

# How to Love God With All Our Heart

by Zac Poonen

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*The sermon emphasizes the importance of loving God with all our heart, which is the first commandment, and that this love comes from understanding how much God loved us.*

**Duration:** 55:41

**Scripture:** Psalm 91:14

**Topics:** "Loving God", "Spiritual Growth"

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## Description

This sermon emphasizes the importance of loving God with all our hearts, focusing on understanding God's love for us and meditating on the extent of our forgiveness to deepen our love for Him. It highlights the need to avoid sin not out of fear or selfish motives but out of genuine love for God, stressing that true spiritual growth comes from loving God wholeheartedly. The sermon also touches on the dangers of spiritual pride and the significance of diligently seeking God through meditation and reflection on His love and forgiveness.

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## Transcript

Let's turn to Psalm 91 and verse 14 to 16. Psalm 91 is a very wonderful psalm, and it speaks about the Lord's protection on his people. That's something which we all need as we approach the end of time.

It says here in verse, the number of promises in those last three verses. Here are the promises there. First of all, he says, I will deliver him.

Verse 14 of Psalm 91. And then it says, I will set him on high. No, verse 14.

I will set him on high. Then I will answer him. I will be with him in trouble.

I will rescue him. I will honor him. I will satisfy him.

And I will let him see my salvation. Those are some tremendous promises if we can experience them. And there are certain conditions mentioned here.

First of all, he says, because he has loved me. And verse 15, it says, he will call upon me. He will call on me.

And then the last part of verse 14, he has known my name. So let's just look at those three things. What it means to love the Lord? To know his name.

And to call or to pray to him. And if we do these things, these things we can experience in our life. He will deliver us from all types of problems.

He will set us on high over sin and the devil. He will answer us. And he will be with us in trouble.

He will rescue us. Honor us. Satisfy us.

And show us his salvation. The first commandment that Jesus said was to love God with all our hearts. And that's why that's the first thing mentioned here.

Now, even though that was the first commandment, nobody in the Old Testament could keep it. They only kept the laws. Now, you can keep God's commandments for various reasons.

See, nowadays many people are taught to pay, give God money, so that God will bless them. So, that is like a business transaction with God. They may be obeying a commandment, but they are not doing it out of love.

We may keep a commandment because we are being troubled in our conscience. Or we may keep a commandment because we may lose our testimony if we don't keep the commandment. So, there are many reasons why we can avoid sin.

And if you avoid sin, it's good. But if you avoid sin for the wrong reasons, you will never become spiritual. If I avoid sin because other people may catch me, it's good.

But it's not the good, right reason. If we avoid sin because we are being troubled by other people, it's good. But it's not the good reason.

Many people of God avoid sin for some wrong reasons. If I avoid sin because I want God to use me, that is also a wrong reason. In the Old Testament, many people avoided sin for the wrong reasons.

We can think we are spiritual because we avoid sin. But if we avoid sin for the wrong reason, we are still in the Old Covenant. If we avoid sin for the wrong reason, we are still under the Old Covenant.

If we avoid sin for the wrong reason, we are still under the Old Covenant. What is the right reason for keeping God's commandments? We read in John's Gospel chapter 14. Verse 15, if you love me, keep my commandments.

That is the only right reason for keeping God's commandments. If we keep God's commandments for any other reason, we are still under the law. Many Christians fool themselves that they are spiritual just because they live a good life.

In the last day when we stand before the Lord, the Lord is not going to see what we did. As I was saying, if we don't obey the commandments because we love the Lord, that is the wrong reason. If we don't obey the commandments because we love the Lord, that is the wrong reason.

If I keep the commandments because I want to get a blessing, or if I keep the commandments because I want to have a good testimony, if I keep the commandments because I want God to use me, if I keep the

commandments because I want God to bless me or reward me in some way, even if I want to get a reward in eternity, even if I want to get an honor in eternity, that is not a problem. Some people think that if you are faithful, God will put you in the bride of Christ. All this is legalism.

Many people think that they are free from the old covenant. They are not. The only basis on which a person keeps the commandments under the new covenant is because he loves the Lord.

So, that is what the law could not accomplish in people. We read in Romans chapter 8, Romans chapter 8, and verse 3, what the law could not do because it was weak through the flesh, God did. What was it the law could not do? The law put a fear into people so that they lived a good life.

It could not make them live a good life out of love for the Lord. It was out of fear that if I don't live a good life, if I don't obey God's commandments, He will punish me. Or that if I keep the commandments, I will get some reward.

So, more important than your seeing whether you are keeping the commandments, you must see why you are keeping the commandments. Many of you go to church service every Sunday. And weekday also perhaps.

But the important thing is not whether you go to the meeting. The important question is, why do you go to the meeting? That only you can answer. Other people see you at the meeting.

But God sees why. But God sees why you have come. The important question in the New Testament is, why do you do it? Let's look at 1 Corinthians 4. Let's look at 4 and 5. We know that Jesus told us not to judge others.

Why should we not judge others? Listen, this is the reason. Because even though you see what they do, you don't know why they did it. You can judge their action.

No, if you are trying to discern whether a person is a true prophet or a false prophet, then of course, we have to go by the external fruit. Because Jesus said, by the fruit you shall know them. So, when I see some preacher going after money, I discern that.

It's false prophet. Or, I see a prophet acting very proud, then I say, okay, false prophet. So, those things are discerning, because I want to keep away from error.

But when we are talking about judging people, Jesus said, don't judge them. When you see somebody do something, you really don't know why he did it. Maybe a good reason, maybe a bad reason, I don't know.

Because the motive, only God can see. And there we read, in verse 5, don't go on passing judgment before the right time. God says, you want to judge, I'll give you plenty of opportunity to judge, but wait.

You can judge everybody. But not now. After I return to the earth, the Lord says, and I'll show you everybody's motives, at my judgment seat, then you please pass your judgments.

That's what he's saying in this verse. He doesn't say, don't judge at all. He says, don't judgment before the time.

He says, wait, why are you in such a hurry to judge? You know, that is one of the evils in our nature. The Bible says in Hebrews 9, 27, that God has appointed for men, first to die and then to be judged. So, when

does God judge a person? After he dies.

When do we judge people? Long before they die. That is the difference between God and man. God is very patient with people.

This is okay. I hope he will change before he dies. But we already passed judgment.

Long before he dies. That is the work of the devil. The devil is judging people before they die.

God judges people after they die. And if you judge people before they die, you are in fellowship with the devil. That's what he's saying here.

You can judge, but don't judge before the time. Wait. Wait until the Lord comes.

And then when he comes, he will bring to light two things. First of all, he will bring to light all the thoughts in a person's heart. And then he will bring to light the motive with which he did those things.

Now, these are the two things in another person's life you don't know. See, even if you have known me for many years, you don't know my thoughts. You don't know the motives of my heart.

So, you can't really judge me because you don't know these two most important areas. That's exactly what this verse says. It's the motive that God is going to examine in the final day.

And on the basis of the motive with which we did certain things, and those hidden thoughts with which we did certain things, on the basis of those thoughts, God will either praise a man or not give praise to a man. So, what is the important thing? Not whether you kept a commandment. Not whether you lived a pure life.

What was the reason? That's where the corruption comes. You know, it's like a person who's got a very infectious disease. And he gives you a very beautiful apple to eat.

The apple may be a very good apple. But you still don't take it and eat it. Because the hand that's giving it is full of some disease.

Many times, when we do something for the Lord, what we do is good. Like the apple. But the hand that's giving it, the motive is bad.

And just like you will not take that apple from a diseased person, God does not accept that good deed that comes from you. And many of us will get a big surprise when we stand before the Lord. We'll say, Lord, I did so many things, good things.

Yeah, yeah, that's all true. But the motive was bad. So, it's all dirty.

Many Christians don't realize this. The only thing that has value before God is what you do because you love Him with all your heart. See, that's why when somebody asked Jesus this question in Matthew 22, somebody asked Him, verse 36, what is the great commandment in the law? 36.

And Jesus said, this is the first commandment. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, souls and mind. This is the great and foremost commandment.

So, everything must come out of this. And so, the first thing we need to see is not whether we are keeping the commandments or avoiding sin. I get so many letters from people.

So many people ask me for counsel. Brother, I'm defeated by sin. How shall I overcome it? I'm sure that's a problem for many of you sitting here.

That's not where you should start. It is, you got to start with loving God with all your heart, soul and mind. You know, you can do a good thing without love for some other reason.

So, even if you overcome sin, you still don't please God. See, your wife and a servant woman may work in your kitchen. Both of them may be rolling chapatis there.

One is doing it out of love and the other is doing it for money. But the chapatis both are doing are very good. That's not the question.

One is under law, one is under grace. That is the difference between Old Testament and New Testament. In the Old Testament, people serve God like a servant.

In the New Testament, we do the same thing but it is as the bride of Christ. That's why in Revelation chapter 2, Revelation chapter 2, the Lord told the elder of a church He says, you are doing a lot of good things. Verse 2, I know your deeds, your toil, your perseverance.

Verse 3, your perseverance, you endured for my name's sake, you have not grown weary. All this is useless because you have left your first love. So he says, what's the use of all that? If you were under the Old Testament, that's okay.

But now it's no use. Do you know that? Do you know that all the good things you do have no value before God if you don't do it out of love? That's why I say, many people are going to get a big surprise when Jesus comes again. They will be surprised to discover that so many things they did were just wood, hay and straw.

It's good to know that now. And that's why I say, the first commandment is to love God with all your heart, soul and mind. Not victory over sin.

That comes from loving God with all your heart, soul and mind. Otherwise it will be just an external victory just to show other people you got victory. So when we come to this most important thing, to love God with all our hearts.

That means in my heart there is no place for anything else. There is no place for my job, my property, my wife, children. And you may say, well am I not supposed to love my wife? Well you've tried to love your wife for so long and that's why you fight with her.

You haven't succeeded. You love God with all your heart, you'll stop fighting with your wife. That's the time you'll really love your wife.

Why is it so difficult for brothers to get along with each other? Because you're trying to love one another without loving God first. If you love God with all your heart first, then it'll be easy to love your brother. It's going to be very difficult.

If you find it to be a great struggle to love somebody, then here's the reason. That's because you don't love God with all your heart. Supposing you have a very difficult wife or a difficult husband, there are believers like that and I've heard so many of them complain.

Why? Because they don't love God with all their heart. And I've met a few believers who've got difficult wives who never complain. Why do they never complain? Because they love God with all their heart.

That is the secret. Many of your problems come because you're not loving God with all your heart. You're trying to keep some other commandment before keeping the first one.

To use an illustration, it's like putting the roof before you put the pillars and the walls. How can you do that? How can you put a roof before you put the pillars up? That's impossible. It'll just collapse.

So, before all that we've got to have a foundation. So let me tell you about the foundation. If you don't have this foundation, you can't love God.

To love God with all our heart is not the foundation. That's like the pillars. The foundation is God loves me.

On that foundation I can love him. See 1 John chapter 4 verse 19 We love because he first loved us. You see which is the foundation and which is the building? It's because I know God loved me that I love him.

Verse 10 In this is love not that we loved God but that he loved us. We didn't love God but he loved us and like the redemption of our sins he gave his son and we gave him and that's where the love and the true character comes from. This is not that we didn't love God but that he loved us is important.

Why is this important? God loved you, you are not going to love Him. From the beginning of my conversion, I have sought to love God with all my heart. And everything I have done, I have tried to do out of love for Him.

Not for money, not for honor, not to please my conscience, but because I love God. And that love came out of my meditating on two things. There is a double foundation for our love for God.

One is that He loved us. He loved us with all, everything that He had. When God gave us His Son, that was the best that He could give.

And that's why it looks so cheap when we give Him some small gift in return. That is the shameful thing of so many believers. God gave His best, and what do you give in return? A little bit of your time, a little bit of your money or nothing at all.

Aren't you ashamed of yourself? It's because you haven't seen how much God loved you. When I saw how much God loved me, it was not at all difficult for me to give everything to Him. You know, so many times we tell people, you got to love God, you got to love God.

But they can't love God if they don't see how much God has loved them first. We tell people, don't love the world, don't love money. But still most believers love the world and love money.

Even in our churches, they sit there like holy people, but they love the world. And the reason is, they have not seen how much God loved them. I'll tell you something.

When I saw how much the Lord loved me, it changed my life completely. Nobody had to tell me to stop loving the world. Why do you have to keep on hearing, don't love the world, don't love the world, don't love the world? It's because you don't meditate on how much God loves you.

I'll tell you something. If you understand how much God loves you, it will change your life. You know, you can hear a message on it, that won't change your life.

But when you see it in your heart, how much God loves you, that will change your life. That can only come if you take a little pains to meditate on God's love for you. See how much God loves you.

How much it cost Jesus to make you His child. Many of us have seen movies of Christ being crucified. And that makes us emotionally stirred for a little while.

I remember in my younger days how I used to see such movies and I'd really weep when I saw how much Jesus suffered. But it didn't change my life. It was just for a short moment you feel, oh how much He suffered for me.

You see, you can see a movie like that and the next day go out and live for the world just like anybody else. It hasn't changed you. For that short time you felt a little sad in your heart.

But when you understand how much He suffered, not just the physical suffering, but the spiritual suffering. How much He suffered. You know what was the most difficult suffering for Jesus on the cross? That the Father forsook Him for those three hours.

Jesus hung on the cross from nine o'clock in the morning till three o'clock in the afternoon. But for the last three hours God forsook Him. And that is so difficult for us to understand.

To be cut off from God, nobody none of us have ever experienced that. The only people who have experienced that is those who are in hell today. Nobody in the world has experienced being cut off from God.

God is good to all people in the world including the Hindus, Muslims, Atheists, everybody. The only people who know what it is to be cut off from God is the people in hell. And if you could ask somebody who has been in hell for the last 5000 years, what he is experiencing, you get a little idea what it is to be cut off from God.

And that is what Jesus experienced on the cross. Now if you concentrate the suffering of all the millions of people who have gone to hell and for all eternity what that suffering is, all the millions of people who are there and take all that suffering and concentrate it and put it into three hours, that is what Jesus suffered on the cross. I don't think we will ever understand it till we go into His presence.

Then we will discover what a terrible thing sin is. That the greatest problem man faces is not his sickness and his poverty but sin. When you see a man suffering with cancer or leprosy, you feel sorry for him.

But a person who is in sin is in a worse condition. When you see a beggar sitting on the road, you feel sorry for him. But a rich man who is in sin is in a much worse condition.

We don't see it because we have not seen how serious sin is. We don't see it because we have not seen how serious sin is. You know the difference between having a cough and a cold and having the disease of AIDS? Oh, what a difference.

That is the difference between AIDS and sin. Sin is as much more serious than AIDS as AIDS is more serious than a cough and a cold. But the difference between having a cough and a cold is as much more serious than AIDS.

Do you understand that? I believe that most believers have not understood how serious sin is. That's why they don't understand how much Jesus suffered on the cross. How much He endured to be forsaken by His Father.

Then we see how terrible sin is. It is our sin that put Him on the cross. We say, Lord, You loved me so much.

How could I not love You in return? How could I not love You? It is when we understand how much He loved us that we love Him. You have heard something from me, but I don't think it sinks in until you meditate on it. You know this verse I quoted yesterday.

I want to show it to you again in 2 Timothy 2. Timothy was Paul's closest co-worker. Paul had explained many things to him, but there were certain things he could not explain. So he tells him in 2 Timothy 2.7, 2 Timothy 2.7, he says, Think about what I say, and then the Lord alone can give you understanding.

So this thing which I just told you now, how much Jesus suffered on the cross. You know what I say? Think about what I said. Only the Lord can give you understanding.

If you are lazy not to think about what I have said, you will remain in the same place. You will remain in the same condition that you are right now. Because I will tell you something, God never rewards a lazy person.

He rewards those who diligently seek Him. I have seen something in the last 30 years of preaching these truths. This number of people hear these truths and they all understand it.

But some people's lives are changed. Most of them, their lives are not changed. And I used to wonder, why is this? A hundred people listen to me, they all understand it, but only 5 of them, their life is changed.

Then I realized, only 5 meditated on what I said and sought God to understand it. The rest of them got it in their heads. 5 of them got it in their hearts.

Their life was changed. The other 95, they will go for another 100 conferences and their life will not change one bit. The last 100 conferences did not change their life.

Next 100 conferences will not change their life. Because of one simple reason. They are lazy.

They want to be spoon fed. Somebody must come and give them. They are too lazy to chew themselves and find out what is God trying to say to them.

God is a rewarder of those who diligently seek him. Let me show you a verse in Genesis chapter 3. One of the results of sin is this. The Lord told Adam, they will not find God in their life.

Now because you have disobeyed me, there are some punishments that are going to come. One of the things was this. For example, verse 18, there will be thorns and thistles.

And we know that is true for all of us. And here is another thing. Verse 19, by the sweat of your face, you will eat your bread.

That means you have to perspire in order to earn your living. You got to work hard to feed your family. In 2nd Thessalonians 3, it says if a man doesn't work, he shouldn't eat.

Yeah, that is related to this. By the sweat of your face, you shall eat your bread. The other verse is 2nd Thessalonians 3. And verse 10.

2nd Thessalonians 3.10. Supposing a person does not want to sweat, then he should eat. Verse 10, last part. If a man will not work, neither let him eat.

That's why we should never encourage lazy people in the church by giving them money. I never do that. Because the law of God is if he doesn't work, he shouldn't eat anything.

You say, well he will starve. He will die. Yeah, let him starve and die.

If a man is not willing to work, he should not eat. That's a law of God, it's not my law. Here it says in verse 10, we gave this order when we were there.

It was an order. If a man doesn't work, he shouldn't eat. And everybody who wants to find work can find it.

Now the same principle applies in knowing God's word. Because this is spiritual bread. And if a man does not sweat, he cannot get his bread.

That means if you are lazy, you are not going to get anything from God's word. I mean isn't it a shameful thing that if you don't go to work and you are always wanting somebody else to give you money to buy bread. I mean most of us would feel ashamed of ourselves.

We say, I want to earn my own bread. Why should this chap always earn money and give me money for my bread. It's the same thing spiritually.

We must meditate on what we hear. That is the meaning of spiritually perspiring so that we get some bread. And so we see here that we need to learn how much God loved us.

The second thing is Luke chapter 7. It says here, you know Jesus said if one man was forgiven 500 pounds, another person forgiven 50 pounds, who will love more? If a man is forgiven 500 pounds, who will love more? Verse 41 and 42. So Jesus replied, verse 47. The one who is forgiven more, loves more.

The more you realize how much you have been forgiven by God, the more you will love God. So how does our love for the Lord grow? Two things. One, to meditate on how much Jesus loved me.

Number two, to meditate on how many of my sins he has forgiven. So how do you meditate? You must think often about all the sins you committed in your life. Not to feel guilty because the blood of Jesus has cleansed us.

Because the blood of Jesus has cleansed us. But to meditate to know how much the Lord has forgiven me. So how do you meditate? I will tell you, I try to remember all the sins that I can remember from the time I was born.

I can't remember all of them. But whatever I can remember, I try never to forget. I don't feel guilty because they are all cleansed in the blood of Christ.

So I try to remember so that I know how much the Lord has forgiven me. Then I will love the Lord more and I won't despise other people when they fall into sin. And I will be saved from spiritual pride.

So I want to recommend this to you. If you want to love the Lord with all your heart, please take this prescription. Take this advice.

One, meditate on how much the Lord loved you. How much he suffered for you. Second, never forget, meditate on all the sins you committed from the day you were born that you can remember.

Then you won't despise other people. And you will love the Lord much more. Then meditate on how much we love the Lord with all our hearts.

We will find many of our other problems solved. Let's pray. Heavenly Father, help us to apply these truths to our lives so that we can honor you and glorify you.

Pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

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