

Faith That Works Through Love

by Zac Poonen

This sermon emphasizes the importance of pursuing the main thing in the Christian life, starting with repentance and faith as the foundation. It highlights the need for genuine repentance and turning away from sin, seeking forgiveness, and believing in Jesus. The sermon stresses the significance of selfless service, seeking God's kingdom first, and loving God and others fervently. It warns against the love of self, money, and pleasure, urging believers to seek faith working through love in all aspects of life.

Scripture: Malachi 3:16, 1 Corinthians 13:4, Galatians 5:6, Acts 20:21, Matthew 6:33, Malachi 4:2

Topics: "Repentance", "Selfless Service"

Description

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Transcript

We have to think of what is the main thing that we must pursue in the Christian life. We begin our life by repentance and faith. That's the beginning.

That's the foundation. A person who has not had proper repentance and not come to genuine faith has no foundation. And that's very important to begin there.

It doesn't matter how great a sinner one is. I mean, on the cross, Jesus manifested through forgiving the dying thief. He was such a terrible criminal, but he probably lived a very wicked life, killing people, stealing, and never did anything to set it right, never asked forgiveness from anyone because he didn't have the opportunity.

And yet he went into paradise because there was a genuine sorrow for his sin. There was a desire to turn from it, and there was evidence that, according to the light he had, he believed in Jesus. So we must never forget that our forgiveness is not based on how we are living today, but have I genuinely repented? It's very important.

I find that repentance is not emphasized in so much of preaching. Even some of the world's great evangelists, they don't emphasize repentance. They say, believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be

saved.

That's a scriptural verse, Acts 16, 31. But if you go to that scripture, you find it was spoken to someone who had repented. If he had not repented, like on the day of Pentecost, when Peter preached, he said, repent and then believe.

Paul also said, let me show you that verse, Acts chapter 20. He tells us there what he was preaching everywhere, Acts of the Apostles, in chapter 20. He was speaking to the elders in Ephesus, and he says to them, in verse 21, Acts 20, verse 21, Jews and Greeks, in other words, the Jews and non-Greeks, non-Jews, that means everybody in the world that's included in that phrase.

Whenever you find in scripture a phrase like Jews and Gentiles or Jews and Greeks, it's referring to the whole world, because the Jews divided the world into two categories, the Jews and non-Jews or Gentiles. And to the whole world, Paul says in Acts 20, 21, there are only two messages I preach, repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. Repentance, the word repentance means a turning away.

It's 180 degrees turn towards God. Repentance towards God means God is here. On the other side is sin in the world, and I've turned right around.

Now, the reason I need to mention that is because a lot of Christians, I've found, have problem in their lives because they've not turned around 180 degrees. They've turned around only partially. They've still got an eye on something in the world, and they wonder why their Christian life is not making much progress.

It's because they're not running in the right direction. They have not turned 180 degrees. Now, don't take that lightly, because if you find your Christian life is not satisfactory, you wonder if something's wrong with the superstructure.

Nothing is wrong with the superstructure. The problem is with the foundation in your life. There's not been a proper repentance.

Repentance toward God, 180-degree turn. In the military, there's a command on the parade ground called about turn. About turn means you turn right around.

You're back is to what you were facing before. That's the difference between a left turn and a right turn. Many Christians have done only a left turn or a right turn from sin, but not an about turn.

In other words, sin is here on the right, God is here, and they've turned halfway. And then all their life, they're going to have problems. All their life.

I mean, some undeserving elder may have accepted them as believers, or if they were going to some other church, some pastor would have accepted them as believers, because those folks don't emphasize repentance either. So I just want you to examine your own heart and see if there's something unsatisfying in your present Christian experience. Ask yourself, have you got a proper foundation? Have you got a genuine turning 180 degrees? What do I have to turn from? What was I worshipping before I worshipped God? I was worshipping myself.

Yes, every human being is worshipping himself. That's what I was doing. That's what all of you were doing.

And if I not stop worshipping myself, I haven't repented. If self is still in the center, everything revolves around, how's that going to affect me? And that person says something about me and I get hurt, or this is a bit inconvenient for me. Brother, sister, forget about being a Christian, if that's your attitude.

Just don't put this Christian whitewash and imagine that you're a Christian. I say this because it's going to be very important in the day of judgment. I've always felt that nobody should be able to turn around to me in the day of judgment.

We're all going to meet one day at the judgment seat of Christ. No doubt about it. I have no doubt I will see everyone I preach to at the judgment seat of Christ.

And I don't want even one of them to turn around and to tell me and say, Brother Zach, you never told us the truth of what we are hearing now. You'll never be able to say that to me because I say it plainly everywhere I go I preach it. Repentance toward God, like Paul preached it.

Away from a self-centered life. Now the reason I say this is because I've seen far too many Christians, even in our CFC churches, who come along and say, oh, that's a nice message. I like to hear Brother Zach speak and it challenges me and encourages me.

It's intellectually stimulating and all that garbage. Intellectually stimulating is not a thing that's going to help us to become holy. It's repentance.

If I'm drawn by the type of preacher or not by the message, I've got to examine myself. So please take these words seriously. Repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.

Now faith is being tremendously emphasized in Christendom. And it's, you know, if you were living in the world 600 years ago, when there was only one big church, the Roman Catholic Church, they never preached repentance. And in those days, if you were living, you would have thought salvation is by being loyal to the church and burning candles and praying to Mary, et cetera.

But then the Protestant Reformation came and they proclaimed salvation is by faith. And so the last 500 years, faith has been preached. But it's been emphasized so much that repentance has been left out.

We've given up, I mean, people gave up the worship of candles and praying to Mary and all that and thought I'll not believe in Jesus Christ. But that belief in Jesus Christ was so shallow because they never turned around from their self. Self was still in the center.

They were believing in Jesus Christ. They believed in Christ to go to heaven. You know that Jesus never came to save us from hell.

There's not a single verse in the Bible that says Jesus came to save us from hell. The very first page of the New Testament says in Matthew 21, 21, he came to save us from our sin. There is no salvation from hell if I'm not wanting to be saved from sin.

I'm not asking whether you've completely been saved from all your sin. That's not my question. I would ask this question.

Do you want to be saved from every single thing that's displeasing God in your life? If you can't say that, you're not really repentant. If you can't say, Lord, if there's a single thing in my life that's displeasing to you, I want to give it up. I may not have the strength to give it up immediately, but I'm determined to give it

up.

And I'm going to pursue you until it's gone from my life. That is what it means to repent. I don't want to have anything in my life that is displeasing to God.

Self will no longer be determining the way I live and the things I never say. Lord, I never want to speak about anything or read anything or see anything that's displeasing to God. Is there anything in my life that's displeasing to God? I want to give it up.

Now, many people don't take such a radical attitude, and they wonder why their Christian life is shallow. They go to church meetings, and they increase in knowledge, and the more they increase in knowledge, they deceive themselves that they become spiritual. They listen to a lot of sermons and have increased in knowledge, and they think thereby they are spiritual.

No. They just get a swollen head. That's all.

It's not spirituality. Spirituality will begin with a proper foundation, which is repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. So once we get past that, and I don't want to rush past that quickly because it's very important that we get that foundation right, then what are we supposed to do the rest of our lives? When you look at Paul's own life, he says here further on, there's something else.

After he proclaimed, he says, I proclaim repentance and faith, verse 21. Then he says in verse 27, I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole purpose of God. The whole purpose of God.

You need to understand what is the whole purpose of God for your life. And I would say in a nutshell, in one sentence, the whole purpose of God, once he's got you turning around from sin, is to make you like Jesus Christ. Make you and me like Christ in our thoughts.

More and more, I begin to think the way Jesus thought. More and more, I begin to speak to people the way Jesus would speak. The more and more, my attitude to everything in the earth becomes more and more like the attitude of Christ.

My attitude to money becomes the attitude that Jesus had. My attitude to people, to enemies, to those who hate me and detest me, will be like the attitude of Christ. This is God's purpose.

The whole purpose of God. So if you just look at these two sentences, first the foundation, repentance and faith in Christ, which must be established. Then I must pursue the whole purpose of God.

So before I go there, what does repentance and faith change in my life? My character doesn't change the day I get converted. The direction of my life has changed. We can say I've come to the starting line of the Christian race.

But the race is a long race, like a marathon race. But I need to come to the starting line. That starting line is repentance and faith.

Then comes this race, and that race is to deny ourselves and take up the cross and follow Jesus. Gradually being conformed more and more and more to his likeness. So I believe that's something that we need to evaluate ourselves.

And I believe it's very good for us to examine ourselves and see that we're not deceiving ourselves. The Bible speaks a lot about self-deception. Let me show you a couple of verses.

In Galatians, in chapter 6, in Galatians 6, it says, verse 4, verse 3, first of all, if anyone thinks he's somebody when he's actually a nobody, he's deceiving himself. And that means it's possible for us to have such a high opinion about ourselves that we think we are somebody. Because we can think we are something when we are nothing.

But, verse 4, everyone must examine his own work. Look at his own life. So what is, what does it mean to become like Christ? There's a verse in chapter 5, it's not a complete covering of all of that, all of God's purpose, but let's just look at one verse.

Galatians 5 and verse 6. In Christ Jesus, circumcision, which is what the Jews emphasize, or uncircumcision, you're not a Jew, means nothing. Faith working through love. That's a very good expression.

A faith in our heart that produces love in our actions and in our attitudes to people. Now, if that is not happening more and more, I'm not running the race. If I run the race, it means I'm trusting Christ more and more in the difficult situations, faith and love.

Repentance and faith, remember, is the foundation or the starting line of the Christian race. And then, the entire Christian life is faith working through love. Love for God and love for one another.

And when I look at a lot of Christians who don't seem to be growing in a fervent love for Christ, and they don't seem to be disturbed by it. I don't know why that is. They seem to be pretty cold in their love for Christ and they come regularly to church and attend the meetings.

There's no fervent passion in their life to know Jesus better and to love Him more, to live more for Him, to sacrifice more for Him. I see there's something wrong with that type of Christianity. So, whatever other activity we do, here it talks about circumcision, put something else there, going to church, singing songs, it all amounts to nothing.

The only thing that matters is faith working through love. So, when we think of God's purpose, God's full purpose, in the new covenant, God, through Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit, wants to accomplish in us what He wanted to do in the Old Testament, but He could not do. Remember one lawyer came to Jesus once and said, what is the great commandment in the law? Because for the Jews, it was the Sabbath or circumcision.

And Jesus said, no. The great commandment in the law is number one, to love God with all your heart, soul, and strength, and mind, and to love others as yourself. So, that's the love spoken of here.

So, progress, you know, that's when God made Adam. He wanted him to be like that. He wanted Adam to love Him, to love God with all his heart, and to love Eve and all the others in the human race as He loved Himself.

Now, Adam failed, Eve failed in that, and all the children of Adam failed. What Christ has done in the cross and through the gift of the Holy Spirit is to bring us back to that original purpose. And you can know whether that purpose is being fulfilled in your life by asking yourself one question.

Am I loving Christ more and more as the years go by? Am I loving other people more and more as the years go by? Am I thinking of myself and becoming more and more considerate of other people? I'm amazed how sometimes Christians can be so inconsiderate of other people. Only thinking of themselves. How will this benefit me? That's the way the entire world lives.

How will this benefit me? If I go to this church, how will it benefit me? If I go to this church, how will it benefit my children? That's not the reason for choosing a church. The reason for choosing a church is not because they got a good Sunday school or they got well-behaved kids there, or there are nice people who will help me when I'm in difficulty. That's completely wrong reasons for choosing a church.

That's a club. And I tell you honestly, a lot of Christians choose a church just like they choose a club. That's a good club to belong to because if I'm in need, they'll help me.

That's a little nice children's club to go to because I want my children to be well-behaved and there's a bunch of nice children there. They can grow up there. These are all the wrong reasons to join a church.

And I believe there's a lot of that in a lot of Christians' minds when they think of what church should I go to. The first commandment is to love God with all your heart. So the reason I choose a church is because they challenge me to stop loving the world, to stop loving money, to stop loving my sin, to hate myself, and to love Jesus supremely, and to love Jesus more than I love my wife, and more than I love my children, and more than I love my job.

I want to go to that church because they are challenging me to love Christ supremely. Is that the reason why you choose a church? Is that the type of message that you listen to? Challenges you to forsake these things and love Christ supremely? That is the first commandment because if that is not being fulfilled, I want to say to you, my dear brothers and sisters, you're not running the race. Don't fool yourself.

One day Christ comes back and you wake up and you say, boy, I'm still stuck at the starting line. I didn't run the race at all. I just kept on increasing in knowledge and having a nice time with a lot of believers but never made progress in my life to fervently love Christ more than I did when I first got converted.

I want to love Christ far, far more than I did when I first got converted. And I want to come to the place in my life where it is impossible for me to hate anyone. That is God's will for my life.

That however many people hate me, it will be impossible for me to hate them because God has done a work in my heart to fill me with the spirit of love. What did we read here? In Christ Jesus, Galatians 5, 6, circumcision or uncircumcision means nothing. Instead of that, you can put anything.

Baptism means nothing. Reading the Bible means nothing. Going to church means nothing if it doesn't lead to faith working through love.

In other words, put whatever you like there. All the activities you do mean nothing if it does not lead to a life of faith working through love where I learn to love Jesus supremely more and more and more and more as the days go by. And as a result, I learn to bear with one another in love.

You know, the world is full of very difficult people, and you discover that, that the world is full of people who like to take advantage of us in some way or the other. And I have to live with them. I have to love them.

I'm not saying that I must allow them to take advantage of me. That's not what I mean. But I've got to love them.

Sometimes I have to love them enough to tell them, sorry, I can't do that for you. I don't have time. I've got a lot of other things to do for the Lord.

I'm not seeking anybody's honor. I have to love Jesus supremely and love others as I love myself. That is, my dear brothers, that's going to be the final test and the final day.

And the Lord examines us. Did you love me with all your heart? The Lord is going to ask you. Were there other loves in your heart which took away from your love for me, particularly love of money or love of an easygoing life, love of pleasure? Let me turn you to 2 Timothy Chapter 3 about the last days.

In 2 Timothy 3, we read, I'm trying to show you the superstructure. We saw the foundation, repentance toward God, faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. The superstructure, Galatians 5, 6, faith, working through love.

And what are the challenges to our loving God? In the last days, those are the days we're living in. In 2 Timothy 3, 1, it says, in the last days, difficult times will come. Or as the Living Bible puts it very nicely saying, it's not talking about persecution here.

No. Not those type of difficulties. Those type of difficulties they had even in the first century.

But Living Bible says, in the last days, it's going to be difficult to be a Christian. And not because there's going to be a lot of persecution of Christians. That happened even in the first century.

It was difficult to be a Christian. Not difficult, but it was dangerous to be a Christian in the first century because you could get killed. Now, there's a lot of difference between being dangerous to be a Christian, as it was in the first three centuries.

You could lose your life. And it's difficult to be a Christian. Difficult means there's so much of compromise in Christendom today.

There's compromise in the world. The pressure of the world is so much. It's going to be difficult to be a Christian.

That's what's emphasized here. It's going to be difficult to be a Christian because Notice the four type of lovers mentioned here. We talk about faith working through love, remember? That's how we started, Galatians 5, 6. Faith working through love is running the Christian race.

And here are the challenges to that. There are four lovers mentioned here in 2 Timothy 3, 1 to 4. Lovers of self, lovers of money, and verse 4, lovers of pleasure, and lovers of God. So there are three challenges to loving God mentioned here.

Number one, the love of self. And number two, the love of money. And number three, the love of pleasure.

So while I seek to love God with all my heart, while I seek to love Jesus with all my heart, there are three other loves that are trying to pull me in another direction. One is, let me come to love of self last, love of money. To have money is a good thing.

Very useful. To love money is absolutely evil. Jesus, the Bible says in 1 Timothy 6, the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil.

And here it is put in contrast to the love of God. It doesn't mean you shouldn't get a better salary. It doesn't mean that you should not invest your money and make some more money.

And it doesn't mean that you shouldn't choose a job which offers you a higher salary. It's got nothing to do with your salary. It's got to do with your love for money.

And there are many poor people in the world who love money tremendously. It's not only rich people who love money. Have you ever seen a poor man who doesn't love money? We've got beggars in the streets in India, and every one of them loves money.

It's not a question of your bank account that determines whether you love money or not. The love of money is deep-rooted in every single child of Adam. Whether he's a beggar or a millionaire.

And I have to be free from it if I want to love Jesus Christ. In other words, that's not primary in my life. I use it, but it's not going to be primary in my life.

I keep it in its proper place because I need to have it to take care of my family. Jesus worked to earn his living. And there's nothing wrong in that.

There's nothing wrong in earning money. There's nothing wrong in earning a lot of money. If you earn it honestly and uprightly, there's nothing wrong in it.

It can be very useful. There's nothing wrong in having money to be able to live a comfortable life. But if it ever takes the place, if it ever sort of challenges the love of God, it's something like, you know, if you love your wife with all your heart, and there's another woman who's sort of attracting you now and then.

You know that's evil. Maybe a pretty woman living next door attracting you and turning you away from your wife. You know that's evil.

Why would I tell you money is like that? It's exactly like that. Here's God seeking all your attention like your wife should have all your attention. That's that pretty woman next door who is trying to draw your attention also.

Money is exactly like that. You got to be careful. So, love of money, that's one thing.

And the other thing mentioned here is the love of pleasure. There's a lot of sinful pleasure nowadays in the world. And sometimes where the line is so thinly drawn between sinful pleasure and what is clean forms of pleasure.

And one has to be very careful nowadays, particularly with the Internet and television and computers. There's a very thin line there. If you don't steer well clear, it's like a cliff.

And if you know that sinful pleasure is a cliff down which you can fall, your aim will never be how close can I get to the cliff without falling down. Now, a lot of people are, you know, and sometimes the young people's meetings, we have question time and one of the questions is, Brother Zack, can I do this and follow the Lord? Can I do this? It reminds me of a child asking me, Dad, how close can I go to the edge of the cliff without falling over? I said, why do you want to go so close to the edge of the cliff? Give a little

distance away. Or in a railway station.

We have a lot of trains in India. Most travel in India by train. And the child comes up and says, how close can I stand to the edge of the platform when the train is coming in? I said, I don't want you to find out how close you can stand.

Let's stay as far away as possible. That's exactly the same I would say in relation to how close can I do that? If I go a little beyond, it'll be sin, sinful pleasure. How close can I go to that? Stay a little far away.

It's safer. It'll be very difficult to be a Christian. Because there'll be men will be lovers of pleasure.

And at the same time, seeking to be Christians. Because it says here, now let me read the whole thing. Men will be lovers of self, lovers of money, lovers of pleasure.

At the same time, verse 5, they're not going to be out in the world unbelievers. They're going to hold to a form of godliness. That means they're going to be evangelical Christians in doctrine.

The form of godliness we can say is the doctrine of evangelical Christianity. They're going to hold on to that, but they don't have its inner power. They don't have the power to free them from these other pleasures.

They've got the right doctrine. But yet, they love money, they love pleasure which is impure, and they love self. Self, I left it for the last because I believe that is the reason why progress is hindered.

Jesus said, if you want to follow me, you have to deny yourself. Say no to yourself. Put self to death.

That's another thing which I'm sorry to say. It's like repentance has not been emphasized in the foundation. In building the superstructure, death to self has not been emphasized sufficiently in Christendom, even among believers.

I've seen even CFC churches, people have been with us for a long, long time. They haven't got light on how much of love of self there is within them. Self is the center.

That's why, after many years, you suddenly discover all types of carnality and worldliness coming in people who you thought were very spiritual ones. They have the form of godliness, but not the power, and that can happen to any one of us. So, remember this.

The only thing that matters in the Christian life is faith working through love. And the challenges to love, to our love for God, are love of self, love of money, and love of pleasure. How close can I go to the edge of the cliff without falling over? Is doing this wrong? Can I go this close to it and still follow the Lord? Why not stay as far away from it as possible? So, that's just love in the vertical direction.

But faith working through love also applies in the horizontal direction. You know, like the cross is about two arms. Vertical speaks of love God with all your heart.

And horizontal is love one another as you love others as you love yourself. So, when Jesus died on the cross, he was proving by that vertical arm of the cross, I love God more than anything on this earth. My father told me to die, even though it's a tremendous price I have to pay to be cut off from him.

He struggled and get 70 for that. I'll do it because I love God with all my heart. Many people look at the cross and say, wow, how he loved us.

I look at the cross and say, wow, how he loved the father. The first thing that Jesus proved on the cross was not his love for us, but his love for the father. In fact, before he went to the cross, he said these words in the gospels.

As the father gave me commandment, so I do. Let's go to the cross. He went to the cross, number one, because he loved the father.

He loved his heavenly father. And secondly, the horizontal arm of the cross, he loved us. Those are the two aspects of God's will, which we see in the cross.

And the second aspect of it, the second part of love God with all your heart and love one another is I've loved you. You see, described most perfectly in 1 Corinthians 13. There's a lot of emphasis nowadays on the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

And I believe in them. I believe in them. I've sought for them.

I can't ask for all the gifts. And I had to ask the Lord let me to fulfill the gift which you called me for. But if you don't seek for the gifts, you don't get them.

But many people look for the spectacular gifts. And a lot of people want to speak in tongues. I'll tell you honestly, I never wanted to speak in tongues in my life.

That's not what I sought for. I wanted to live a holy life. God gave me the gift of tongues more than 40 years ago.

But I wasn't seeking for it. It was just a gift. It's like a bonus he threw in when I was seeking for something else.

I was seeking for control over my mother tongue. I said, Lord, I get angry. I speak rudely sometimes.

I want to control that. Forget about other tongues. Give me control over my mother tongue first.

And when I sought God for that in prayer, he filled me with the spirit. And helped me to control my mother tongue. And gave me other tongues.

So I tell people, don't seek for other tongues. Ask God to fill you with the Holy Spirit to give you control over your mother tongue. The way you speak to your wife.

The way you speak to your children. The way you speak to other believers. The way you speak to those who are rude to you.

Ask God for the power of the Holy Spirit to control your mother tongue. Wonderful. But I'm not saying gifts are not important.

What I said was, Lord, give me the gift you want me to have. And he gave me the gift of teaching. I didn't have a natural ability for it.

God gave it. Not everybody can have it. If God gives you a particular gift, you've got to be satisfied with that.

See, for example, I'll tell you one gift which nobody seeks. Let me give you a list of some of these gifts. 1 Corinthians 12.

1 Corinthians 12. Verse 28. Okay.

Here are all these gifts mentioned in 1 Corinthians 12. The gifted people in the church. Apostles.

Those who plant churches. Second, prophets. 1 Corinthians 12.

Verse 28. Those who proclaim the word of God prophetically. Third, teachers.

Those who explain the Bible. Fourth, those who have the ability to do miracles. Supernatural miracles.

Not just physical healings, but miracles in different difficult situations. And then, 1, 2, 3, 4, and then fifth, healing. That's healing from sickness.

And sixth, helps. Seventh, administration. Sort of administering the church and various activities of the church.

And then, tongues. Now, out of all those gifts, if somebody were to look at those gifts, what do you think the average Christian seeks for? I've seen through the years. Lord, I like healing.

Or, I'd like to be an apostle. Or, I like tongues. Look at that small little gift mentioned in there called helps.

You find many people seeking God. Lord, make me a helper. Wherever I go, I just see how I can help people.

Can you please give me that tremendous gift of just being a helper wherever I go? I can't teach. I can't heal the sick. I don't speak in tongues.

I'm not an apostle. Far from it. I'm not a prophet.

I'm not a teacher. But, can you make me a help, Lord? And, you know, it's a very important gift. It's mentioned there along with miracles, healings, and helps.

It's like the different parts of the body these gifts are. So, I'm just mentioning that to you to show you that if I love God with all my heart, the self comes in so quickly that when I ask for a gift, it's a gift that will give me some prominence in the church. If you're a help, you're the type of person who quietly cleans the floor and cleans the church building when nobody's looking.

That's a help. Most people don't look for that type of gift. No, because that doesn't give them any prominence.

They're quietly behind the scenes doing a lot of work, maybe in the kitchen or cleaning up the church before the service and after the service. No honor there. Nobody even knows that you did it.

But, there you see how self is in the center, that even in seeking a gift, we're seeking some honor for ourselves. And that's the reason why many people don't get anything from God. So, there's nothing wrong

in seeking these gifts, but it says in 1 Corinthians 14.1, Pursue after love first, then by all means earnestly desire spiritual gifts.

So, what I learned from that is, if I want to exercise a spiritual gift to bless other people, I must pursue after love first. I must say, Lord, let me love this person. Let me love God's people.

Then I'll be able to serve them. And that's the tragedy today that so many people want the gift of preaching or teaching or something like that, or it's not coming out of our heart of love. And that's where 1 Corinthians 13 is important.

Remember the verse we started with, Galatians 5.6? Everything is useless except faith working through love. That is a fervent love for Jesus Christ and a love for one another. And you can take your own time to see that our love for one another is manifested in these verses 4 to 7. Love is patient, love is kind, is not jealous, does not brag, is not arrogant, does not act unbecomingly.

And here is one of the primary marks of love. It does not seek its own. Think of just that one thing.

And if I really love people, I'm not going to seek my own. I'm not going to see what benefit will I get out of this. Zero.

Doesn't matter. What benefit did Jesus get by coming to this world and dying on the cross? He said, Lord, give me that spirit where I serve because I love you. And I get nothing out of it.

I'm not seeking my own. Such a person is a tremendous blessing in the church. Such a person, you'd love to be around such a person because he's not seeing anything for himself.

Where do we find pastors, for example, or leaders who are not interested in one single thing from you? They don't want your honor. They don't want your money. They don't want you to come and be their servant.

They don't want a single thing from you. They want to serve you. Isn't it wonderful if you had a church full of such people who are not seeking anything from the church for themselves? They're only thinking of what they can do to bless others and help others.

They go to a church not because they say, oh, I can get something nice for me here, or I can get something nice for my children. No, I'm not seeking anything for myself. I'm seeking how I can serve and bless the church.

You know, they will get the maximum from the Lord, and the church will be a tremendous blessing to them and their children as well. Seek the kingdom of God first. Put God first in your life.

Choose a church because it's going to challenge you to love Jesus Christ supremely, and not that you can get some benefit out of it. And I tell you, it'll go exceptionally well with your family, with your children. I've proved that in my life in the last 45 years that we have built CFC churches.

I can honestly say before God that I did not seek my own or the good of my family or profit or any such thing. I said, Lord, I want to glorify you. And I see God threw all the other things in.

He threw everything else in for me and for my children and my family without my asking for it. Because that's how God is. You remember, you know, you'll never lose heart by serving God.

I'll tell you that. You remember the story of Jesus feeding the 5,000. I don't know whether you noticed how they were so hungry because they'd been with Jesus the whole day, and Jesus recognized these guys are hungry.

And Jesus chose his 12 disciples to feed them. And I'm sure people asked for a second helping and a third helping because the buns that Jesus made were so good. And as these disciples went around distributing the buns and the fish and all that, do you know who were the hungriest people there? The disciples themselves.

They hadn't eaten at all. And they didn't have time to eat because these people are all asking for a second helping and a third helping. And they go to this crowd.

Can you imagine how long it took for 12 people to feed 5,000 people? They go around and around and around and around. But when you read these, don't rush through these passages in scripture, but stop a moment and say, how many people were serving 12? How many men were there? 5,000. And probably women and children.

And they just go around serving, serving, serving, serving. Boy, they were really exhausted. I'll tell you what was going through their mind.

Boy, I'm so hungry. I hope there's something left for me. After all these guys have finished eating, I hope there'll be something left.

That would have passed through any one of our mind. And you know how the Lord rewarded them. You know why there were 12 baskets full at the end? Because there were 12 disciples.

The Lord said, you served me faithfully. You don't just get a few buns and fish. You got a full basket to go home with.

That's how the Lord rewards those who selflessly serve others. Let me tell you that. I have proved it through more than 50 years of serving the Lord in my life.

I can honestly say before God, I never saw it my own when God's taken care of me amazingly and my family. I've never lacked anything, never asked anybody for anything. He really gives you a basket full as you go around serving others.

So don't think of yourself, my brother, sister. Say, Lord, I'm here to seek your kingdom first. I want to glorify you on earth.

That's the reason why you kept me here. It doesn't bother me if other people don't care for me. My Heavenly Father cares for me.

Why should I bother if somebody else doesn't care for me? Somebody is not considerate towards me. It doesn't bother me. I've got a Father in heaven who cares for me.

He cares for me exceptionally well. I'll tell you that. If you can't believe the Bible, at least believe my testimony.

I'm a living example of the fact that you seek God's kingdom first. All the other things will be thrown into you, for you. So faith working through love.

Pursue that. Start with the foundation of repentance toward God and faith toward the Lord Jesus Christ. And say, Lord, I want to run this race seeking to love you more and more every day.

Not seeking my own in any way. Steering clear of the love of pleasure. Steering clear of the love of money.

Steering clear of the love of self. Not seeking anything for myself. I pray that you'll have a testimony, my brother, sister.

When people mingle with you, that you're a person who does not seek anything for yourself. You're not seeking a name for yourself. You're not seeking comfort.

You're not trying to get fellowship with others to get some benefit for yourself. You're only thinking, can I glorify Christ here? Can I bless these people in some way? Those are the finest Christians on the face of the earth. There are very few of them.

You won't find many of them even in a good church. But there are some. They are God's Jews.

Okay, let me close with a verse in Malachi. Please turn to Malachi in chapter 4. In Malachi chapter 4, it's the last chapter of the last book of the Old Testament. Sorry, I want to read Malachi 3, just before chapter 4. In Malachi 3, verse 16 to 18, that's the passage I'm thinking of.

The last three verses of Malachi chapter 3. Those who fear the Lord spoke to one another. I hope our church will be like that. I hope RLCF will be like that.

A church full of people who fear God and speak to each other with the fear of God. And the Lord pays attention, it says here. He listens to what they're speaking.

Such people. And he writes a book of remembrance. Now, this is different from the book of life.

The book of life is those who are born again. The book of remembrance is another book. I want to be in this book.

My name is already in the book of life. And I want to be in this book of remembrance, which is written, where the names are written of those who reverence God and esteem His name. Everything in my life, Lord, I want to be governed by a reverence for God.

And I want to esteem the name of Jesus Christ that is never dishonored by anything I say or do in my life. And see what the Lord says. Those people who are in this book of remembrance, they'll be mine.

On the day when I prepare my own special possession. And I believe the meaning here is I will bless them like I bless my own children. Like a son who served me faithfully, I will bless them.

And in that day, when the Lord comes back to reward those who feared Him and esteemed His name. That day you will distinguish who was really righteous, verse 18, and who was wicked. And that day you really distinguish among all those people who sat in your church, who really served God.

And who really served only himself. Who came to that church for some benefit for himself and his family. And who came to that church to pour out his life for God and His kingdom.

In that day, you will distinguish. I believe we will distinguish in that day. That's the only thing worth living for, my brother and sister.

God has given us a few years on this earth to live. I want to live in such a way that the Lord will put my name in the book of remembrance. Because I fear Him and esteem His name.

And I want to judge myself. I've been doing it for many years. But I've not become 100% like Christ yet.

So I've got to keep on judging myself. Keep on judging myself. Saying, Lord, I want to be more like you.

I want to run this race. I'll never stop running. I've been running for 61 years.

I'm not going to stop running. I'm determined to be more and more like Christ every day. I pray that that will be your passion.

Everything else in life must be secondary. God bless you all. You're fortunate.

I wouldn't use the word fortunate. It's a worldly word. You're blessed to have.

It's got nothing to do with fortune. You're blessed because you have such a wonderful church there in RLCF. You don't realize.

I pray that you'll value it. You don't realize what a lot of other churches are like. You're really blessed to be a part of this church.

Be thankful to God that you can join in with such wonderful people. I praise God for RLCF. And for the leaders God has given you there.

Humble, God-fearing people. Value them. Esteem your elders.

It's not easy to be an elder in a church. I tell you that. I've been an elder for 45 years, and it's not easy.

But I'm thankful God gave me that honor. Value your elders. They face tremendous pressures.

I know you don't despise them, but don't be neutral towards them. Value them. Esteem them very highly, the Bible says.

You've got a wonderful church, and value the church. Let's pray. Heavenly Father, I thank you for fellowship with these dear brothers in RLCF.

I thank you for every one of them, and how eagerly they listen to God's word, even though they're not able to come together. Please bless every family, we pray. We pray that all these little children in these families, every one of them, Lord, will grow up to live for the glory of God.

Not one of them will live for the world or for themselves. Bless our children, Lord, we pray. And all those who are listening, young and old, we pray in Jesus' name.

Amen.

Video: <https://sermonindex2.b-cdn.net/Bsacw1-Vuqs.mp4>

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