

What It Means To Love God Supremely

by Zac Poonen

This sermon delves into the concept of loving God with all our heart and the challenges that come with it. It emphasizes the need for self-awareness and acknowledging our inability to fulfill this command on our own. The speaker highlights the importance of coming to a 'zero point' in our lives, where we surrender completely to God, allowing Him to fill us with His love and power. The message stresses the dangers of allowing love for money, self, and pleasure to compete with our love for God, urging believers to pursue maximum commitment to Christ and disciplined living.

Scripture: 2 Timothy 3:1, Luke 16:13, 1 Corinthians 9:27, Jeremiah 29:11, Psalms 139:14, Philippians 3:13, Matthew 22:37, 1 Timothy 6:17

Topics: "Loving God Fully", "Surrender and Commitment"

Description

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Transcript

I want to turn with you to 2 Timothy chapter 3. We know that when God made man through Moses, it was the first time he gave man an understanding of what he expected of man. Enoch walked with God, Noah walked with God, what they learned we don't know. But when it comes to the time of Moses, even Abraham and Jacob, we don't know much about what they learned.

But when it comes to Moses time and the Israelites coming out of Egypt, you have through the law a clear definition of what God expected from man. I think man was not ready for that revelation earlier and probably things could not be written down in those days before Moses time, I don't know. But whatever it is, when the law came in one simple sentence, the Lord said to the people, which is expanded in about 613 commandments, which in Exodus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, et cetera, but to sum it all up, it is just this.

You must love the Lord, your God with all your heart. And flowing out from that will be an ability to love everyone as you love yourself. Now that's humanly speaking, an impossible command.

And we got to acknowledge that first. Like the branch in the tree says, I cannot produce a single fruit if I don't get the sap from the tree. Even if I have 50 years of experience bearing fruit, I cannot bear any fruit now.

50 years experience is useless. I still need the sap, just like the new branch that just got into the tree today. So the first thing we have to acknowledge is, Lord, I cannot love you with all my heart.

I want to, but I can't. And there are people who take a long time to learn that one lesson. That's why it takes long.

In all the miracles that Jesus did, he wanted man to cooperate. But before they learned to cooperate, they had to learn that by themselves, they could do nothing. And that's why when the first miracle, when Mary came and said, they have no wine, it wasn't absolutely accurate.

There was a little bit of wine left. It was running out. That's what she meant.

And that's why Jesus said, my time has not yet come. Why has it not yet come? Because it hasn't come to a zero point yet. Mary, you're not accurate in what you're saying.

There's still a little bit left, maybe a couple of glasses. I know it's running out, but my time will come when it has come to zero. And when it came to zero, he got his servants to fill the water pots and 13 to 6, 180 gallons.

Can you imagine how much wine that is? How many people were there in the feast? When the Lord answers prayer, he answers it in abundance, but he does not do it until you come to zero. And that's the first miracle. You go to the last miracle.

That was after his resurrection. When Peter said, okay, I've given up being an apostle. I denied the Lord, but there's one thing I can do.

I can fish. I'll go back to that. And it's as if the Lord said, really? Okay, go and try.

You're the great fisherman, right? And he went out probably six o'clock in the evening with his other discouraged apostles. And hour after hour after hour, there are other boats getting fish, but nothing coming near Peter's nets. That was the Lord who controlled all the fish in the world telling don't go near Peter's net.

He was wondering what happened. This expert fisherman hours and hours and hours and hours, midnight has come. He hasn't given up yet.

He hasn't come to a zero point yet. No, a little more hard work. I'll get it.

I'll get it. I'll get it. One o'clock, two o'clock, three o'clock, four o'clock.

Finally, Peter comes to a zero point and says, okay, there's no hope. At that moment, the Lord appears. And just like he asked the servants to fill the water pots, he doesn't do it all himself.

The Lord never does everything all by himself. Even to raise Lazarus from the dead. He said, you do the easy part.

Move away the stone. I'll do the difficult part. It's always God's way.

You do the easy part. I'll do the difficult part. You fill the water pots.

I'll turn it to wine. You move the stone. I'll raise the dead.

You cast the net. I'll fill it with fish. The Lord could have made the fish jump straight into the boat.

It would have saved a little bit of labor, but then the disciples would have done nothing. You got to see this principle always. There's something you have to do.

Otherwise, he doesn't do anything. You sit waiting for the fish to jump into the boat. I'll tell you, they'll never jump.

You've got to step out in faith and put that net down at the Lord's command. But you're not ready to do that until you come to a zero point in your life. And so to love God with all your heart, to love your neighbor as yourself, I have to begin by saying, Lord, I've tried.

It is impossible. I've tried six o'clock, seven o'clock, eight o'clock, nine o'clock, 10 o'clock, 11 o'clock, 12 o'clock. When are you going to reach five o'clock in the morning? I hope you'll get there soon.

But when you get to that zero point, you'll find Jesus standing on the shore waiting to fill your life, fill your life with the most wonderful thing of all, not money, not pleasure or honor, but fervent love for Jesus and a heart that is impossible to hate anyone. I believe this should be my goal. Like I mentioned many times, I went into a car factory in India many years ago, and I saw on the board, a wall, a notice in that car factory, we aim for zero defect.

They didn't have zero defect, but they said, we aim for zero defect. And I've never forgotten that board in my life. I said, Lord, an earthly car company is aiming for zero defect, and I'm a child of God.

I want to aim for zero defect in my love for you and my love for others, zero defect. I haven't got there yet, but I want to get there. And I know I can't do it on my own.

I want to come to that five o'clock morning time when you appear on the shore and says, cast your net by the side, your boat will be filled. I want my boat to be filled with fervent love for God so that it is fulfilled in my case that I love God with all my soul, with all my strength, with all my heart, with all my mind. And the very part of me is love for God.

And from that flowing out a love for the unlovely, for enemies, those who bless, curse me, those who hate me, et cetera. But here in second Timothy three, it speaks about lovers of God in the last part. Second Timothy three, lovers of God, that's what we were just speaking about.

But competing with this in our heart are three other loves mentioned here. First of all, number one, verse two, love of money, love of self, the king who sits on the throne, self. And then second, love of money.

And third, verse four, love of pleasure. These are the three things that compete in me to take over the throne, which God alone should sit in, Christ alone should sit in. And we come to self finally, love of pleasure.

Go backwards. Love of an easy, comfortable life without any trials, without any difficulties. Love of pleasure, which can lead to an undisciplined life where I love eating so much.

It gives me so much pleasure that I become indisciplined. Why did Jesus speak about fasting? Yeah, he spoke about it. Why do the apostles speak about it? He speaks about fasting in relation to food.

1 Corinthians 7 speaks about fasting in relation to married life. It has some value. It's not the yoga type of self-discipline.

No, it's showing the Lord, Lord, food is not everything for me. Sex is not everything for me. You are everything.

And if I have to, I want to make sure that nothing has power over my body. This body loves pleasure. It loves sleep.

I must discipline myself if I want to say that I'm not going to get the pleasure of sleep if I have something to do. Paul said in 1 Corinthians in chapter 9, he says in verse 27, I discipline my body and make it my slave. 1 Corinthians 9, the living Bible says, it's a beautiful paraphrase.

I make my body do what it should do, not what it wants to do. All of us know what our body wants to do many times. And I have to say to my body, no, you're not going to do what you want to do.

Your tongue, you're not going to speak what you want to speak. You're going to speak what you should speak. Your eyes, you're not going to look at what you want to look at.

You're going to look at what you should be looking at, whether on the computer or on your smartphone or on the streets or anywhere. Your eyes are going to listen to me. I'm not going to let you loose.

People who have dogs should carry their dog on a leash. The Bible speaks about keeping a bridle on your horse, referring to the tongue. Paul says, I discipline my body, making it do what it should do, not what it wants to do.

And he says, if I, the great apostle Paul, verse 27, allow my body to do whatever it wants to do, after I preach so much and planted so many churches in the final day, I will be disqualified by the Lord. It may look as if I came first in the race, but the empires will say, sorry, disqualified. Everybody thought you came first.

But you were indisciplined, Paul. I don't know whether you see the seriousness of that. The great apostle Paul could say that he would be disqualified because he did not discipline his body from those pleasures that the body asks for.

See, there are three desires God has put in our body, for food, for sleep, and for sex. And you can be indisciplined in all three areas. That's why Jesus speaks about fasting, whether it's food, sleep, or sex.

There's a need for self-discipline. I'm not talking about stealing food. I'm not talking about sleeping when you should be working.

I'm not talking about rightful sex. I'm saying even in those rightful areas, there's a place for discipline. This wholehearted Christian does not think of what is the bare minimum necessary.

I've often said there are two types of Christians. One is the minimum Christian, the other is the maximum Christian. The minimum Christian is the one who says, what is the minimum I have to do to go to heaven? Just ask Jesus to come into my heart.

That is the person who has never seen God's love on Calvary. One of the first things God showed me when I got converted was his love for me on Calvary. That's what made me dedicate my whole life to him.

When I saw the love of Jesus on the cross, I stopped becoming a minimum Christian. I said, Lord, really? You did all that for me? What is the maximum you can get out of my one earthly life? I said that to the Lord when I got baptized at the age of 21. I said, Lord, I'm determined.

You must get the maximum out of my one life. I don't want to be a minimum Christian ever in my life. My dear brothers and sisters, you can glory that you belong to a new covenant Christian fellowship.

It means nothing. It can be a label. Do you really want God to get the maximum out of your life? Do you want to love God with all your heart, all your strength, and all your mind, and all of everything? God allows you to enjoy good things.

It's very clear. It says that in 1 Timothy 6. It's a lovely verse that God allows us. 1 Timothy 6, 17.

The last part of verse 17, 1 Timothy 6, 17. God richly supplies us with all things to enjoy. To enjoy a good meal is not a sin.

To enjoy your sleep is not a sin. To enjoy legitimate sex is not a sin. But in all these areas, you can be undisciplined where the love of pleasure can push out the love of God.

And that's what Paul warns Timothy about, that in the last days, and those are the days we live in, 1 Timothy 3. Difficult times will come in the early days. I used to think that referred to persecution, but I like the translation in the Living Bible. It says in the last days, it'll be difficult to be a Christian.

In what way? Not because there'll be persecution. That's not what it says in verse 2, 3, and 4. No. It'll be difficult to be a Christian because Christians will be lovers of self.

Why do I say that? I can paraphrase verse 2 saying, not for men will be lovers of self, but born-again Christians will be lovers of self. Born-again Christians will be lovers of money. Born-again Christians will be lovers of pleasure.

Why do I say born-again Christians? Because verse 5, it says, all these people still hold to a form of godliness. So that's not referring to the non-Christians. It's referring to people who have a form of godliness.

That means that doctrine is right. That's the form of godliness. But the inner power of the Holy Spirit that makes them live in godliness is missing.

It's the form of godliness, the words, the right words spoken in a church meeting, the right words that impress everybody that you're a wholehearted, zealous Christian. The form of godliness is there, but in the daily life, in the daily grind of life, that power is missing because of three other pleasures, three other loves, replacing the love of God, the love of pleasure, and the love of money. That's another very big thing.

Jesus said in Luke 16, 13, you cannot love God and love money at the same time. You cannot serve God and serve money. See, all these areas, whether it's pleasure, money, or self, they're all like onions.

You can think of them as three massive onions that we've got in our life. You peel off one layer and you think you've got to the end of it. No, you haven't.

I'm telling you from 60 years of experience. Many times I thought, ah, I finally got rid of that. A little while later, some circumstance comes up and I discover, hey, there's another layer underneath.

I never knew there was another layer underneath. I thought I'd really disciplined myself in all these areas. No, no, no, I haven't.

There's another deeper layer there. I thought I was completely free from the love of money. No, there's another layer I discover underneath there.

I thought self is not on the throne of my life. Only Christ is on the throne of my life. I discover a little later, there's another layer there where I'm seeking honor or being taken up, people appreciating me or some rubbish like that.

These are dangerous, my brothers and sisters. For those who want to be maximum Christians, for those who want to be minimum Christians, I say, I really have no message for you. And I don't think the Bible has a message for you.

You may get a message. Minimum Christians may get a message in some churches, but it's not in the Bible. The Bible has only got a message for maximum Christians who say, Lord, what is the maximum you can get out of my one earthly life? I want to know that.

Whatever the price, besides saying, Lord, this is, I want this, send me the bill. Will you say that to the Lord? Tell me to cut out this thing, legitimate thing, I'll cut it out. You have money to spend.

Jesus did not operate on the basis of, if I have money to spend, I can go and spend it. No. He prayed.

Do you think Jesus would have sinned if he had taken a one week holiday to Rome, just to relax because he's been so full of pressure in the ministry? Not at all. He could have gone to the most worldly place in the world and kept absolutely pure. Why did he go for a one week holiday to Rome? Just to see something and relax and come back.

It was not in his father's will, period. That's all. His entire three and a half years without even a single day's holiday or vacation was spent within a small area like Israel.

It's a very small little state. Whenever I look at it in a map, you can drive across the whole country in one day, north to south and east to west in a few hours. He lived there.

He was quite content, even though he had a tremendous passion to reach the world with the gospel. He didn't think of going to Africa or China or anywhere. At the end of his life, he could say, father, I have finished the work you gave me to do.

And I covet for all of you, my brothers and sisters, whatever job you're working in. Remember, God has got a plan for you. Jeremiah 29, 11, I have made plans for you.

Zephaniah 3, 17, he's always silently planning for you in love. Say, Lord, I want to know that plan. Psalm 139, verse 14 to 17, God made a plan before I was born.

Many verses like this that teach us of a plan God has for us. Like I often think of these verses, particularly in the gospel of Matthew, it comes a number of times, even in the first two chapters, that it might be fulfilled, which was spoken by the prophet many times in the gospel, that if Jesus did this or went here or

came here, because so that it might be fulfilled what was spoken by the prophet. Jesus' life was planned out long before he was born.

He was to be born in Bethlehem. As a child, he had to be taken to Egypt, brought back. It was all written down in the Old Testament.

And that's why it says, so that it might be fulfilled. And I said, Lord, the father loves me just like he loved Jesus. So I'm sure that my life has also been planned out like that.

And it should be written about me that I did here. I did that so that it might be fulfilled what was written in God's plan for me. So that at the end of my life, I should be able to say, like Jesus said at the end of his life, Father, I have glorified you on earth.

I believe every one of you, my dear brothers and sisters who are really committed members of NCCF. I really believe I know many of you, and I know you're absolutely sincere. I have no doubt about it.

You really love the Lord. I believe that. I'm blessed when I hear some of you.

I'm blessed when I just heard what Paul shared today. Wonderful. Listen to it again.

And I say, I want you to know that I believe you're wanting to be maximum Christians. But you've got to recognize there are onions there that if you don't peel off layer by layer by layer with all your sincerity and all your devotion, you will not be able to say at the end of your life, I've finished the work God gave me to do. You have to say, Lord, I need a little more discipline in my life in terms of food, money, time.

I need to be more disciplined. Otherwise, like Paul says, I'll be disqualified. You know, a lot of people, minimum Christians are only thinking of when I get to heaven, that's enough.

One way or the other, I got there. I don't want the Lord to say to me when I get there, well, you managed to scrape in or you made it, did you? No. I want to hear him say, well done, good and faithful.

Not because I want a reward. No, not at all. I do not work for reward.

Because when I see my savior's face, like we sing in that song, I wish I had given him more. When I see his face, when he holds out his hands, I wish I had given him more and I won't have that opportunity then. That's why I'm serious now.

That's why I say, Lord, I'm not in a hurry to leave this earth, not at all. If there's something more you want me to do, however inconvenient it is for me, I'll do it. I'm willing to speak in Zoom meetings from morning to night and that's God's will.

I have to finish a work planned for me with long before I was born. And that's true for you, my dear brothers, you sincere brothers and sisters who already sacrificed so much and stood for the Lord and joined NCCF. Don't miss out on God's grace.

Say, Lord, I don't want to love pleasure more than you. I don't want to love ease and comfort more than you. I don't want to ever love money more than you.

I don't want to love myself and my honor more than you. These things mean nothing. They're all rubbish.

Like Paul said, that I may know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of his sufferings. So my advice to all of you is forgetting the things that are behind all our failures and the years wasted and the years of indiscipline. Let us press on from now and say, Lord, I want my life to count for you, not because of any reward I'm waiting for.

No, just so that when I see your face, Lord Jesus, that I'll be able to say from at least from one point in my life, I will not wish I had given him more. Only a part of my life, yes, I wish I'd given him more, but from this particular point in my life, I gave everything. Christ was first.

I pray that will be true in your life so that God's heart will be satisfied that he found one person here, one sister there, one brother there, one young man here, one other person there who could satisfy his heart by wanting to love him supremely about everything else and who determined that there would not be a human being on earth he would hate or not love. He would seek with all his heart to love. There would not be an enemy he did not love.

There would not be anyone who cursed him he did not bless. There would not be anyone who did evil to him to whom he did not seek to do good. That God's heart will be delighted.

I've often prayed this prayer and say, Lord, Father, I wish you could say to me, this is my beloved son in whom I'm well pleased. You said that to Jesus. Please say it to me, Lord.

I want to hear that more than any commendation from anybody in the world. I want you to say that to me. I pray that will be your prayer too.

God bless you all.

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