

Loving

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- [0 : 00] Well, good morning. My name is Ray Sweet from First Christian Church in Greensburg, Indiana. If you'd like to know more information about us, you can check out FCCGreensburg.com or you can go to the FCC Greensburg Facebook page.
- But hey, thank you so much for tuning in today. Our heart is always to get into the Word of God, but most of all, let that Word get into us and change these hearts to beat for Christ.
- Now, one of my wife's favorite stories is about a young boy named Ted. Even his fifth grade teacher, Miss Thompson, wasn't impressed with him.
- Very sloppy in appearance, he didn't show much expression or emotion, and he really had no interest in school. She even admitted that she kind of enjoyed bearing that red pen down as she made all those X's next to his wrong answers.
- Perhaps, though, she should have studied his records a little closer. Here's how they read. First grade, Ted shows promise with his work and attitude, but has a poor home situation.
- [1 : 03] Second grade, Ted could do better. Mother seriously ill receives little help from home. Third grade, Ted is a good boy, but too serious.
- He is a slow learner. His mother died this year. Fourth grade, Ted is very slow, but well behaved. His father shows no interest. Well, as Christmas arrived that year, all the children got so excited to present their gifts to Miss Thompson.
- And then there was Ted's gift, wrapped in crinkled up brown paper, covered with scotch tape, and all the other kids' gifts were nicely wrapped. Well, as she slowly opened each gift, the children got so excited and they would cheer.
- But then she came to Ted's gift. And the room got kind of quiet. And as she picked it up, a gaudy rhinestone bracelet fell out that was missing half the stones.
- She also found a bottle of cheap perfume. Immediately, the children began to snicker, but she quickly quieted them down by putting on the bracelet and splashing some of the perfume on her wrist.
- [2 : 09] Well, at the end of the day, as each of the children started to leave, she noticed that Ted was kind of hanging around. And finally, he sheepishly came up to her desk and said, Miss Thompson, you smell just like my mother.
- And that bracelet looks real nice on you too. I'm glad you like my presence. And as he left, with tears streaming down her cheeks, she got on her knees right there by her desk.
- And she asked God to forgive her and to change her attitude. The next day, the kids were met with a teacher who had completely changed. She was now committed to loving every child, especially the rougher ones, especially Ted.
- And as she began to pour into him, he started to show great improvement. Even caught up with the rest of the students and passed a few by the end of the year.
- As time went on and Ted advanced on in his schooling, Miss Thompson lost contact until one day she got this letter. Dear Miss Thompson, I wanted you to be the first to know I will be graduating second in my high school class.

[3 : 19] Love, Ted. Four years later, another note arrived. Dear Miss Thompson, they just told me I'll be graduating first in my class. I wanted you to be the first to know the university has not been easy, but I liked it.

Love, Ted. And then four years after that, she gets this. Dear Miss Thompson, as of today, I am Theodore Stollard, M.D.

How about that? I wanted you to be the first to know. I am getting married next month, the 27th to be exact. I would love for you to come and sit where my mother would have sat if she were alive.

You are the only family that I have now. Dad died last year. And you better believe, with tears streaming down her face, Miss Thompson attended that wedding and proudly sat in that place of honor.

Now, I think as we all know from experience, love is a powerful, powerful thing. And today, as we continue at our series all about the secret of living for Jesus, we'll continue zooming in even more.

[4 : 27] Now, if this is the first time that you've listened with us, you can go ahead and grab your Bibles. Turn to John chapter 15. John chapter 15. So far in this series, we've started out with the big picture.

Here it is. The secret to living is fruit bearing. And then we zoomed in a little bit more and said, okay, the secret to fruit bearing is abiding in Christ.

Even further, the secret to abiding is obeying. And then today, the secret to obeying is loving. Now, that story about Ted Stallard holds a very special place in my heart because on a smaller scale, I experienced that with a teacher at North Decatur.

To be honest, she was a unique personality that some kids really liked and others didn't. And yet, she spoke some powerful truth into an insecure 17-year-old kid who was lost and didn't have much self-worth.

See, little did I know that she was a follower of Jesus. And I would be, too, about a year later when God kept watering that seed by putting more people in my path.

[5 : 37] But I'll never forget when I questioned whether I was smart enough to go to college. She looked at me and said, not only can you do it, but you will.

See, love is a powerful thing. And more potent than the love of a teacher that believes in you, a parent who sacrifices so much for you, a spouse who doesn't give up on you, or even a soldier who selflessly serves or even gives their life for your freedoms.

Even more powerful is the love that God has displayed and continues to show for you and me. A God of grace and justice who saw his creation in its sinful state and made a way.

Jesus, God in the flesh, came to this earth, lived a sinless, perfect life, and died on the cross to take our place. To say to you and I, I love you big time.

And then things got quiet for the rest of Friday, all day Saturday, and into Sunday. But when light broke through that morning, the grave could hold him no longer.

[6 : 45] And Jesus came busting out of that tomb to offer us life on this earth and life eternal. And because he has resurrected, those who choose to pick up their cross and follow him will be resurrected to eternal life in heaven.

Church, there's nothing like the agape love that has been shown to us. And what I want you to see today is that the secret to obeying the Lord is truly loving God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength because of his great compassion, mercy, and grace.

So let's look at our main passage today in John chapter 15. We're going to start here in verse 9. Jesus says this.

He says, As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you. Now remain in my love. If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commands and remain in his love.

Now once again, I want to give credit where it's due. This series is based off of a little purple book by Warren Wiersbe called Abide, where he breaks down John chapter 15.

[7 : 58] And I want to show you some powerful truths here that he points out. So we're going to borrow a few things from him, give him credit for that, and then we're going to expand on it ourselves. So let's talk about three levels of obedience.

Because remember, with Jesus, motives always matter. And here's the first level. Selfishness. Selfishness. This is where we obey because we need to, because we want to get something out of it.

We see this with a comment that Peter makes to Jesus in Matthew 19:27, when he says, We've left everything to follow you. What then will there be for us?

See, this is kind of like a teenager learning that when I obey, there are often perks that come with it. And listen, Peter would mature and grow in his faith, and that selfishness would start to disappear.

And sadly, though, we see a lot of Christians live with that selfish mentality. My obedience is measured by what God gives me. And if I don't get what I want, then I'm gone.

[9 : 01] And I'll tell you, church, that's selfishness. If you remember back probably three months ago, we looked pretty in-depth at a story from the book of Daniel about three Hebrews named Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego.

These men were faithful followers of Yahweh, the God that we worship, and they refused to bow down to Nebuchadnezzar's golden statue. They rejected worshiping any idols made by human hands.

And when the king threatened to heat up the fiery furnace and throw them in it, this was their response. They said, If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to deliver us from it, and he will deliver us from your majesty's hand.

But even if he does not, we want you to know, your majesty, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold that you have set up. Now, guys, I love that.

Their faith wasn't just built on everything in their life going perfect and God always giving them exactly what they wanted. They truly loved and worshiped their creator with all their heart.

[10 : 11] So the first level of obedience is selfishness. Second is fear. This is the we have to or else we're in big trouble type of obedience.

Okay? This is human fear. Now, I will say this because you may be thinking this. There is a good and holy fear. The Bible calls this the fear of the Lord. A lot of people misunderstand what that really means.

It is this absolutely beautiful blend of love, reverence, respect, and awe because he is God and I am not. So this is the fear of a slave shows a master.

It's not the fear a slave shows a master, but instead the respect a son shows a father. And in John chapter 15, verse 15, Jesus says, I no longer call you servants because a servant does not know his master's business.

Instead, I have called you friends. So when we think about a human fear, like, Lord, I'll do what you want because I don't want you to smite me, that's not a healthy obedience.

[11 : 17] And yet so many people see God as this big guy in the sky who throws down lightning bolts when I'm bad and blessings when I'm good. And this type of false understanding and man-made view of God will drain your joy in a heartbeat.

The way to fix that man-made view is to get into the word of God and discover the Father's amazing heart of compassion and grace.

See, Warren Wearsby actually put it like this. He said, Fear can rob us of the real joys that God wants us to experience because we obey him.

Now, let's dwell for the rest of our time here on the highest motive for obedience, and that's love. If we look at John 14, verse 15, Jesus very simply says, If you love me, you'll keep my commands.

So for the rest of our time here, let's answer this question. Why is love the highest motivation for obedience? Why is love the highest motivation for me to be obedient?

[12 : 23] And here's the first thing. Love focuses on the giver and not the gift. Love focuses on the giver and not the gift. Now, it's pretty common that girls, even from a very young age, will dream of their engagement and even their wedding day, where I think most guys think of it about the time they fall in love and are ready to propose.

And while every girl envisions that special moment when her true love will get down on one knee and propose, that moment isn't so much about the gift, the ring, it's more so about the giver.

Here's what I mean by that. Ladies, imagine with me for a second that a random guy that you've never met, that he comes up to you with a beautiful diamond ring, gets down on a knee, and asks you to marry him.

Now, unless you're just super desperate or a gold digger, you're going to be like, No way, right? Why? Because I don't even know you, and that gift is only special because of the one who gives it and the bond of love that we have.

And one reason why love is the highest motivation for obedience is because love focuses on that relationship with Christ. It's not about what I get. It's about my Savior who loved me and died for me.

[13 : 40] It's all about the privilege I have to walk in a relationship with him every day. And if we go back to the Old Testament, to the story of Job, Job was a godly man who had been blessed by the Lord in so many ways.

He also had 10 children, 7,000 sheep, 3,000 camels, 500 yoke of oxen, 500 donkeys, and many workers. That's what you called in that day filthy rich.

And that's when Satan says to God that he's only a godly man because of all his blessings. If you remove them, he'll surely curse you. So the Lord allows Satan to take away those things but not to kill Job.

So one by one, messengers come to tell him the bad news. First, that all his animals and all his workers are gone. Even his children were killed when the house they were in collapsed.

Almost every earthly possession taken from him. And here's what Job says. In Job 1, 20 and 21, it says that this, Job got up and tore his robe and shaved his head.

[14 : 50] Now it's kind of a customary way of grieving in their day. And then it says, he fell to the ground in worship. Let me say it again. Then he fell to the ground in worship and said, naked I came from my mother's womb and naked I will depart.

The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away. May the name of the Lord be praised. Wow! Man, love focuses on the giver and not the gift.

Next, love is the highest motivation for obedience because love doesn't measure sacrifice. See in John chapter 15, verse 13, Jesus says, greater love has no one than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends.

And once again, the ultimate example is Jesus who didn't measure the level of his sacrifice for us but willingly went to the cross out of love. And when we return that love to him, we don't measure the cost of obeying his word because love simply obeys.

You know, it reminds me of a story from 2010 where the Merkel family was enjoying a nice evening at home when suddenly they smelled smoke. And before they knew it, the house was just engulfed in flames.

[16:10] I mean, just very quickly it all happened. In pure panic, 36-year-old Jacob and his wife grabbed three of their kids that were close and they quickly got them outside only to discover that their 13-year-old was nowhere to be seen.

And even though the fire was becoming really intense, Jacob didn't think of his own safety at all, but he ran back in making his way to the basement. He scooped up his son Kai and he flew through the house, dodging the fire, dodging the debris.

And as he stepped through the front door, soon as his kind of foot crossed that threshold, there was an explosion behind him and he quickly shoved his son to safety.

But sadly, he took the brunt of the explosion that ended up taking his life. See, as a parent, as a grandparent, as a spouse, as a friend, many of us would do whatever it takes to save those that we care about because love doesn't measure the level of sacrifice.

And when it comes to our relationship with Christ, knowing what he did for us, knowing the depth of his love and sacrifice, when we choose to follow him, when we choose to love him back, we are choosing to obey regardless of the cost because love that calculates is not true love.

[17:29] And then third, love is the highest motivation for obedience because God is love. Because God is love. You know, one of my favorite quotes from this little book that we've kind of drawn inspiration for this series from, this book Abide, is when Warren Weersbe says, God gives his commandments because he loves us.

And because we love him, we obey his commandments. We do not question them or seek to change them. We do not fear his will. There is no fear in love, but perfect love drives out fear.

1 John 4.18. Now that passage, honestly, is very special to me because it takes me back to the summer of 07. I had met Bethany in December of 06.

And pretty quickly, I knew God had answered my prayer for a godly woman who would love me with all my quirks. We truly connected on such a deep level from the very start.

And we officially became boyfriend-girlfriend on January the 1st. And while the people who always told me that when I met the right girl, I'd know it, while that drove me nuts before I met the right girl, I now realize they were right.

[18:43] And both of us could see that God was in the relationship. He had a purpose bigger than we could understand. And as she graduated from college that spring, and she assumed her normal summer schedule at the time of working at Mahoning Valley Camp, we just couldn't spend enough time together.

And as she continued to remind me that she was ready to marry me, man, I was so grateful for that, but I also became very overwhelmed. Now, anybody on our church staff would tell you that sometimes I can appear as a little bit of a buzzkill when I don't mean to because when someone throws out a big picture idea to me, my mind immediately starts to figure out the details of, okay, how do we accomplish that?

And while I think that can be helpful, it can scare the people who just want to hear, oh, yeah, that's a great idea. Well, little did Bethany know when she talked about getting married, in my mind, I had to figure out how I was going to provide for her, where we would live, whether I was truly ready to make that lifelong commitment, and the list goes on.

So I got really overwhelmed, if I'm honest. And one day I told her, it just kind of got to me, and I told her the very thing you should never say in a relationship, that I just needed some time and some space.

Little did I know, she took that as, oh, no, he's going to break up with me. And it really just wrecked her world. So when we came back together to talk, she gave me a Bible with 1 John 4, 18 highlighted that says, there is no fear in love, but perfect love drives out fear because fear has to do with punishment.

[20 : 23] The one who fears is not made perfect in love. And then fast forwarding a couple months, I had just accepted my first full-time preaching ministry at a little country church not far from the camp.

We had been there painting at the church parsonage where I would live at first and then she joined me after we got married. And I devised this grand plan to propose.

I planned out the whole evening with all kinds of different things that we did that kind of went along with different parts of our relationship up to that point. And the night ended at what would be our future residence at the church parsonage.

And as she walked into the house, I had spread out some rose petals and candles that kind of led the way to a bedroom where there was a Bible on the floor, the engagement ring on top of it, and communion to the side.

And guess what passage I read to her? There is no fear in love, but perfect love drives out fear. And praise God, she said yes. And we are celebrating today 17 years of marriage.

[21 : 36] Now, bring that back. Let me bring that back to our love for the Lord. The highest motivation for our obedience is this great reality that God is love.

We've talked about His amazing love displayed on the cross, but what about how He daily takes care of you and your family? Think about the times in your life that you didn't think that you were going to make it through this one.

And what happened? God was faithful to provide, to protect, and to love you and I more than we could ever deserve. You know, just last Sunday after the 11 o'clock service, I was talking with a few people about how rough life can be sometimes.

And that's just a reality, right? We all go through really tough things in life. And that's when one of them, the people I was talking with, brought up Romans 8, 28 that says, and we know that in all things, God works for the good of those who love Him, who have been called according to His purpose.

And that's when Kathy Minkedick summed it up this way. She said, you know what? As I look at that verse, here's what I hear. My story for His glory. And that kind of heart towards the Lord happens when we truly love Him.

[22 : 53] See, when we understand the depth of His love, fear will cease. Fear will go away and we will be able to love Him. And when we truly love Him, we're going to be obedient to Him.

Now, as we close here, zoom back out with me here, okay? So the secret to living is bearing fruit. The secret to bearing fruit is abiding.

The secret to abiding is obeying. And the secret to obeying is loving. When you truly have been set free from the bondage of sin and you've experienced the amazing love of God in your life, that is when your motivation for obedience won't be selfishness, it won't be fear, but instead, you will run with everything you are into His loving arms and you will love Him with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength.

So why do I want to obey Him? Because I love Him. And why do I love Him? Because Jesus first loved me. Let's pray.

Heavenly Father, thank you so much for just showing us the depths of the love that you have for us. When we were yet sinners, you died on the cross for us.

[24 : 19] When we are unlovable and we push everyone else away, you have this amazing love, a Father's love for us.

So we just worship you. We adore you. We thank you for what Jesus did on the cross to show that agape love. He died to take our place.

And so, Father, we just pray that because of your love, you will show us how to truly love you back with all of our hearts and that that love will lead us into a life of living obediently to you, to walking in holiness, into seeking your face, every single day.

So, Father, have your way, take our hearts and make us more and more into the image of Christ. We love you, Jesus. We pray all of this in your precious and your holy name.

God's people said, amen and amen. Hey, I want to give this invitation today. I have no idea who God has led to listen to this radio broadcast, but I want you to know that it's not an accident, that he has brought you to it for a reason, whether to encourage you or maybe even to lead you for the very first time to the love of Christ that will change your life, that will forgive you of your sins, that will set you on the solid rock, and God will use your life in incredible ways and when that life comes to an end or Jesus comes back first, you will be with him for all eternity.

[26 : 00] And so, if you have questions, maybe about what it means to follow Christ, maybe you just have some faith questions, maybe you want to know more about the church, here's some ways that you can get a hold of us.

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

That's 812-663-8488. Or, if you prefer to email, you can go to Ray, you can email me at ray at fccgreensburg.com.

Hey, we so appreciate you tuning in today to hear the word of God and I pray that God will do immeasurably more than we could ever ask or imagine as you truly, as you truly give your heart to Him and you begin to walk with Him every single day.

I hope you have a fantastic week. God bless you.