

New Year Message 3 of 4 : The Proof That We Love God

by Zac Poonen

The proof that we love God is our ability to persevere in trial and overcome temptation.

Duration: 58:19

Scripture: 2 Samuel 24:24, James 1:12, 1 John 2:15, 1 John 4:20

Topics: "Loving God", "Christian Living"

Description

This sermon emphasizes the importance of proving our love for God through practical actions in our daily lives. It challenges listeners to be faithful in times of temptation, to avoid being enslaved by worldly values, to be generous and rich towards God, and to demonstrate love towards difficult individuals, including those within the church. The ultimate test of love for God is seen in how we treat others, especially those whom we may find challenging or disagreeable.

Transcript

Praise the Lord. God has no calendar, so he never has a New Year, but we're not God, we are human beings. And it's God who determined the number of days it takes for the earth to go around the Sun.

So we can know there's some significance in 365 days. And it doesn't matter whether it's the 1st of January, 1st of January is a very convenient time, but it could be any time of the year, could be your birthday. But at least once a year it's good for all of us to have a spiritual checkup.

I mean the doctors say that people who get older should have a physical checkup once a year, how much more a spiritual one, and to evaluate how we have, how it has been in the last year. And if we don't do that, then the possibility is that we will continue on in a life of self-deception. I believe one of the greatest dangers that is facing Christians around the world is self-deception.

Imagining things about ourselves which are not true. There are multitudes who imagine that they, for example, are going to heaven. They're not.

Is there anybody who imagines in the world that he's going to hell? If you look at all the obituary columns in the newspapers, have you noticed where they've gone? It says they've all gone to the feet of the Lord, and have you ever read an obituary column that says this man went to hell at the end of his life? I haven't

seen it till today. Everybody's gone to the Lord's feet, or to heaven, or something like that. And then there are Christians who imagine that they're born again, who are not born again.

Born-again people who imagine they're filled with the Holy Spirit, who are not filled with the Holy Spirit. We can imagine that we love the Lord, especially when we sing very moving hymns, especially when we get emotional. You know, we've got emotions and times we are very emotional.

There's nothing wrong with that. It's good. God's made us like that, and just like he's given us a mind that we must use, he's given us emotions that we must use.

I don't believe in suppressing our emotions. We must express our emotions to God and also to one another. But I just want to share with you some things this morning to help us, to save us from self-deception, particularly in this matter of loving the Lord.

You know, that is the first commandment. It's good to begin the new year thinking about the first commandment. That is, you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, strength, and mind.

If you don't obey that, even if you do everything else in the Bible, you'll be a failure. You can't go into God's kingdom. The thing that God looks for, he created man for, was that man might respond to him in love.

And I want to say to you, my brothers and sisters, if you don't love the Lord with all your heart, everything else you do in this year is a waste of time. And everything else, everything you did in previous years, you'll discover one day is a waste of time. I don't want to waste my life.

And I find that particularly in a lot of Christian songs these days, this matter of loving the Lord has become a matter of emotion and feeling. And very often, our love for the Lord is compared to the way a girl and a boy love each other. The Christian world has been so much influenced by cinemas and movies.

And I think part of the reason is, many of today's songwriters, hymn writers, they don't write hymns nowadays. They only write these three, four line songs, which you repeat 20 times. These songs are written by people who spent years and years watching movies.

And in their olden days, they wrote love songs. And now they are writing songs for Jesus. And, you know, songs have a tremendous power over life because we sing it when we're having a shower.

We sing it when we're traveling. And we're singing it in our minds. And you keep on singing it, you convince yourself that you love the Lord.

And you may not. So, I personally find it very useful to always get back to scripture, to save myself from all these movie type of Christian songs. So that I see, wow, how do I know that I really love the Lord? It is the most important commandment.

I don't want to fool myself. So, I want to share a few thoughts with you. Three or four things.

First of all, James chapter 1. How do I know that I love the Lord with all my heart? In James chapter 1 and verse 12, blessed is a man who perseveres under trial. Because once he has been approved, and approved means we have overcome the temptation. Trial and temptation are basically the same thing.

He will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love him. And then he goes on to speak. Let no one say when he's tempted, he's being tempted by God.

Because God cannot be tempted by evil. And he himself does not tempt anyone. When Adam went into the Garden of Eden, it was not God who tempted him.

The source of temptation, that tree, that was created by God. But God didn't tempt him. It was the devil who tempted him to do evil.

God never tempts us to do evil. How could that be? He's so pure. He wants us to be pure.

But he allows us to be tempted by the devil. And in that we can say we are being tested. And blessed is a man who perseveres in that trial and testing.

Because when he's been approved, he will receive a crown of life. And then it says there, so who's going to get the crown of life? The one who overcomes in a trial. And that is equated with, verse 12 last part, those who love him.

You see the connection? If I love the Lord, I will persevere in trial. That's the number one mark. Proof that you love God with all your heart.

Who receives the crown of life according to verse 12? Those who overcome in trial. Read further, those who love him. It's the same thing.

It's not two separate groups. The one who loves him perseveres in trial. I want to ask you, brothers and sisters, did you love the Lord during the last year? We've all been tested many times in the last year, tempted by Satan, tempted by the lusts in our flesh.

Did you show in those trials that you love Jesus Christ? That's the important thing. We can be tempted in so many ways. In it all, we're being tested whether we love Jesus Christ or not.

The fact that we are attracted by something is not a sin. Because if I'm not attracted, there's no temptation. Something that doesn't draw me at all, there's no temptation there.

So the fact that we are drawn by something, it's not a sin. It's being tempted. And the fact that I overcome that proves that I love the Lord.

So it's my love for the Lord that prevents me from responding to that temptation. So please remember throughout this year, whenever you're tempted, in anything, tempted to be bitter, tempted to lust after someone, tempted to possess something God has not chosen to give you. You know, one of the last commandments in the Old Testament was, you shall not desire.

All the other nine commandments were external. But the tenth commandment was, you shall not desire. And what? In one sentence, you shall not desire anything God has not chosen to give you.

That is, your neighbor's wife, or your neighbor's daughter, or some girl walking down the street, or somebody's picture on the internet. You shall not desire what God has not chosen to give you. You can certainly welcome and embrace what God has chosen to give you.

But what God has chosen not to give you, you must not even desire your neighbor's house, or wish for anything that another person has. And so that is also a temptation. And if you look at the things that tempt us in our mind, in our thoughts, very often it is the desire to have something God has not chosen to give me.

This is how people get into debt. This is how people lust after things they are not supposed to. The desire to have something God has not chosen, the first temptation was like that.

In the Garden of Eden, there were thousands of things God had given Adam, but there was one thing God had forbidden. And temptation was to go for that one thing. So, look at your life.

Don't just say those few dirty things I don't do. Remember the last commandment of the ten. Are there things you desire which God has not chosen to give you? Or, it is a test of our love for the Lord.

If I love the Lord, I say, Lord, you will give me what I need. I am not going to desire anything that... See, that raises our understanding of temptation to a higher level. And when our understanding of temptation goes to a higher level, our holiness goes to a higher level too.

You know, it is like when children go from one class to another. Through the years, I have tried to think about, to understand, what exactly is sin? What exactly does it mean to yield to temptation? Here in James 1, it says, when we are tempted, we are enticed. And when the lust is conceived, sin is born.

Now, that is a very clear definition there between temptation and sin. And all of us must understand that so that we don't condemn ourselves because we are tempted. We don't condemn ourselves because we are attracted to something.

And you have heard me say this many times, if you find money attractive, that is not a sin. If you consider that a girl is very good looking, that is not a sin. It is when that which you find yourself attracted to in your mind, you want it and say, Yes, I want that.

Then we sin. But God has not chosen to give us. It is a connection.

It is very similar to the way a baby is born between the union of a man and a woman. If a woman keeps on refusing, even though she is very attracted to a man, if she says, No, no, I am attracted, but I am saying no, there is no conception. So I can be attracted every day of the year by so many things.

I am very attractive. I say no. In my thoughts I say no.

I haven't sinned. And the wonderful comfort for us is that Jesus himself was attracted by these things. See, sometimes we can have a wrong understanding of Jesus.

And that is because we haven't seen that Jesus came in the flesh. If we know that Jesus came in the flesh, he was tempted, it says, exactly like us. But he loved his Father.

Because he loved his Father, he said no to every temptation all the time. That is the meaning of Hebrews 12 and verse 2. Who for the joy set before him endured the cross. In the middle of verse 2, and we are told to look at Jesus, the joy set before Jesus was the fellowship of the Father.

He longed for that so much that he was willing to pay any price. I will not yield to this lust. I am tempted.

Supposing you are tempted to get angry with someone. There is nothing wrong with that. If you don't get angry, you haven't sinned.

I don't mean you don't speak words. I mean you don't even get angry in your heart. If you don't speak words, that could be self-control.

With yoga you can do that. But when you don't get angry in your heart, then you overcome temptation. It is good if you can control your tongue so that you don't get angry.

That is good. You don't hurt the other person. That is like saying I don't commit adultery.

Because if you commit adultery, you hurt another person. But the Lord goes deeper and says you shouldn't do it in your heart. So anger also, don't think anger is only in words.

That is like the adultery coming out into an action. Anger is in the heart. When it says put away anger, it is not words.

More than words. I am not angry in my heart. I can be tempted to be angry with someone, but I say no.

I lose fellowship with my father if I do that. Do you realize that? The moment you sin in your thoughts, it is like the wire being cut. The power goes off.

You may not realize it because you may be living in darkness so much that you don't even know when the power goes off. You see at night when the lights are off, you don't even know whether the electricity has been cut in our city. But if you really walk in the light, you will find that anytime you yield in your thoughts, fellowship with the Father is cut.

Jesus never wanted it. He always wanted fellowship with the Father. I want to encourage you this year to pursue fellowship with the Father.

The only way you can maintain that is saying, I am going to be faithful in temptation. I am going to endure the cross. It is not enjoyable.

It has been a great comfort to me to read here that Jesus did not enjoy the cross. He endured it. That means there is a pain in it.

There is a pain. We saw in the conference when it said Jesus learned obedience by what he suffered. That suffering, many people don't understand the suffering of Jesus.

Let me show you a verse which we haven't looked at. We looked at it a lot in the early days. We haven't looked at it much for quite a while.

Many Christians don't understand it. 1 Peter 4 verse 1. Since Christ has suffered in the flesh. Now the moment people read that verse, immediately they think of Christ suffering in his body.

This is more than that. They think of the whipping and the crown of thorns. They say, Oh Lord, you suffered so much.

This is not talking about that. This is talking about a suffering inwardly in his flesh. You will understand that in a moment.

You must have the same purpose like an armor. Arm yourself means if you have this purpose, then the fiery darts of Satan will not hit you. It's an armor.

And because anyone who has suffered in the flesh stops sinning. So how do you understand suffering in the flesh now? If suffering in the flesh means suffering in our body, then all the people in the hospital should have stopped sinning long ago. They sin more when they get into the hospital.

They complain and grumble against God and the nurses and everybody else. That's not stopping anybody from sinning. Whenever you get some physical pain, you stop sinning? Have you seriously, my brothers and sisters who read the New Testament, have you seriously tried to understand this verse? That's another thing I want to encourage all of you to do in the New Testament, in the New Year.

When you come to a verse that you don't understand, don't just skip it and say, oh, that's not important. If you were going to sign a legal document in court that would involve millions of rupees, would you skip over one sentence because you couldn't understand it? No. You would take that document to a lawyer and say, hey, this involves millions of rupees.

I can't afford to sign it without understanding even one sentence in it. Why don't we take Scripture so seriously? I'll tell you why. Because we love money more than we love God.

That's the plain truth. I've seen it. I saw it in my own life first and I asked the Lord to deliver me from it.

I've seen it in hundreds of thousands of believers. The reason they don't understand Scripture is they don't treat Scripture with the reverence and respect that they would have for a legal document which they're going to sign. That's why when you come to a verse like this, you say, Lord, there's something here I don't understand.

It can't be physical suffering because physical suffering has not stopped anybody from sinning. What does suffering in the flesh mean? Because I want to stop sinning. Now, I'll tell you, the only person who would be interested in finding out the meaning of that verse is one who's serious about stopping sinning completely.

I mean, if you say, well, I want to sin a little less this year, you're not going to be serious about this verse because this is not talking saying he who suffers in the flesh will sin less. No. This is, he who suffers in the flesh stops sinning.

It's complete. Once and for all, stop. And for those who want to stop sinning, you'll understand this verse.

See, the opposite of suffering is pleasure. And the Bible speaks about the pleasures of sin. Hebrews 11.25, Moses rejected the pleasures of sin.

So, when sin is, when I'm tempted, I have two roads in front of me. I have an option. I can choose the road of pleasure or the opposite, suffering.

My flesh can get pleasure in that sin or my flesh suffers in that sin, in that temptation. And the reason why we yield to temptation is because I want to give pleasure to my flesh, to this thing inside me, which the Bible calls the flesh. Every sin, even when you speak angrily to somebody to give the person a piece of your mind, there's a certain pleasure you get out of it.

There's a pleasure you get out of making that person feel small. There's a, think of when you sit at home and speak evil of somebody. Now, one would think that speaking evil is like eating garbage.

I've never met anybody who eats garbage and enjoys it. I mean, except pigs. They enjoy it, I suppose.

When you sit at home and you eat this garbage while you talk to each other at home and you enjoy it, I hope you're getting a revelation on what your nature is like, that you enjoy the garbage of speaking evil of others. There's a certain pleasure you get out of it. The pigs really get pleasure out of eating that garbage

and you must be enjoying tearing down somebody and saying something evil.

So much so that if you had to keep quiet on it and keep your mouth shut, it would be a suffering for you. You know how when somebody tells us some juicy bit of news, what a lust we have to tell other people that. It's a pleasure we get out of conveying secret information to other people, the gossip that you heard or, do you know this or do you know that? Things which are not going to help that other person to become godly.

You know, I find that I remember an elder brother once asking, has so-and-so become pregnant? I said, I don't know. I'm not interested. What all people are interested? Is so-and-so getting married to so-and-so? I don't know.

If he's getting married, he'll get an invitation. I'm not interested. To tell you honestly, you know, our mind is like a room.

There's only like a cupboard. Let's take a cupboard. If you stuff your cupboard with a whole lot of unnecessary stuff, there won't be place to put the valuable things inside that cupboard.

You stuff your cupboard with garbage and you stuff your mind with a whole lot of information, which is not going to help you in any way in your secular profession, on your Christian life. Why in the world do you accumulate all that information? People give me information, I throw it out. I say, Lord, I don't want that.

Many times I pray, Lord, this guy's put something into my head now, which I never wanted this information. Please take it out. I know it can't go overnight, but Lord, in two years, you must get that out of my mind.

If you're serious, the Lord will do it. I've heard, I've known cases of people come to me and tell me, Brother Zach, I told you that sometime ago. I say, I've completely forgotten it.

Thank God. I don't have time. There's so much in God's word for my daily life that I need to know that I don't have place in my cupboard for all the trash that other people want to tell me.

Keep it to yourself, Brother. I'm not interested. And if you're really serious this year about keeping your mind for God, resist temptation in your mind.

Say, I won't have that. I don't want that. I don't want to see that.

You guys may be enjoying that, but I don't. Have you seen this movie? No, I haven't. And I'm not interested because I don't have time to stuff my mind with that rubbish.

Blessed is the man who perseveres in trial. He proves that he loves the Lord. Secondly, turn to 1 John chapter 2, verse 15.

It's closely connected, but it is a bit different. Do not love the world, nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.

Here's another test of my love for the Father. Anyone. If I love the world, I do not love God.

I mean, it's like saying if 2 plus 2 is 4, then 2 plus 2 is not 5. That's clear. It's as clear as that. If you love God, if you love the world, you just don't love God.

In fact, James also says that in chapter 4. James chapter 4, he says, verse 4, last part. James 4, 4. Whoever wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. This is even stronger.

It's not just that I don't love God. I want to be friendly with this world system. I have become an enemy of God.

You need to read that slowly. Whoever will be a friend of this world is an enemy of God. Are you an enemy of God, by the way, without knowing it? It's not a friend of God.

It's a worldly people. God loved the world that he gave his son for it. He started there.

He's talking about the people of the world. I must love the people of the world. I must love Hindus and Muslims and atheists and my enemies and even Pharisees.

I must love all of them. I must love Christians of all denominations because God loves all of them. But here he's talking about this world system, the values this world has.

I must have no friendship with that because if I'm unfriendly with that value system, I'm an enemy of God. The things that this world considers important. Do what I did.

You can do it in your mind if you've got a good mind and memory. Or you can write it on a piece of paper. Think if you do a little homework today, it won't take you more than five minutes.

Write down the things that worldly people consider valuable. It's very easy. You don't have to write 25 things.

Write three or four things or whatever comes to your mind. The things that the people of the world say. Unconverted, Godless people of the world.

What all do they consider valuable and great? There you see the world system. It's not that I can't have any of those things. It's that I don't consider any of those things great.

What are the things that people in the world consider great? Money. I can have money, but I'm not going to live for it. I don't think it's wonderful when I have plenty of it.

And I don't feel discouraged if I have little of it. That means I'm free from it. It's there, I've learned to treat it as my servant.

Sex is another very big thing. See, if the devil can convince you that these things of the world are very important and very great, he'll make you his slave. Sex is important, man.

What are you living life without sex? You're convinced about that, you'll be an enemy of God. But if you say, I'm free from it. If God gives it to you in marriage, you take it.

Outside of marriage, I won't have it because it's not a great thing. Money and sex are not. The gifts of God which I can use in the proper place are the honor of people.

It's a very big thing for people. People are so disturbed if they lost honor somewhere. Somebody thought a little less of them.

Or they heard that somebody spoke something demeaning about them. It disturbs you. You know, you love the world.

The world's values are your values. You're an enemy of God. Think if you were only concerned about God's opinion about you.

God, oh Lord, what do you think about me? Never mind what all these people think about me. It doesn't matter. You'll make a lot of progress this year.

There are things like that, you know, to have power and position over people, to have influence, to want to, a husband who wants to rule his wife or an elder brother who wants to rule a church. It's all worldly. If I have the slightest desire to rule my wife or to rule a church, I'm a friend of the world.

I'm an enemy of God. I tell you, a lot of enemies of God sitting around in many churches. Because the values, the things that worldly people value is what they value too.

I've decided in my life I'll never value what any worldly person values. So if you really want to do this homework, draw two columns and write in two columns, one side all the things that worldly people value and the other side all the things that Jesus valued. And say, Lord, I'm going to stick to that this year.

That's what it means not to love the world. If anyone loves this world, the love of the Father is not him. And then I look at Jesus and I see the things he valued.

And it's so opposite to the things the world values. So if anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is just not in him. And not only that, he's an enemy of the world.

And the world system is there in every aspect of what we see around us. You've got to be careful about what you see in the advertisements. But not only in the advertisements, I find nowadays in the newspapers, news on the internet.

What I've discovered, and I've, I mean I read newspapers and I read the news on the internet too. And I see something that journalists and people who put out all this information are so much under the control. I mean, they don't know it, but they're influenced by the forces of Satan that, you know, their aim is to get money.

These guys make millions, these people who are on television announcers and all that. And their whole aim is to keep people gripped. And they write the news in such a way that they feed your curiosity a little bit.

And then like these serials where they'll stop just before interesting part comes in so that you want to read some more about it. And then the next day they'll put some more information out there. And then you want to read that.

And then they've left you in suspense. And the next day you read more about that story and it never ends. And your mind is gripped.

I saw it till I had to break away from it. I say, Lord, this is an addiction. And it came so subtly.

I thought I was just reading news. It wasn't news. It wasn't any sexual news, just news about what's happening.

But it was just this addiction. The next day you want to see what happened. And what else did WikiLeaks say? And what else? And what else? And what else? That guy is a master at keeping people in suspense.

He'll hold people's attention for a whole year. Even Christians who don't have time to read the Bible. They'll tell you what WikiLeaks has announced.

That's what I mean. But it looks so innocent. He's not putting out sexual information.

But it's this thing that I fill the cupboard. And I tell you, if you're reading the newspapers and watching the news on the internet, you can fill this cupboard of your mind with multitudes of stuff which is absolute trash. No wonder you don't know the Scriptures.

No wonder your knowledge of God is so poor and your connection with God is so weak. It doesn't look like temptation. It's this world system coming.

It says the devil comes as an angel of light. Don't you need to know what's happening in the world? Yes. Just generally.

Most of the time the Lord tells me, just look at the headlines. That's enough for you. I say, Lord, help me.

I'm not making a rule here that you can't read what's written below the headlines. But all I say is make sure that nothing gets a hold of you, grips you. I mean, I won't even let the cricket score grip me.

Then what? Did he get a century? I couldn't care less what he got a century. I mean, okay, it doesn't matter if I don't know it till the day after tomorrow that he did get a century or he got out at 99 or something. It doesn't matter.

I don't need to know tonight before I go to sleep. This is what I mean by being gripped by something where it has made you its slave. These are not sinful things.

But what about that verse of Scripture which you haven't understood? Do you want to find that out before you go to bed tonight? Or are you just satisfied that you know the cricket score before you go to bed tonight? What about that other thing which will do you a lot more good, which will give you a more peaceful sleep? If you get to know what God wants to say to you. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. We have a year ahead of us, brothers and sisters, to prove our love for God.

I'm not an ascetic. I'm not saying we should be hermits. I read the newspaper.

I read the news on the Internet. I want to know what's happening in the world, but I will not be its slave. I use money, but I will not be its slave.

Or anything. I can enjoy a good meal, but I will not be a slave to food. Food doesn't look like something sinful.

It's something of the world. People in the world, in that list of things people in the world enjoy, good food. Yeah, eat good food, but don't be a slave to it.

Don't say you can't live with it. Oh, I've got to have that. I haven't had this for a long time.

You know, these are the little things which we keep in our proper place. It's not essential. And I get it.

I enjoy it. I'm not an ascetic. It says about Jesus that they call him a gluttonous man.

He wasn't fat. I believe Jesus was very slim and fit. But he was not, if you gave him an ice cream, he would have it.

And if you asked him, Lord, would you like to have another? He would first look around and see if there was enough for everybody. He would see if this was a poor house where they buy ice cream once a month. All these things he would ask himself.

And then decide whether he'd take a second helping out. You know, I've sometimes had to tell brothers, when you visit some poor home, and they make a grand meal for you, and you enjoy this thing and that thing and the other thing, restrain yourself. Because you enjoy the dessert so much.

Particularly if there are small children in that house. Especially where there are small children. I mean, if it's adults, it's okay.

But if there are small children, very often those small children are not sitting at the table in many Indian homes. And even though you want that second helping of dessert, you say no. Because you say, if I don't eat it, those children will get a second helping.

Say no. Those children behind the curtain will say hallelujah. We'll get something to eat extra.

Have you ever thought of that? I think of it all the time when I go to these poor villages. Dear brothers and sisters, this is Christianity. It's a question of not letting this worldly way of thinking, I enjoy this good food.

We may think we are very spiritual. We're not. Okay? We've done these things in the past.

Shall we do it differently this year? And that's just one area. If you ask the Holy Spirit to teach you, he'll make you so refined. You'll be a gentleman.

You'll be a lady wherever you go. You won't be a crude, carnal, worldly person. Christianity makes us better people.

Then I want to show you number three. There's a little expression which I love in the Gospel of Luke. I mentioned it briefly in the conference.

It's this expression where the Lord said in a parable about a man who just kept on accumulating things for himself. In Luke chapter 12, he said in verse 21, so is the man who stores up treasure for himself and is not rich towards God. A man who stores up treasure for himself and is not rich towards God.

It's that expression. It's challenged me for many years. I ask myself, am I rich towards God or am I rich towards myself? It's a mark of love.

I'll tell you why. You know, when people, haven't you seen in the world and all, when people love somebody, they give expensive gifts. I've heard of people who, I mean, who can afford it, who buy expensive diamond necklaces and rings and all for their loved ones.

What all a father will do. A father may buy a house for his son. Love always gives very expensive gifts.

You don't give expensive gifts to, I mean, you may give gifts even to a beggar. You don't give very expensive gifts to a beggar. When you give a wedding gift, it depends on who the person is.

If it's someone you don't know so well, you won't spend so much money on a wedding gift. All of us, you and me. But if it's your own son or daughter, boy, what a gift you'd like to give to them.

What about to God? How did God show his love for us? God so loved that he gave. God so loved that he gave us a gift. And what he gave was the most precious thing that heaven had.

Because he loved us so much. I can't understand that. Why he could love me so much.

And I mean, even as human beings, you know, they have a custom in some parts of India where they, at weddings, they will, we don't do it in any of our weddings, but they have a custom. So-and-so has given this gift. I'm used to embarrass people to make sure that next time you come with a gift is going to be a good one.

So you don't be shamed before people. So-and-so has given so much money in this envelope. Boy, next time they'll make sure they give a large amount.

But what I'm saying is people make a note of that and say, okay, when that guy's son gets married, I know what to give him because I know how much he gave me. He gave me a measly 25 rupees. Okay.

I'm going to teach him a lesson. I'm going to give him 25 rupees for his wedding. What about God? You want to repay God the way he gave you? That's what I was driving at.

I wasn't talking about weddings. God so loved that he gave his son. And now you so love God that you give what? Fill in the blanks.

So is a man who lays up treasure for himself, but is not rich towards God? I don't mean only in terms of money. Your love for the Lord is shown and we saw in our being faithful in temptation and not loving this world's values. And thirdly, in what we give to God of my time and my energy and everything I have.

Lord, you want this from me. And he can test us in different situations. I think it was year before last, I was in Europe and the United States for some meetings and it was continuous meetings in Norway and Romania and France and then in Texas and different places.

It was one after the other. From one place, I was going to the next, to the next, next. And I had exposed myself.

I was sitting out in the open one evening in Norway and I got picked up a cold and I was very unwise sitting without any covering over my head without a cap. And I picked up this cold and I had meetings for the next 21 days continuously. And here I was sick.

And these people were expecting me. They never had any other speaker at all these conferences. So I said, what shall I do? Well, I kept a glass of water on the pulpit and kept coughing and drinking water and continued some of those meetings three, three, four times a day.

And I said, Lord, I'm not going to let the devil get the victory here. I'm going to prove my love for you. Now, I'm not saying that that's the only way.

I'm just saying for me it was there because I could not afford to disappoint these people who were so dependent on expecting me to serve them. So I said, okay, I'm going to do it. There's a tremendous power in love and you can see that especially in a mother.

I mean, I've seen it at home with my wife. It doesn't matter if she's sick. She still feels that she's got to cook a meal for me or when the children come.

It doesn't matter if she's sick or down with fever or anything. Love drives, and not only she, any mother, love drives a mother to serve and serve her little children because she can't tell her children, I'm sick. I can't make any food for you today.

There's a tremendous power in love to make you do things that you think you cannot do. We make silly excuses. It's raining, so I don't think I'll go for the meeting or something like that.

Well, look at a mother and the way she loves. You know, love for God makes us rich towards him. We say like David said in 2 Samuel 24 and verse 24.

It's a tremendous verse. It's a verse, one of the first verses the Lord gave me after I took my baptism. I was 21 years old when I got my baptism and soon after that, within the next year or so, the Lord spoke to me through this verse in 2 Samuel 24, 24, easy to remember, where David said, I will not offer to the Lord my God that which costs me nothing.

I will not give to God that which costs me nothing. And I felt the Lord was telling me at that time, if you love me, don't ever give me that which costs you nothing. We have to give the best to God.

Think about, this is one of the crimes of the Israelites as they came to the end of their period in history. Malachi says in chapter one, it's the last prophet that God sent to Israel saying, Malachi chapter one, verse eight, you present the blind for sacrifice. You present the lame and the sick.

Will you give that to your governor? They were to offer sacrifices to God, but they would pick out a blind lamb. That is a bit of a nuisance to them in any case. Okay, we got to give an offering to God.

Let's give the blind one or a lame ox, which is a bit of a nuisance to them. Let's give this to God. We are so calculating.

There's a story of a man who was a farmer who had cows. And he told, one day he came home and told his wife, you know, our cow gave birth to two calves today, a brown one and a white one. And I've decided to give one of them to the Lord.

A few weeks later, he said to his wife, the Lord's calf died. And the wife said, hey, I thought we hadn't decided which was the Lord's calf. No, he said, I always felt the brown calf was going to be for the Lord's that died.

I'll tell you something, the Lord's calf always dies. Your calf will live. That's the mark of a man who is rich towards himself, very miserly towards God.

And I want to tell you this. It's a proof that we don't love him. All the emotional feeling we have here in the meeting, when we sing songs, it's all a deception.

We don't really love the Lord. Ask yourself whether you are rich towards God. You know, when the last question that Jesus asked Peter was, do you love me? After Peter had caught in John 21, that fantastic catch of fish, he had never caught so much in his life.

He'd caught all this fish, huge. It says in John 21, 11, 153 huge fish. And if each fish was worth 2000 rupees or something, large fish, 2000 rupees, I presume, very expensive fish nowadays, in terms of today's values, 300,000 rupees in a catch.

And Peter may have been catching 10,000 rupees worth of fish in other days, this 300,000. He says, boy, I'm glad I've given up being an apostle. No, I denied the Lord.

I'm going to finish with that. This is going to be my profession. Of course, I'll give a tithe to the Lord.

And the Lord sees all that in Peter's heart and says, Peter, do you love me more than all this? That is the question. Do you love me more than all this that you see in verse 15? Many of us today are far more prosperous than we were many years ago. Think back to the days when you had very little.

God has blessed you with much, much materially, I mean. And the Lord asks you, do you love me more than this? It's a very searching question. And Peter first says, Lord, yes, I do.

And you also may say, yes, I do. Really? He asks you, do you really love me more than this? You say, yes, I do. Tell me.

And Peter knows that this is a very searching question. And he says, Lord, I don't know. I thank God for his honesty.

What he's saying is in verse, the last time when he's asked in verse 17, Lord, I really don't know. I think I do. I feel I do when I sing those emotional songs, but I really don't know because when it comes to the crunch, when it comes to the test, I'm rich towards myself, not towards you.

Lord, you know. And the Lord says to Peter, I want to give you a greater ministry than just catching fish and making money, even if you give 10% of it to God. I want you to care for my sheep.

I want you to build my church. Will you do that? And he says, when you build my church, you won't make 300,000 rupees a day. You'll be crucified.

Verse 18 and 19. You'll be led where you don't like to go. You'll have to pay a price to serve me.

You'll have to offer to me that which costs you something. Are you willing? Follow me. That's what the Lord says to you.

Finally, let me tell you one more mark of our, to test whether we love God. We've seen three things, faithfulness and temptation, freedom from love for the world, being rich towards God. And finally, 1 John 4 and verse 20.

If anyone says he loves God and he doesn't love his brother whom he has seen, he cannot love God whom he has not seen. That's the ultimate test. Can you love that difficult brother? Can you love that difficult husband who's so inconsiderate this year, like you never loved him before? Can you love that pain in the neck of a wife like you never loved her before? That'll be the proof of your love for God.

It's very practical. Love for God is not found on Sunday morning when we sing songs. Someone whom you can see, who disagrees with you, who's different, probably irritates you.

Lord, I'm going to prove my love for you by loving this person. I'm not going to say anything that'll hurt my husband or wife this year. That'll be the proof of my love for you.

I don't want to fool myself singing songs. My Jesus, I love Thee. I know Thou art mine.

If ever I loved Thee, Lord, it is now. Say that when you're tempted. Say that when you're drawn by the world.

Say that when somebody doesn't love you. Lord, if ever I loved you, Lord, here it is, my love for this person who's evil towards me. It says in Romans in chapter 12, verse 21, do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

There is only one way to overcome evil. When somebody does evil to you, do good. The devil says there's only one way to overcome evil, do more evil.

All the wars and terrorism and everything in the world is the people who believe the devil. But in the midst of it, midst of such a rotten world, God has a few who really follow Jesus, who prove that the way to overcome evil is by doing good. That if somebody comes to capture you and some friend of yours cuts off his ear, like Jesus, you pick up the ear and heal it.

And when people nail you to the cross, you say, father, forgive them, but they don't know what they're doing. Jesus proved by his life that the only way to overcome evil is by good. That good is more powerful than evil.

That when somebody gets angry with you, a gentle kind answer is more powerful than more anger in return. Love is more powerful than, good is more powerful than evil. How many of you believe that good is more powerful than evil? If you, if you do believe it, that's how you will overcome evil in future.

Even Abraham Lincoln, the president of America used to say, the best way to overcome an enemy is by making him your friend. How do you like that? The best way to overcome evil is by good. I hope we learn these lessons so that our love for the Lord in this year is going to grow.

And we're going to prove our love, not in words, but by some of these very down to earth practical tests. To love one another in the church. Here's another bit of homework.

Think of, now this is serious, all of you. Think of someone in this church whom you don't really like. Can you think? I'm sure you can rattle off at least about 10 names immediately.

Now you say, Lord, this year it's going to be different. You say, I love them, but I don't like them. Try telling that to your wife.

I love you, but I don't like you. You'll have war. How can you say to somebody, I love you, but I don't like you.

If you don't like a person, you don't love the person. I'm not saying you agree with the person. Let's pursue love this year and you'll be all right.

The greatest is not faith. So many charismatic say faith, faith, faith, faith for this. The Bible says in the last verse of 1 Corinthians 13, there remains faith and love, but the greatest is love.

Don't ever forget that. Let's pray. Let's bow our heads before God.

Heavenly Father, thank you for your word that keeps on correcting us and showing us the right path. It saves us from deception. Help us to show our love for you in practical ways every day of this year.

We pray in Jesus name. Amen.

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