I'd like to sin, not even sin once.

I say, you're really born again. You believe Jesus has died for you. I say, come, I'll baptize you.

No, come, I'll baptize you. And then I tell them, now don't get discouraged tomorrow if you fall. It's like if you fall outside on the road, get up.

Now if you fall on the road, how long do you wait on the road before you get up? How long do you lie down there discouraged, oh, I learned to walk when I was two years old, but again I fell down today. I can fall, trip on the road even today. But I've learned to walk.

I learned to walk when I was maybe one or one and a half. But that doesn't mean I could say I'll never fall. So even when we preach about victory over sin, it does not mean we never fall.

It means God has given us grace to learn how to walk. But if we are not careful, accidentally, we may fall. But if we fall, we'll immediately get up.

And it's very rare that we fall. See, for example, if I'm falling 25 times a day, then that means I have not learned how to walk yet. And that's the difference between falling once in 25 days.

So you see the difference. Now victory over sin is a further stage. You don't have to wait till you get victory to get baptized.

Baptism is like a birth certificate. Like, you know, a child is born, you get a birth certificate. What does a birth certificate say? This child is very smart, it's very tall, it will never fall again.

Nothing like that. No, no, no, it's only saying it is born. That's all.

Baptism is only that. It only means that. See, when we put a person into the water, we are saying the old person has died.

And now a new person has come out. The new person is not a perfect person. He is growing to perfection.

But he's got new desires. A desire not to sin. And it will grow little by little by little and gradually learn how not to fall into sin.

So that's very important to get these things clear in our mind at the beginning. And right from the beginning, if you, you know, just like a child is given milk, every day it's crying out for milk. If you're really born again, you'll find in your heart a desire to read the word of God.

See, it says in 1 Peter chapter 2 and verse 2, It says, like newborn babes long for this pure milk of the word of God. So, here it speaks of a growth into fuller salvation. And that is by longing for the milk of the word of God.

So, you'll find, if you're really born again, you'll find a desire to read God's word. And I would encourage you to do that. Now you see, this one book has got milk and meat and bones and everything.

So, you can't put meat into the mouth of a child. And a child does not know how to take the bones out from the fish. Or to eat a chicken and remove the bone.

So, when you read the word of God, you'll find milk and meat all mixed there. What I mean is, there are some things which are very strong which are for grown up believers. And milk is the very simple things for new believers.

So, you shouldn't get discouraged if there are some things you can't understand. See, in your school or college, you have a different set of books in each standard. But imagine if you were in a school where you had the one book all the way from 1st standard to 10th standard.

Just one science book. All the syllabus, 1st standard, 2nd standard, 3rd standard, all is in one book. And they are not even put in separate sections.

It's all mixed up. Sometimes 1st standard stuff, next verse maybe 10th standard stuff. The Bible is something like that.

You read and some things you can't understand. And you say, well, maybe I haven't reached that class yet, so I'll just set it aside. Maybe I'll understand it in 10 years.

And you come to something else, you say, oh, I can understand this. Take that. Then you may find 10-15 verses which are in different levels which you can't understand.

Next year you'll understand some more. You know, there are things I'm understanding this year which I never understood for 49 years. Because in the Christian class, it's not just 10 standards, there are many standards.

So don't get discouraged if there are a lot of things here you can't understand. You say, that's the meat, I'll drink the milk. So, that's how it was for me.

I found something I could understand, I took it. You know, sometimes when I used to witness to people, they would ask me some question. I didn't know the answer.

Because I didn't know the Bible so much. And I would tell them, see, I'm sorry, I don't know the answer to that. I'll try and find out.

I mean, a little child, what's wrong in a 5-year-old saying, I don't know the answer to that. I mean, if you ask a little child something about the rotation of the earth around the sun, it doesn't know. That doesn't mean that child is not a healthy child.

He could be a very intelligent child and he may not know anything about the rotation of the earth around the sun. He will understand after 2-3 years. So, there's nothing wrong in saying, well, I'm just a young believer, I don't know the answer to all these things.

So, the Christian life is like a growth, it's like going in school and you first learn ABC. But, we must have a desire, like you have in school, I must get promoted to the next class. And it's not just by studying the Bible that we grow.

The Bible is like, studying the Bible is like eating food. That's good. But, you know, every school has got a games and physical training and all that.

Because, we also need to do something with our body, some exercise. I think that's a bad school that has no physical exercise at all. So, in our Christian life also, we need something to exercise our spirit.

So, God allows us to face different temptations. That is our exercise. That is like PT.

That makes me strong. That somebody opposes me and questions what I'm saying in the class. Or, I find some difficulty with my parents at home.

Maybe your parents don't understand you. And many children have conflict with their parents. Even when the parents are believers.

Because, you must remember that your parents also are not perfect. They are also growing. After 15 years, they will understand you better.

I mean, I know that. My first son was born when I was 29 years old. And, my last son was born when I was about 39 years old.

So, I had a lot more wisdom by the time my last son was born, compared to when my first son was born. So, we are also growing, parents. So, your children must not be so hard on your parents, saying they don't understand.

Just like you are growing, they are also growing. So, in those conflicts with your parents, you must say, Lord, you are allowing all this, so that I can become a little strong, spiritually. So, I want to encourage all of your children to learn to appreciate your parents.

The Bible says, in Ephesians chapter 6, Children, obey your parents and the Lord, for this is right. Verse 1. Honor your father and mother, so that it will go well with you, that you may live long on the earth. See, this is a command for children.

As long as you live in the home, remember, one day you are going to leave the home. Maybe you get married and you will set up your own home. So, when you set up your own home, you should not have any regret about the way you lived with your parents.

Because you get married and you will have children, remember. You want those children to behave properly to you, and you behave properly to your parents. Because there is a law in this universe that we reap what we sow.

So, honor your parents when you are at home. Respect them for all the trouble they took to bring you into the world. If you could only see what a lot of trouble a mother has to bring a child and to bring it up, even in the first few years.

Don't forget that. So, be patient with their mistakes. And use them to say, Lord, you can make me strong through all this.

And the other problem we can have is when you are in school or college, and there are other worldly type of boys and girls around you. They have got all types of worldly values and no fear of God. They try to pull you to do wrong things with them.

There again you have an opportunity to say no. You know, many times they will challenge you saying, come on, be bold, don't be a coward. And you say, I am bold.

That's why I am saying no to you. If I were a coward, I would have said, yes, I will come along with you. If you are bold, you will say no.

So, it's because you are a coward that you say, yes, yes, I will do that because you want to be popular with them. I believe a lot of young people get into a lot of problems because they want to be popular with their friends. Nowadays, things are so bad that if you seek popularity with your friends, you can destroy your life.

They can lead you into so many bad habits. And if you are a girl particularly, you can destroy your whole life. You have to be more careful than the boys.

You have to be very careful in your relationship between boys and girls. Because nowadays, because of the cinema and television and all, there is very free intermingling of boys and girls. I am not talking about ordinary conversation.

Yeah, you can talk to anybody. There is nothing wrong in boys and girls talking to each other. There is nothing wrong in boys and girls talking to each other.

But you have to be careful when you get into any physical contact with one another. If you find somebody trying to get close to you physically, trying to touch your body in some way, that's a dangerous signal. You've got to immediately, even if it makes you unpopular, you've got to pull back to make that person know, No, I don't permit that.

That will protect you. You may be unpopular, they may laugh at you, make fun of you. But you will protect your life, unlike the others who mess up their life.

So, one of the most important things that young people need to learn to say to their friends is, No. And those of you who are in Christian homes, when you go to church, I'll tell you something. It's very difficult to

find a truly spiritual church in most places in the world.

You know, many churches, in order to draw young people, they produce a lot of entertainment. There's a lot of programs and movies and music and all. It's like the world that's come right into the church.

And that way you can draw a lot of young people. But they'll never become spiritual. I've seen that in so many places.

That's one extreme. One extreme. And then the other side, there are people who avoid all that.

And who have nothing. That's boring, absolutely. I'll tell you something.

I have traveled in many countries and been to many, many different types of churches. Most churches are like one of these. Don't think it's only your church that's boring.

Or only your church is so thoroughly worldly. Most churches in the world are in one of these two categories. There are very, very few churches that have a real spiritual balance in this area.

And I'll tell you another thing. There are very, very few preachers who are not boring. Most pastors and preachers in the world are boring.

If they speak only 15-20 minutes, they're boring only for 15-20 minutes, thankfully. But those who speak for one hour, boy. But those who speak for one hour, boy.

So don't think that happens only in your church. When I was a young Christian, I used to go to an assembly. I mean, they would really study the word.

They would study and preach, but it was all heavy stuff. Very heavy. It was not worldly, but it was very heavy.

But you know what I did? And I could not find one man of God in that church whom I could look up to and say, there's a Christ-like godly man. No, like Christ. I never found in those years one really dynamic, anointed preacher.

Not even one. So I said, Lord, what shall I do? I don't find an example I can follow. I read in the Bible that I must look unto Jesus.

In Hebrews 12, look unto Jesus and run the race. So I got an answer. If I don't find a human example that's good, then I look at Jesus, who's a perfect example.

Jesus is living, and he can reveal himself to me as I read the Bible through the Holy Spirit. So I said, Lord, I'll make you my example. Once in a while, I would meet a really godly man.

That was very rare. I'll tell you, I met very, very few really, really godly men in my life. You know, real, humble, godly men whose example I could follow.

Who were not legalistic and full of rules and regulations. But who were just gracious and Christ-like. Very few.

So I said, okay, if I see somebody like that, I'll follow him. You know, like Paul said, follow me as I follow Christ. But if I don't find somebody like that, I look at Jesus.

So that became my rule in life. I always had Jesus as my example. And whenever I saw a godly man, that was an additional help.

Is that a blessed way to go? A blessed, good way to go? See John chapter 20. This is a wonderful verse here, John 20. And if you're not familiar with this verse, tell me which is more blessed.

To see Jesus physically and believe in him, or not to see Jesus physically and believe in him. Which do you think is better? I always used to think, oh lord, if I could just see you once. Even five seconds, if I could just see you once, that would be great.

And the lord showed me this verse. You know, Thomas said, when Jesus came once after his resurrection, Thomas was not there. People told him, we've seen the lord.

Thomas said, no, I will not believe until I physically touch him. That's John 20, verse 25. So after eight days, verse 26, then the disciples were gathered.

Jesus came again, and Thomas was there. And then Jesus said, here Thomas, put your finger, verse 27, and see my hands and my feet. Put it into my sight.

Verse 27. And then Thomas said, no, I believe. You're my god.

Listen, this is the verse I wanted to show you. Verse 29. Because you have seen me, you have believed.

Blessed are those who have not seen, and still believe. Sure. I'm more blessed than the apostle Thomas.

Do you believe that? You know, you're more blessed than all the apostles. Jesus himself said that. They all saw him and believed.

I don't know how it is, but Jesus said, and I believe it, that I am more blessed than Peter, Thomas, Matthew, all of them. More blessed than Paul. Paul also saw Jesus.

And if you have not seen Jesus physically, you are more blessed in some way. I don't ask you to explain it, but in some way you are more blessed than all those people who saw him. So that's a great encouragement.

If we see and follow, we don't become as strong as when we don't see and still believe. There's one more thing I want to say. So many things are happening in the world that we are approaching the second coming of Christ.

I'm not speaking like a prophet, but I don't think any of you young people will come to my age. I don't think any of you young people will come to the age of 70 like I am. Because Jesus will come before that.

Are you happy about that? That you won't live up to 70? Jesus will come very soon. So use the few years that you've got to live for him. It's very little time.

Very little time. You know the Jewish people had a great hope that one day they will go back to Jerusalem. More than 1900 years ago, in the year 70-80, they were all sent out, scattered from Jerusalem.

And then about 150 years ago, some Jews got together and said, we've got to go back to Israel. But they never came back until 1948. Only in 1967 they finally came to Jerusalem.

But for 100 years before that, they would keep on saying, next year in Jerusalem. Next year in Jerusalem. The people who said it died.

And the next generation got up and said, next year in Jerusalem. Finally, they came. The early Christians were like that.

Early Christians, the first Christians. Jesus will come back soon. But they didn't know that 2000 years will go.

But now we know, so many things are happening in the world that Christ is coming very soon. So, you don't have many years to live for Jesus. Don't waste it for useless things in the world.

Let's pray. Let's bow our heads in prayer. I want you to pray that Jesus will give you an assurance that your sins are forgiven.

Lord, I want you to believe today that you have accepted me. Lord, I want you to believe that you have accepted me. I asked you many times to come into my heart.

Today, I believe your word that those who come to you, you will never cast out. I believe today that I am a child of God. In baptism, first of all.

And then in other things. Help me to honor my parents. Help them to see a change in my life from today.

And more than pleasing my parents, help me to please you. And when I see, don't see good examples around me. Let me look at you, Lord Jesus.

And follow you. Thank you, Lord, for hearing me. I pray, Father, you'll bless these dear young people and help them to be true disciples in Jesus' name.

Amen.

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