

Knowing

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[0 : 00] Well, good morning. My name is Ray Sweet from First Christian Church in Greensburg, Indiana. As always, if you'd like to learn more, you can go to FCCGreensburg.com or you can go to the FCC Greensburg Facebook page.

Hey, thank you so much for tuning in today. Our heart is always to get into the Word of God, to let that Word change these hearts so that we can look more and more like Jesus.

Now, I'll never forget the story that a mentor of mine shared. This man who recently went to be with the Lord, he worked here in Greensburg most of his career, was deeply loved for his kindness and generosity.

But when he was a younger dad, he had a son at some kind of Cincinnati Reds event or ball game. And at one point, they got on an elevator, and as they got on, they looked over to discover that a famous member of the Big Red machine was also in the elevator with them.

Now, I'm not going to share the name of this Reds player because I don't want to smear him, but you would know the name if I said it. So, it was just about three of them on the elevator, and that's when my mentor politely asked him if he would sign his kid's hat or glove, whatever it was he brought with him.

[1 : 17] And yet, he refused, and he was very rude about it as well. And I remember the guy saying to me, he said, Now, I wonder if you've ever had someone that you looked up to as a kid, maybe, that you just thought kind of hung the moon, right?

And then you matured into an adult, and you just weren't quite as impressed. Maybe they were more selfish or moody than you remember. Maybe the optimism they radiated before had turned to pessimism.

Maybe the words that came out of their mouth weren't so clean. Maybe like the story I told, they were good at a sport or whatever, but not such a great person.

And yet, while any person that you look up to is going to have their flaws, I can tell you this. As you get closer and closer to Jesus, he continues to stay perfect.

And there's nothing like going even deeper in your walk with him. So welcome back here to the last fifth and last week of our series called Secret.

[2 : 29] If you'd like to follow along, go ahead and grab your Bible. Turn to John chapter 15. Probably about three quarters this way through your Bible. John 15.

And we've been talking about the secret to living for Jesus. And as you've seen each week, we've compared it to zooming in on a map of the United States.

So let's say we start off with the whole country, okay? All 50 states. You can see the view. Next, we zoom in a little closer to the great state of Indiana.

Then we come to our hometown of Greensburg. Even closer to Broadway Street that runs through Greensburg. And then ultimately our church address at 425 North Broadway.

And here's what that Zoom has looked like in our series. In week one, we started off with the big picture. The secret to living is bearing fruit in this world that impacts the kingdom of God.

[3 : 27] And I think every one of us who love and follow Jesus would agree that we want to be his hands. We want to be his feet in this world being used to lead others to his salvation.

And then see them walk daily in the fruits of the Spirit. So in the second week, we said, okay, if that's the big picture, how do we get there? So we zoomed in a little more.

The secret to bearing fruit is abiding or dwelling in that relationship with Christ. Getting your strength from the vine. Week three got even closer.

The secret to abiding is obeying God's word. Following the Holy Spirit's leading every day.

Obedience. In week four, we learned that the secret to obeying is loving God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength.

And then today, we're going to close out this series with the final zoom. The secret to loving is knowing. The secret to loving him is knowing him more deeply every single day.
[4 : 31] Because like I said, the closer you get, the more you get to know him. The more you get to know him, the more you'll love him. In fact, I love what Paul says to us in Philippians 3, starting in verse 8.

This is after 25-ish years of walking in a relationship with Christ. He says this. He says, What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage that I may gain Christ and be found in him. Not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ. The righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith. And then he says, I want to know Christ. Yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death.

So regardless of whether you're still searching or maybe you're brand new to your faith, possibly you're just a few years into the journey, or perhaps you've been walking with Jesus for several decades now, the goal is still the same, to love him more.

[5 : 47] And that happens as we go deeper in our walk, as we live out those words from Paul that we just read, that I want to know Christ. Yes, to know the power of his resurrection.

See, one thing that breaks my heart, makes me want to stay faithful to God's call on my life to preach the word, is this reality that so many play church.

And it's easy to do. Listen, I have found myself there sometimes when I decide to get spiritually lazy. See, the American church has often made a really big deal about salvation.

And rightfully so. It's vital. We put all our efforts into leading people to the altar, where they repent of their sins, surrendering everything to Jesus, getting baptized into him.

And we know that Jesus's purpose was to seek and save the lost. And I would never downplay that salvation experience, where someone truly makes that commitment to follow Christ.

[6 : 47] Because it's the most beautiful thing to see someone pass from eternal death to life everlasting. And that's one of the motivators, honestly, that gets me out of bed in the morning.

But church, it's almost like we stop there sometimes, where we love to collect names under the heading of salvations this year. So we can humbly brag at the next ministerial meeting, right?

And while I'd never downgrade the importance of someone's sins being washed away as they're welcomed into the family of God, that is what it's all about. We see in the word that we need to put the same energy, the same resources, into helping the body of Christ know Jesus more deeply, working out their salvation every single day.

So it's taken me a few minutes here to kind of get this plane off the runway, comfortably into the air. But I just wanted to paint that picture that your baptism wasn't the end.

It's the beginning of an amazing journey of knowing Jesus and going deeper and deeper and deeper. So, now you can pull out your little tray in front of you on the plane there.

[7 : 58] You can get your complimentary peanuts and soda from the stewardess as we answer this question today. Why is it important to know Christ better? Why is that important to know Christ better?

And here's why. Number one, because salvation is a living relationship. It's a living relationship. We cannot grow. We cannot bear fruit apart from a personal fellowship with our Savior.

Now, if we look at our main passage today, John 15, 15, Jesus puts it like this. He says, I no longer call you servants because a servant does not know his master's business.

Instead, I have called you friends. For everything that I learned from my Father, I have made known to you. So Jesus has just used an example of the vine and the branches to make this powerful connection to the relationship that he desires with his disciples that will ultimately bear fruit.

And while he's been speaking this metaphor, in verse 15, he speaks very clearly. He looks, basically, he looks his disciples in the eyes with compassion and he wants them to know that they are his friends who have been granted access to approach his throne room and know him deeply.

[9 : 14] Now, let me clarify. Jesus is not just our buddy who we have a special handshake with while quoting every line from our favorite movie together. This friendship is different from any other as he is still God.

And I approach him with the reverence, the adoration, the praise that he deserves, remembering that he is God and I am not. That he's the one who created everything out of nothing and sustains it while also realizing that not only does he love and know you and me, but he willingly invites us to draw near to him, knowing his heart and friendship.

Now, let me ask you this. What are some good things that we can easily substitute in for that living relationship with Christ? So I'm talking about an unhealthy thing here.

What do we substitute in instead of a living relationship with Christ? Well, you know how I feel about making worship with the body of Christ a priority in your life because God's word teaches the vital nature of doing life together in community, worshiping the Lord, growing in our knowledge and faith in him.

We need it, right? We need to be with the church. We need worship together. But when going into church, and here's what I want you to see, when that replaces the daily walk with Jesus, our faith can so easily become just about traditions.

[10:39] It can morph into something that it never should have. And we can grow into a fantastic Pharisee. By the way, the Apostle Paul would tell you that's not a compliment. They're the ones who had Jesus killed because he interrupted their religious control.

We could also talk about so many well-meaning Christians who take the word of God and basically make it into a weapon. They create their own rules from it where they feel free to take plenty of liberties.

And while it's often meant at first to create this healthy boundary protecting the body of Christ, it can easily turn into a self-righteous list to show how holy I am.

And while I will always promote holiness and seeking to be more like Jesus, listen, this has to flow from a relationship with Christ and not just a set of do's and don'ts.

We can also make another great thing like serving Jesus into an idol where everyone knows I'm in charge of this ministry and what I'm doing is building my identity around it more so than my friendship with Christ.

[11:41] And if you come close to my responsibilities, I'm going to bite your head off because it's mine. So get away, right? I've even had to look in the mirror myself and ask, okay, Ray, if God would ever take away the privilege that you have to preach his word, would I still find my joy in his presence?

Or if I put my identity more so in my official role in the church body? How about this example?

Someone may say, not only do I tithe, but I've gone above and beyond.

I give 20% of my income to the church. And you know what? That's great. If it flows from a heart of thankfulness because of the grace of God. See, all these things we just looked at, they are wonderful servants when they flow from knowing Christ.

But listen, they're terrible masters. Why is it important to know Christ better? Because salvation is a living relationship with Jesus where we daily approach his throne in prayer, through his word.

We follow the Holy Spirit's leading. And from that relationship will always flow the fruit that we want our life to bear, not the other way around.

[12:53] And then the second thing, it's important to know Christ better because we become more like Jesus. Because we become more like Jesus. Have you ever noticed that if you're around someone enough, you can start to say things like them, to sound like them?

Or if your kids come home from somewhere and they keep saying something they normally wouldn't, you realize, oh, they just sound like the other kid. We've even said to our children, hey, we love your friend, but please don't try to sound like them.

Just be you. And sometimes I don't think we can help it because the more we're around people, the more we can become like them. And the same thing is true with Jesus. The more we're around him, the more we become like him.

See, Romans 8, 29 says, For those God foreknew, he also predestined, watch this, to be conformed. That's the word, conformed to the image of his son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters.

I also love the picture that we see in the books of Jeremiah, Isaiah, and Romans. This picture of God as the potter. Okay? So you can picture a potter with his wheel and the clay that he's molding.

[14:04] And God is the potter and we are the clay in his hands. And as we know him deeper through his word, through prayer, through the Spirit's promptings, he is molding us and he's shaping us, conforming us into the image of his son, Jesus.

And as we've talked about throughout this series, the pruning can be painful. The journey isn't always comfortable. And the easy choice in that moment is to live like the world and give in to every temptation.

That's why the road is narrow and the majority don't take the right path. But the fruitful decision is to daily pursue the heart of God, growing more and more like Christ.

And I have to tell you, I love how Jesus chose disciples or apostles that no other rabbi was interested in. Four were blue-collar fishermen. One was a despised and greedy tax collector that we would call a Benedict Arnold.

One was a zealot engaged in politics and anarchy looking to overthrow his government. One was a thief. One was a Pharisee. And the others, while we don't know their exact occupations, were mostly rough around the edges.

[15:14] And I love how John MacArthur, he wrote a book about the 12 disciples. He called it 12 Ordinary Men. But John MacArthur said Jesus did not choose 12 extraordinary men to follow him.

He chose 12 Ordinary Men to make extraordinary through him. And if you've read through the Gospels, Jesus and his eternal patience calls this ragtag group to leave everything behind and follow him.

And they did. But listen, they were rough. And over three years of ministry, he pours himself into them, showing them the power of God, teaching them how to walk by faith. He is like the potter at the wheel, molding and shaping them.

And then, as he was crucified, they didn't know what to do. He had warned them exactly what was coming, but they just weren't listening. They just didn't get it. So they went into hiding, scared for their lives, thinking that, okay, this was a great run, but now it's over.

And then, three days later, he resurrects from the tomb. In the weeks to follow, he appears before them, calling them to a great purpose, to spread the Gospel to the ends of the earth.

[16:22] And when the Holy Spirit came upon them at Pentecost, these timid disciples that were scared for their lives, hiding away, came into the open and preached the Word of God boldly, baptizing thousands.

And from there, going all different directions, using their lives to lead people to a loving Savior. And then, listen, all but one of them, and that was the Apostle John, who, trust me, suffered plenty.

But all but John would give their lives, whether by crucifixion, beheading, stabbing, stoning, or another means, they would give their lives sharing the story of Jesus.

And church history even records some of their last words about how humbled they were to die for the cause of Christ. Or in Peter's case, he asked to be crucified upside down because he wasn't worthy to die in the same manner as his Lord.

This kind of change doesn't happen in religion. This kind of change doesn't happen just because you go to church, or you serve in a ministry, or you give money to a cause.

[17:29] This kind of change happens when your whole heart is surrendered and you make it your life goal to sit at the feet of Jesus through His Word, through prayer, and through the Holy Spirit's leading, growing every day into His image.

And I can't imagine the amazing homecoming these guys had in heaven as they once again came face to face with their Savior, hearing those words, Well done, good and faithful servant.

Enter into your rest. And listen, we too have the same promise if we can stay connected to the vine, Jesus Christ. See, our goal must be what Romans 12, 1 and 2 teaches us when it says, Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy or because of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God.

This is your true and proper worship. Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you'll be able to test and approve what God's will is, His good, pleasing, and perfect will.

So what is that saying? Very quickly, it says, My body, my mind, my will, my heart, Jesus, they're yours.

[18:46] So transform me into your image. Make me holy as you are holy. Lord, here am I. Send me.

And then the last thing I want you to see today, why is it important to know Christ better? Because you're going to grow to love Him even more. See, I started off this message talking about the reality that all of us have our flaws, right?

And we've each probably disappointed someone at some point who thought we had it all together. And did they learn very quickly? We don't. And yet, instead of wanting anyone to look at us, we must always point them to the only perfect one, and that's Jesus.

But if you're like me, sometimes in my weaker moments, I have the tendency to make Jesus more like me and less like the God that He is. But then I go to the Word and I read the names of Jesus. The Almighty, who is all-powerful. He's the author and finisher of my faith, who has me from start to finish. The Bread of Life, who is my sustenance daily.

[19 : 50] The Bright and Morning Star, who lights our way, our path. The Chief Cornerstone, who is our rock of safety. The door which we must enter through to eternal paradise.

As you hear more about in the coming month, He is our Emmanuel. He is God with us. He's the head of the church that He dearly loves and leads, gave His life for.

He is the Holy One who is perfect in every way. He's our hope in every hard thing that we will walk through in this life. He's the image of the invisible God, the perfect picture of God the Father.

He's not just our advocate, but He's also the faultless judge and ruler. He is the King of kings that our world empires cannot stand against. He's the Lamb of God who came to take away the sins of the world and be our sacrifice.

He's not weak. Instead, He's the Lion from the tribe of Judah who came to this earth fulfilling prophecy through David's line. He is the Messiah that the world longed for, and He's not disappointed.

[20 : 50] He is my Prince of Peace that calms this heart to live for Him. He is my Redeemer who sets me free. He is the resurrection and the life that I dwell in. He's my shepherd that walks with me every day, protecting and guiding my ways.

And He is the true vine, the source of life. And listen, that's just a portion of the names of Jesus that describe His character, His power, His sovereignty, His judgment, and His love over His creation.

And if you and I have the audacity to do more than just play church or religion, if we will sit before Him daily, flooding our hearts and our minds with truth, if our wills are surrendered through prayer, lifting everything to His throne, and the Holy Spirit is truly directing every step, if I will surrender my weakness, trading it for His strength, church, we better watch out!

Because God will do something incredible in your life. Actually, here's how Paul put it in Ephesians 3, starting in verse 20. He said, Now to Him, talking about Christ, who is able to do immeasurably more than we all ask or imagine, according to His power that is at work within us, to Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus through all generations forever and ever.

Amen. Now I want to take you back to April 26th of 2020. That was the day our previous lead pastor retired after a fruitful 18-year ministry.

[22 : 22] We were also in the heart of everything shut down during COVID. And that's the day that I officially stepped in to that role as lead pastor. I didn't do so with arrogance or cockiness, saying, Look what I'm going to do.

Instead, humbly realizing my own limitations, but also relying on the Lord's strength and even the unity of our eldership, which I love. The previous year and a half before that April 26th, 2020 date had been a healthy transition for me as I had the opportunity to get to know the church family even better.

I did a lot of praying, asking the Lord where He was leading us as a church family. And I began to see a vision that God was bringing into focus for FCC.

A season of much needed healing coming to completion as we transitioned even more into a strong focus on getting healthy internally and seeing that bear fruit into a stubborn and single-minded focus on our mission to love God, love people, and make disciples.

I have stood back over the last four and a half years and watched God raise up a new generation of leaders who are biblically strong and fiercely courageous in their pursuit of God's will.

[23 : 35] I've seen our church become even more welcoming to every single person regardless of their past, their current struggles, even whether their collar is white or blue. I've watched at least a couple hundred people come forward to either proclaim their new allegiance to Jesus or to place their membership, making it clear that, hey, this is my family.

This is my tribe. I've viewed a congregation, get the reality that church isn't about what a group of pastors can do or about what I want. It's about what the body of Christ can accomplish together in God's will.

And I've seen a church come even more alive to this idea that we've talked about in this series. The secret to living is bearing fruit. And listen, I am so proud of how each of you are doing that.

And church, we better put on our seatbelt because with the Lord in the driver's seat, we ain't seen nothing yet. Pray with me. Heavenly Father, thank you so much for your words of life and your words of hope today that you have just spoken over us, your children.

Your grace, your mercy, your love is amazing. We don't deserve it. We can't earn it. And yet you freely give it when we, by faith, surrender these hearts to your Lordship, Jesus.

[24 : 58] Thank you for loving us with that agape love. Thank you for seeing something in each of us that we can't even see in ourselves. And Father, it is my prayer as we wind down this series and we start to look towards a Christmas series starting next week, it is my prayer that you will just take our hearts, that we won't be about playing church, we won't be about playing religion, but that we will be all about abiding in that relationship with our Savior who loved us and died on the cross to set each one of us free.

So Father, take our hearts, make us more like Jesus, and help us to live this life in unity together as the body of Christ, making an impact in this world, and showing everyone we encounter the love of Jesus Christ.

Father, you are so good. We adore you, we love you, and we pray all this in the name above all other names, the name of Jesus. Amen. I want to give you this invitation this morning.

I don't know where you're at. I don't know how you've stumbled upon this broadcast. I don't know if you listen every week or man, you're just driving through the area. I once had a guy driving through the area.

Give me a call the next day because God spoke something powerful through the message. I don't know your story, but it doesn't matter because God does. And He loves you, and He has a purpose for your life.

[26 : 34] If you've never surrendered your heart to the Lordship of Jesus Christ, He wants to come into your life. He wants to forgive you. He wants to set you on the solid rock, and He wants to use your life every day as you continue to grow in holiness.

He wants to use your life to impact others for Jesus. If you have any questions about that or questions about faith or questions about the church, here's a couple ways you can reach out to us.

You can call us in the church office. Once again, we are First Christian Church of Greensburg, Indiana. My name is Ray Sweet. I'm the lead pastor. You can call us at 812-663-8488.

If it's after office hours, please just leave us a message. But go ahead and call, or you can email me at ray at fccgreensburg.com.

Hey, God bless you, and thank you so much for tuning in today.