

JOKE: The Pastor's wife walked into the kitchen to find her husband stalking around with a fly swatter. "What are you doing?" She asked. "Hunting flies" He responded. "Oh. Killing any?" She asked. "Yep, 3 males, 2 females," he replied. Intrigued, she asked. "How can you tell them apart?" He responded, "3 were on a beer can, 2 were on the phone."

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What we often think is important is at times really not as important as we think.

When it comes to following Jesus, it's often not about the things we think it's about...

Success in the Kingdom following Jesus, may not appear like success to those watching from the outside.

The impact your life can have if we will only follow Jesus.

What does it mean to follow Jesus?

Jesus was always urging people to in His words, "Follow me" that was a constant catchphrase in his message. At the beginning of his ministry, he called his first disciples with the command, "Follow me and I will make you fishers of men." As his ministry developed, he told the crowds, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross and follow me."

All throughout the gospels we hear those words follow me.

When we turn our attention to what the Bible shows us about how to follow Jesus in daily life, two things stand out: obeying his teaching and following his example.

Both at times seem easier said than done. Obedience can be so difficult when He asks us to do something outside of our comfort zone.

1 Samuel 15:22 (NIV) - <sup>22</sup> But Samuel replied: “Does the LORD delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in obeying the LORD? To obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed is better than the fat of rams.

1 Samuel 15:22 (The Message) - <sup>22-23</sup> Then Samuel said, Do you think all GOD wants are sacrifices—empty rituals just for show? He wants you to listen to him! Plain listening is the thing, not staging a lavish religious production.

For many, there is a temptation to take the Jesus of the Bible and twist him into a version of Jesus we are more comfortable with.

Take for example the Jefferson Bible, have you ever heard of it? It was written by none other than Thomas Jefferson. The Scripture to him was hard to grip unto so he decided to rewrite the gospels and called it, The Life and Morals of Jesus of Nazareth. I don't want to go into great detail because of time but let me say this, every miracle Jesus performed was taken out and re-wrote because Jefferson had a hard time believing that the God who created the universe could feed 500 with a sack lunch.

It was for him and I'm afraid for much of the Body of Christ a cut and paste Christianity.

We find something that we don't like, and we cut it out, or put in in to a wrong context so that we don't need to change, be obedient to what God is calling us to, or some other thing that we prefer to just hang on to.

A Jesus who is fine with nominal devotion that does not infringe on our comforts, because, after all, He loves us just the way we are. That's the kind of Jesus many would like Him to be.

But do you realize what we are doing when we do that? We could very well be molding Jesus into our image. Instead of us be molded into His. He is beginning to look a lot like us, instead of us looking like Him, because that is whom we are most comfortable with. And that really is nothing less than idolatry.

Do we really believe He is worth abandoning everything for? Do we really believe that Jesus is so good, so satisfying and so rewarding that we will leave all we have to find our fullness in Him? Do we truly believe Him enough to obey Him and to follow Him wherever He leads? However, He leads?

We have blindly and knowingly or maybe unknowingly embraced values and ideas that are common in our culture but are opposing to the gospel Jesus taught.

We must learn to follow Jesus. With everything that is in us.

Matthew 22:37 (NIV) - <sup>37</sup> Jesus replied: “**Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.**’

Following Jesus is simply about becoming love.

Romans 13:8–10 (NIV): 8 Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for whoever loves others has fulfilled the law. 9 The commandments, “You shall not commit adultery,” “You shall not murder,” “You shall not steal,” “You shall not covet,” and whatever other command there may be, are summed up in this one command: “Love your neighbor as yourself.” 10 Love does no harm to a neighbor. **Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.**

We as believers have a debt to love.

If you want to learn how to love, look at Jesus. Let me just give one example than I want to turn to what Paul writes to the church in Corinth.

Mark 5:1–5 (NIV) - They went across the lake to the region of the Gerasenes. <sup>2</sup>When Jesus got out of the boat, a man with an impure spirit came from the tombs to meet him. <sup>3</sup>This man lived in the tombs, and no one could bind him anymore, not even with a chain. <sup>4</sup>For he had often been chained hand and foot, but he tore the chains apart and broke the irons on his feet. No one was strong enough to subdue him. <sup>5</sup>Night and day among the tombs and in the hills he would cry out and cut himself with stones.

This was the kind of man nobody wanted anything to do with. No one wanted to be around. He was alone. Frankly, he scared people.

Listen, often if you want people to have an encounter with love, you need to be willing to invest in them.

You know the story Jesus rebukes the spirit it leaves to go into a herd of pigs who find it best to run off the cliffs edge. Now let's pick our story up there. . .

Mark 5:14–20 (NIV) - <sup>14</sup> Those tending the pigs ran off and reported this in the town and countryside, and the people went out to see what had happened. <sup>15</sup> When they came to Jesus, they saw the man who had been possessed by the legion of demons, sitting there, dressed and in his right mind; and they were afraid. <sup>16</sup> Those who had seen it told the people what had happened to the demon-possessed man—and told about the pigs as well. <sup>17</sup> Then the people began to plead with Jesus to leave their region. <sup>18</sup> As Jesus was getting into the boat, the man who had been demon-possessed begged to go with him. <sup>19</sup> Jesus did not let him, but said, **“Go home to your own people and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you.”** <sup>20</sup> So the man went away and began to tell in the Decapolis how much Jesus had done for him. And all the people were amazed.

Here's the thing church, you don't need to join the crowd and tell people what everyone else sees in them, you and I have been commissioned by Jesus to tell them what He sees in them.

Every time we love people and show them what God sees, we ultimately show people how God feels about them.

The shepherds went and started telling everyone what they'd seen. The man was telling everyone what he'd experienced. And Scripture tells us, "all the people were amazed. "

So, love like Jesus loved. Invest in people, show them, tell them what God sees in them for it can be transforming.

Now let's look at Paul. . .

1 Corinthians 13:1–3 (NIV) - If I speak in the tongues of men or of angels, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. <sup>2</sup>If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. <sup>3</sup>If I give all I possess to the poor and give over my body to hardship that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing.

Do you realize how much good news is in the text I just read? It means . . .

- You don't have to measure up.
- You don't have to prove yourself.
- You don't have to get it all right.

All you need to do is love. Love God, love people.

We get to model the life of Jesus and carry his message with us, and that happens as we become and show love to people.

According to Romans 2 it is God's goodness that leads people to repentance. We need to be the goodness of God to those who we meet.

But what truly is the love that we need to show? Paul gives us some challenging may I say maybe even difficult words about what love really looks like.

1 Corinthians 13:4–7 (NIV) - <sup>4</sup>Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. <sup>5</sup>It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. <sup>6</sup>Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. <sup>7</sup>It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.

Here's the thing about this list. . . you and I are not capable of loving like this in our own will and power. We are dependent on the Holy Spirit enabling us to love others in the way Paul tells us to.

Do you know that we may encounter difficult people? That's why we need the Holy Spirit to help us.

I don't know about you, but sometimes I get impatient, sometimes I get angry a little easier than I should, sometimes I remember the wrongs of others. . .any body else struggle with some of these or is it just your pastor?

So, this Scripture isn't a checklist of requirements. Rather it's a picture of what God's love looks like.

The only way to love like God loves, is to let God love through you. And to do that you need to realize just how much God loves you.

But here's the problem we often have: We think that the opposite of love is hate, and that the opposite of fear is courage. But truth is fear and love are the real opposites. Someone once said that the opposite of love is indifference. When people don't feel like anyone cares.

Oh, about courage being the opposite of fear, may I propose to you that it could be peace. See fear is a state, courage is an action. I'm in a state of fear, but I push past it with courage.

Let me pause here a moment and say this, even if you don't believe everything this book says about you. The enemy understands and knows what it does and he, even if you don't right now, he recognizes that you don't have the spirit of fear but of power, love and a sound mind.

What if I just have peace, because I know and love God. . . (talk about Jesus calming the storm- why you so afraid, etc.).

When you recognize what the word declares over you you no longer need to walk in fear, but can have a peace in the midst of the storm, because your Heavenly Father is able to come to you and say, storm be still !

But if the enemy can keep you in fear. . .he can discourage you and stop you from reaching your full potential.

Here's the thing church. . .When fear drives you. . .

- You keep your distance from God for fear of judgment.
- You become afraid to embrace the real you.
- You are stopped from doing what you are called to do.

Ultimately fear paralyzes you. (Talk about the lions roar)

Whereas, when you know love. . .

- You can walk in peace and know that God is not angry with you when you . . .
- You have peace because you understand whose you are.
- You walk in confidence because you understand that you are loved.

We have heard messages on 1 John 4:19 – look at it

1 John 4:19 (NIV) - <sup>19</sup> We love because he first loved us.

But let me share a few verses before and after that verse to put some things in context.

1 John 4:16–21 (NIV) - <sup>16</sup> And so we know and rely on the love God has for us. **God is love.** Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in them. <sup>17</sup> This is how love is made complete among us so that we will have confidence on the day of judgment: **In this world we are like Jesus.** <sup>18</sup> There is no fear in love. **But perfect**

**love drives out fear**, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love. <sup>19</sup> We love because he first loved us. <sup>20</sup> Whoever claims to love God yet hates a brother or sister is a liar. For whoever does not love their brother and sister, whom they have seen, cannot love God, whom they have not seen. <sup>21</sup> And he has given us this command: Anyone who loves God must also love their brother and sister.

1. When fear drives you, you avoid God because you fear his punishment, but...

The good news is that love compels us to draw near to God.

Romans 8:1–2 (NIV) - Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, <sup>2</sup> because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you free from the law of sin and death.

You need to recognize that the enemy wants you to fear Papa God.

Let me pause here and say first off that Scripture tells us the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. Around 300 times Scripture tells us to fear the Lord. So what does that mean? Probably not what many of us think. The enemy wants you to fear him as oh know I messed up so Papa is coming to get me.

He wants us to think of Him as a cranky old grandpa that trips us with his cane every time we walk past.

But listen to what Scripture tells us,

Psalm 33:8 (KJV): 8 Let all the earth fear the Lord: Let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of him.

The “fear of God” that brings God pleasure is not our being afraid of him, but our having a high and exalted, reverential view of him.

To fear the Lord is to stand in awe of his majesty, power, wisdom, justice, and mercy. To adore him.

God delights in those who fear him – those who stand in awe of him – and instead of trusting in their own human abilities or resources, “hope in his steadfast love.”

The fear of the Lord is not a bad thing. But when understood rightly, it motivates us to worship God and follow after him. To love Him because He first loved us.

2 Corinthians 5:13–16 (NIV) - <sup>13</sup> If we are “out of our mind,” as some say, it is for God; if we are in our right mind, it is for you. <sup>14</sup> For Christ’s love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. <sup>15</sup> And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again. <sup>16</sup> So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer.

2. When fear drives you, you question His love, but . . .

The good news is that love enables us to embrace our true identity found in Christ.

Romans 2:4 (NIV) - <sup>4</sup>Or do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness, forbearance and patience, not realizing that God's kindness is intended to lead you to repentance?

Romans 2:4 (NLT) - <sup>4</sup>Don't you see how wonderfully kind, tolerant, and patient God is with you? Does this mean nothing to you? Can't you see that his kindness is intended to turn you from your sin?

Do you remember the movie Chronicles of Narnia, The Lion, The Witch, and The Wardrobe? In that movie there is a scene where Lucy was talking to Mr. Beaver because she wanted to know about this Aslan. So, she asks Mr. Beaver is he "safe. . ."

"Safe?" replied Mr. Beaver; Don't you hear what Mrs. Beaver tells you? Who said anything about safe? 'Course he isn't safe. But he's good. He's the King, I tell you."

Following Christ, loving God isn't always safe, but it is always good, because He is good. Loving people isn't always safe, but always right.

When we are compelled to show others Jesus by allowing His love to work through us. It shifts the hearts of people and us.