



REAL LOVE

SERMON NOTES



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These sermon notes are to be used in conjunction with *Real Love: Where Bible and Life Meet* by Thaddeus Barnum (Indianapolis: WPH, 2014).

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ABOUT THESE NOTES

Real Love by Thaddeus Barnum serves as the text for this interactive study. With clarity and utmost practicality, *Real Love* helps us understand what it means to have a vital relationship with Jesus and others. This relationship includes exploring real love and finding real life for our souls. But it also challenges us to practice obedient faith, even when hard trials invade our lives.

Trust the Lord to enrich your life and the lives of your group members as you explore your real love in these sessions.

INTRODUCTORY SERMON

WHAT THE CHURCH NEEDS NOW IS LOVE, REAL LOVE

INTRODUCTION

A popular song had a catchy tune and a simple message: “What the world needs now is love, sweet love.” Of course, it’s easier to sing about love than it is to spread it around a strife-torn world. Similarly, it is easy to sing in church about that old-time religion that makes us love everybody, but it isn’t easy to apply love to the broken relationships that characterize many churches and Christians. However, real love is God’s unfailing remedy for every kind of broken relationship.

SERMON OUTLINE

I. God Requires Real Love (Matt. 5:21–22)

Two words are translated “love” in the New Testament. One, *phileo*, identifies a liking for or a fondness. The second, *agape*, identifies self-sacrificing love. God displayed self-sacrificing love for us (John 3:16), and we ought to reciprocate by showing Him and others self-sacrificing love. *Agape* love is real love.

A. Violation of Real Love Invites Judgment (Matt. 5:21–22)

B. Service without Real Love Has No Value (1 Cor. 13:1–3)

C. Offerings without Real Love Are Meaningless (Isa. 1:11–13, 17; Matt. 5:23–25)

II. Real Love Requires Prompt Action (Matt. 5:23–24)

A. Set Important Priorities

Love for God and love for others must be our highest priorities (Lev. 18; Deut. 6:5; Mark 12:29–31). If we nurture a grudge and allow a broken relationship to fester, we do not love either God or our neighbor.

B. Seek Immediate Restoration

As soon as we are aware of a broken relationship, we need to do whatever we can to mend it.

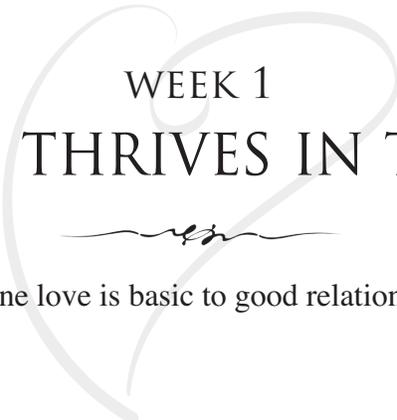
Two pastors had not spoken to each other for twenty years, but everything changed when they attended a conference. To their surprise they were assigned lodging at the same private residence. When their host showed them to a guest room with a double bed that sagged in the middle, the two men stared at each other before one of them broke the silence. “Brother,” he said, “I have forgotten why we have not spoken to each for years, but if we hope to get

any sleep tonight, we need to confess our stubborn, sinful attitude to the Lord and reconcile with each other. The other agreed. Then the two pastors dropped to their knees, confessed their sin to the Lord, and with tears in their eyes hugged each other as restored brothers.

CONCLUSION



If you are in a broken relationship, take immediate, loving action to restore that relationship. If there are broken relationships in your church, act as an agent of change by helping others grasp the meaning of real love.



WEEK 1
REAL LOVE THRIVES IN THE LIGHT

Genuine love is basic to good relationships.

INTRODUCTION



We have all known tragic situations in which a child or teenager has gone missing and the frantic, loving parents have worked tirelessly to recover their son or daughter. Sometimes the search continues for months or even years only to have a sad ending. Sometimes, the search leads to a joyful conclusion in which the missing loved one is found and restored to the parents. We grieve when the search leads nowhere or to a mournful end, but we rejoice when it leads to a successful conclusion in which the child is restored to his or her parents.

Two millennia ago, God showed immeasurable love by sending His Son to seek the lost and bring them into a restored, loving relationship with Himself. The apostle John wrote about this restored relationship in his first epistle, and presented it as a model of the kind of relationship we should have with one another.

SERMON OUTLINE



I. God Demonstrated Real Love for Us (1 John 1:1–3)

A. He Made a Way for Us to Have an Eternal Relationship with Him

In love God gave His Son for us (John 3:16; Rom. 5:8). Jesus was the Light of the World, yet He entered the darkness to bring us light and love (John 1:4–8).

B. Jesus Established a Loving Relationship with His Disciples

He called them to be His disciples. He changed their lives. He lived with them. He taught them. He prayed with them. He ate with them. He washed their feet. He died for them. He appeared to them after His resurrection. He commissioned them.

II. We Ought to Demonstrate Real Love for God and One Another (1 John 1:4–8)

The word “fellowship” in 1 John 1:3, 6–7 signifies a sharing in common. As believers we share in common salvation, the Scriptures, direct access to God, a call to be holy, the comfort and guidance of the Holy Spirit, a bright future, and many more blessings, but we must not minimize the fact that we also share the responsibility to love God and one another.

A. Loving Fellowship Brings Joy (1 John 1:4)

It has been said: “Sin causes the cup of joy to spring a leak.” If believers destroy a relationship with fellow believers, they forfeit their joy. However, if believers walk in the light, they enjoy loving relationships with one another.

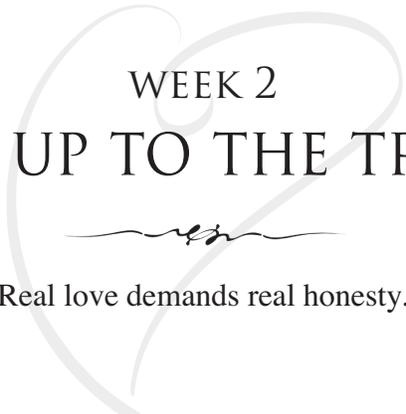
B. Loving Fellowship Demands that We Walk in the Light (1 John 1:5–8)

Instead of living in the light and loving God, Adam and Eve stepped into darkness, when they chose to disobey God’s word—His clear command (Gen. 3). By sinning, they lost their peaceful relationship with God and to a great extent even their relationship with one another. We should understand that we cannot have fellowship with God and others if we walk in the darkness. However, if we live by the truth and walk in the light, we enjoy loving relationships and the blood of Jesus purifies us. Further, we must not deceive ourselves by claiming to be without sin (1 John 1:8).

CONCLUSION



A camper wandered down a trail that led farther and farther away from his campsite and friends. When darkness engulfed him, he felt alone and extremely distant from his friends. He wondered how he would ever find his way back to them. Then he turned on his cell phone and used its small light to guide him back to the campsite. When a broken relationship separates a believer from another believer, he or she should allow the light of God’s Word to lead him or her back to the believer’s brother or sister and to a restored relationship.



WEEK 2
FACE UP TO THE TRUTH

Real love demands real honesty.

INTRODUCTION

A look in a mirror can be welcome or unwelcome. It is a welcome experience if it reflects what we want to see, but unwelcome if it reflects what we don't want to see. For example, a teenager may not want to see pimples, and an elderly person may not like to see wrinkles. Someone recovering from nose surgery would not like to see a swollen, bruised nose. However, no one can fault a mirror for the unsightliness; it simply tells it like it is.

Similarly, as James 1:23 points out, God's Word is a mirror. When we look at 1 John 1:8—2:10, do we see the face of hypocrisy or the face of honesty?

SERMON OUTLINE

I. The Face of Hypocrisy (1 John 1:8—2:4)

The word *hypocrite* means “pretender.” Actors in ancient Greek plays assumed different roles by using masks to conceal their real identity. Hypocrites hide behind masks to conceal their identity. They only pretend to love God and others.

A. The Hypocrite Deceives Him- or Herself (1 John 1:8—2:2)

First John 1:8–10 exposes hypocrites, pretenders who claim to be sinless, but are deceiving themselves. Their hypocrisy keeps them from confessing their sin and receiving cleansing and forgiveness. Their false claim to sinlessness is tantamount to calling God a liar. Clearly, they reject God's truth.

God does not want us to sin, but if and when we sin, Jesus, the righteous One, stands at God's right hand as our defense attorney. He paid the penalty for our sins, and lives now to represent us before the Judge of heaven and earth (1 John 2:1–2).

God detests hypocrisy but welcomes righteousness (Amos 5:21–24).

B. The Hypocrite Disobeys God (1 John 2:3–4)

John identified hypocrites as disobedient liars. During His ministry on earth, Jesus exposed the Pharisees as hypocrites. They paraded in public wearing religious robes and proclaiming to be righteous, but Jesus said they were hypocrites because their religion consisted merely of empty works (Matt. 6:5, 16; 23:23–33).

It has been said that some people can talk Christianity by the mile but can't walk it by the inch. Let's not live that way.

II. The Face of Honesty (1 John 2:5–10)

A. The Honest Believer Obeys God (1 John 2:5–6)

Proof that we belong to God points to our obedience to Him. Jesus said, “By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you love one another” (John 13:35).

B. The Honest Believer Loves His Brother and Sister (1 John 2:7–10)

It is one thing to tell another believer, “I love you in the Lord,” but another to show genuine love for him or her. The honest believer shows he or she lives in the light by loving a brother or sister self-sacrificing way. He or she puts a brother's or sister's needs ahead of his or her own (Phil. 2:3–4).

Real love “rolls up the shirtsleeves” and goes to work on behalf of others in response to the old-but-ever-current command to love one another.

CONCLUSION



When you look into the mirror of God's Word, what do you see? If you see the face of hypocrisy, confess your sin to the Lord, and receive cleansing and forgiveness. If you see the face of honesty, keep on walking the walk. Serve the Lord faithfully, and extend a helping hand and an encouraging word to your fellow believers.



WEEK 3
FAMILY TALK

The church experiences real love as a family.

INTRODUCTION



The term *generation gap* suggests there are distinct distances between one another. It is assumed that these generations have different perspectives, preferences, customs, and approaches to life. Because of the generation gap, varying age groups may not find much in common with one another. In God’s family, however, there are no generation gaps. The elderly apostle John included all his readers in the family circle: little children, fathers, and young men. We believers are family. We are one with the Lord and one with one another.

SERMON OUTLINE



I. Commending Each Group in the Family (1 John 2:12–14)

Assuming the role of family patriarch, John directed each group in the family specifically and lovingly.

A. Dear Children (1 John 2:12)

All who have become members of God’s family by faith in Jesus are God’s dear born-again children (John 1:12–14; 3:3–8), but do we consider every member of God’s family “dear”? Real love embraces all His children and deems them “dear.”

B. Fathers (1 John 2:13–14)

The “fathers” among John’s readers were in fellowship with their eternal Lord. “Know” in verses 13 and 14 conveys experiential knowledge, not simply an intellectual knowledge. It is one thing to know facts about God but quite another to know Him experientially. A vital experiential knowledge of God comes from a daily walk with Him. How well do you know Him?

C. Young Men (1 John 2:13–14)

It is wrong to disregard young Christians. Paul commanded young Timothy to let no one look down on him because he was young (1 Tim. 4:12). John held young men in high regard because they had become victorious over the Devil.

Real love respects Christian young people, embraces them, and gives them service roles in the church.

II. Counseling the Whole Family (1 John 2:15–19)

A. To Reject Worldliness (1 John 2:15–16)

John recognized that the unregenerate world is the Devil's domain. Therefore, he urged the members of God's family to reject worldliness.

Satan uses evil cravings, evil images, and sinful pride to draw believers into his net and away from walking in fellowship with the Lord and one another. Peter wrote that we should "resist him, firm in your faith" (1 Pet. 5:9).

B. To Do God's Will (1 John 2:17)

We have a choice. We can spend our lives pursuing pleasures, money, and things that pass away, or we can invest our lives in what is eternal. John urged us to do God's will.

C. To Recognize Antichrists (1 John 2:18–19)

Throughout history evil men have opposed God and His Son, and many have endeavored to usurp God's throne. Some have even posed as the Messiah. They follow false doctrine, and try to convert others to their evil teachings. John insisted that evil would ultimately be personified in "the antichrist," but already antichrists had separated from true believers. By separating from believers, they showed their real colors.

CONCLUSION



When a member of a family succeeds, all the members celebrate the success. Real love among the members of God's family celebrates spiritual growth and victory over the Devil. Let's celebrate and not criticize!

WEEK 4

BLESSED ASSURANCE

A heart relationship with Jesus Christ is essential.

INTRODUCTION

Fanny J. Crosby was blind, but she was able to see spiritual truth clearly and communicate it with conviction and clarity in the hymns she composed. In the hymn “Blessed Assurance,” she rejoiced that Jesus was her Savior and that she enjoyed a “foretaste of Glory divine.” Believers can identify with Fanny Crosby’s words because we have an anointing.

SERMON OUTLINE

I. We Have an Anointing (1 John 2:20–21, 23–29)

Isn’t it wonderful to pray, “Our Father,” with confidence that He is our Father? Because of our anointing, we know in our souls, in our hearts, and in our minds that we are correctly related to God.

A. The Anointing Comes from the Holy Spirit (1 John 2:20)

“You have an anointing from the Holy One,” John wrote. Believers know they belong to God because the Scriptures promise that “as many as received Him [Jesus], to them He gave the right to become children of God” (John 1:12). But this assurance also comes from an inner witness: “The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God” (Rom. 8:16).

From the time you were a child, you knew you belonged to your earthly father. No one had to spend hours trying to convince you of the fact. Similarly, we know by the witness of the Spirit that we belong to our heavenly Father.

B. The Anointing Enables Us to Distinguish Truth from Error (1 John 2:21, 23–29)

Antichrists were endeavoring to ensnare John’s readers, but he was confident they knew the truth and could discern false teaching. They would abide in the Son and in the Father and hold tightly to the promise of eternal life. They would not accept false teaching, but instead would profit from the Holy Spirit’s teaching.

Antichrists did not fade away in the first century. They exist today and try to spread their false doctrine through print, TV, radio, and door-to-door visitation. We ought to resist their efforts by standing fast for the truth and abiding faithfully in Christ. By doing so, we will be confident and unashamed at His appearing.

II. We Have a Child-Father Relationship with God (1 John 3:1)

A. The Father Has Lavished His Love on Us

The apostle John was likely about ninety years old when he wrote 1 John, but he never lost the wonder of God's deep and undeserved love for him and his fellow believers. He possessed the blessed assurance that all God's children are the recipients of the Father's inexplicable love.

God has every reason to cast all human beings aside eternally, but He showered His love upon us by sending Jesus to rescue us from sin and bring us to the fold (John 3:16; 10:11, 14–17).

B. The World Has Rejected Us

An old hymn reminds us this world is not our home; we're just passing through. Jesus said, "If the world hates you, you know that it has hated Me before it hated you" (John 15:18). We should not be surprised, therefore, that John wrote. "For this reason the world does not know us, because it did not know Him" (1 John 3:1).

A wise pastor counseled a group of teens that complained they were no longer popular since becoming Christians. "It is far better to be popular with God," the pastor told the teens, "than to be popular with the world."

III. We Have a Bright Future (1 John 3:2–3)

A. The Glorious Prospect

John's take on the Christian life was that it is good now but it is going to get much better when Jesus returns. We have the blessed assurance that we will see Jesus "as he is" and we will be like Him.

Think of it: pain, suffering, sadness, and sinning will be over when we see Jesus. At last we will be all that we ought to be for God's glory.

B. The Practical Motivation

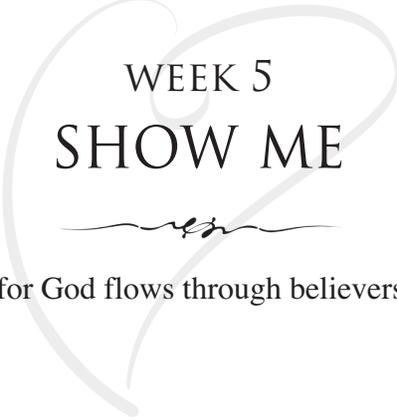
Some critics of our blessed hope might say it is all pie in the sky, bye and bye, but John silenced their argument by pointing out that the hope of Jesus' return motivates us to lead a pure life.

Picture a bride keeping herself pure while she anticipates the marriage union. As the bride of Christ, we anticipate being united eternally with Christ, the Bridegroom, and so we endeavor to keep ourselves pure.

CONCLUSION



Unbelievers have no substantial hope. The world is crumbling around them, and many of them are collapsing under the weight of fear of terrorism, an uncertain economy, and eventual death. However, we Christians have a firm hope, a blessed assurance. The Holy Spirit resides in us, God is our loving Father, and Jesus is coming again. Let's share the gospel and give others an opportunity to have this blessed assurance!



WEEK 5
SHOW ME

Real love for God flows through believers to others.

INTRODUCTION

Missouri is known as the “Show Me” state. No one knows precisely how the nickname originated, but many attribute it to Missouri’s US Congressman Willard Duncan Vandiver. Speaking at a naval banquet in 1899, Vandiver said, “I come from a state that raises corn and cotton and cockleburs and Democrats, and frothy eloquence neither convinces nor satisfies me. I am from Missouri. You have got to show me.”

It is easy to profess one’s love God and others, but the proof of real love shows in practical ways. Although the apostle John certainly wasn’t from Missouri, he espoused the “show me” attitude.

SERMON OUTLINE

I. Show Me Righteousness (1 John 3:4–10)

A. Sinful Living Is Lawlessness

Some may insist it is OK to continue in sin because we have been forgiven, but we ought to disdain sin. A sinful lifestyle demonstrates an allegiance to the Devil and ignores the fact that Jesus came to destroy the works of the Devil.

B. Righteous Living Is a Clear Witness

Righteous living shows that we belong to God. A division is clear. Those who practice sin belong to the Devil. Those who practice righteousness belong to God.

II. Show Me Love for Your Brother and Sister (1 John 3:1–15, 17–19)

A. An Exhortation to Heed

We are commanded to “love one another” (1 John 3:11). Granted, some believers are hard to love. It may seem easier to warm up to a porcupine than to them. Nevertheless, the command doesn’t allow us to select whom we will love. We are to love one another without partiality.

B. An Example of Hate

Cain hated his brother Abel. In a fit of rage, he killed Abel. This was history’s first fratricide, but it was not the last.

C. An Example to Avoid

III. Show Me Obedience (1 John 3:20–24)

A. God Knows Your Heart

B. God Rewards Your Obedience

CONCLUSION



The Ebola outbreak in 2014 killed many Africans, but one of the most tragic stories to emerge from the disaster was that of an Ebola victim who was left to die outside a Liberian hospital because there was no room for him in the hospital. Today, in our community, many needy individuals may be dying for a bit of love. Will we make room for them in our hearts? Will we show them our love, and by doing so allow God's love to flow through us?

WEEK 6 PASS IT ON

Real love puts others first.

INTRODUCTION

Church dinners can satisfy any taste, whether the taste is for salad, pasta, meat, pie, or cake. Likely most of us overindulge, but we need to at least sample what each person has brought to the table. Right? Of course, we enjoy seeing others sampling what we contributed to the meal. It is easy to predict that church dinners will be around for a long, long time.

So will God's love! And like the good food at church dinners, we ought to pass it on.

SERMON OUTLINE

I. Share Real Love (1 John 4:4–15)

A. Share It as Those Who Know the Truth (1 John 4:4–6)

False teachers possess only a worldly perspective of the gospel. They reject its truth, and therefore spurn God's love. However, all who belong to God know and embrace the truth.

B. Share It as Those Who Know God's Love (1 John 4:7–15)

We Christians ought to love one another, because we know God loved us. We know He sent His Son to die for our sins. We know God resides in us. We know He is developing His love in us to the fullest measure. And we know He has given His Spirit to us.

John Wesley understood the value of knowledge, but he disdained knowledge that was not accompanied by love. He counseled, "An ounce of love is worth a pound of knowledge."

Knowing God's love, we should share it freely with others.

II. Incentives for Sharing Real Love (1 John 4:17–21)

A. Confidence on the Day of Judgment (1 John 4:17–18)

If we know God loves us and we love Him, we will not fear standing before Him. Someday the Lord will evaluate our Christian lives and grant rewards for what we did faithfully and out of love for Him and others.

B. Contemplation of God's Proactive Love (1 John 4:19–20)

We demonstrate love as a reciprocal action. God initiated this relationship of love by first loving us. So we respond by loving Him and passing His love to others.

C. Command to Love (1 John 4:21)

Passing God's love to others is not only a privilege, it is also a responsibility. "Who loves God should love his brother also" (v. 21). It would be impossible to obey this command if we did not possess love, but God has placed His love in us by the Holy Spirit (Rom. 5:5). Let's not hoard that love! Let's pass it on!

CONCLUSION



Occasionally, a horrific story of child abuse reaches us. We learn that heartless parents kept their child chained like an animal and confined to a closet, or we learn that a parent beat a child until he or she was black and blue or suffered broken bones. We recoil at such absence of love. We expect parents to love their children. Shouldn't we also recoil at the thought of Christians withholding love from God, from one another, and from those who need to know that God loves them?

Let us be good stewards of God's love by passing it on!



WEEK 7
THE POWER OF REAL LOVE

INTRODUCTION



A preacher told his congregation. “Look in the mirror several times a day and say, ‘I love you, I love you, I love you.’” His motive may have been pure, but isn’t there already enough self-love in the world. Some parents with too much self-love may leave their children in a parked car while they pursue fun in a bar. Often their actions lead to tragic consequences. A wife who buys into the self-love philosophy may separate from her husband in order to seek self-fulfillment. Self-love may cloud a father’s good judgment, persuading him to squander his paycheck on himself and then arrive home with very little or nothing of his income to meet family needs.

Real love contrasts sharply with self-love, because it is self-sacrificing, just as Jesus’ love for us is self-sacrificing. Paul said the Son of God “loved me and gave Himself up for me” (Gal. 2:20).

A person’s self-love is often evidence in that he or she does not belong to God, whereas real love—self-sacrificing love—is evidence in that a person belongs to Him.

SERMON OUTLINE



I. Real Love Assures Us We Are Members of God’s Family (1 John 5:1–2)

A. We Love God

Rarely does a child despise his or her father, although in cases of parental abuse, it is not uncommon for a child to develop hatred for his or her father or mother. In such cases, it takes wise counsel and a great amount of time to heal the breach.

Love for God is not a characteristic we were born with. We were born in sin and lived as enemies of God until He saved us (Ps. 51:5; Rom. 3:23; Eph. 2:1–3). But now, as God’s born-again children, we love Him (Rom. 5:5; 1 Pet. 1:8; 1 John 4:19).

We can never repay God for loving us with infinite, self-sacrificing love, but we can love Him supremely and tell Him in every prayer that we love Him. Such love bears witness to the fact that we are members of His family.

B. We Love God's Children

Real love is both vertical and horizontal. It rises heavenward and it reaches out to our brothers and sisters in Christ. John wrote: "Whoever loves the Father loves the child born of Him" (1 John 5:1). Love for our fellow believers and love for God are two sides of the same coin (v. 2).

John Fawcett, author of the hymn "Blest Be the Tie That Binds," received and returned the kind of love the apostle John identified in his epistle. In 1772 Fawcett was ready to leave the small church he had pastored for seven years. He had preached a farewell sermon, and then had loaded all his belongings onto a wagon. He would soon be the pastor of a large, famous church in London. But the members of the little church gathered around the wagon and tearfully expressed their sadness that he was leaving. Fawcett was so moved by this outpouring of love that he unpacked his belongings and notified the famous church that he had changed his mind. Soon after this event, he wrote the words we often sing, "Blest be the tie that binds our hearts in Christian love."

Real love prompts us not only to sing those words, but also to live them.

II. Real Love Causes Us to Obey God (1 John 5:3)

A. Obedience Proves That We Love God

It is an insult to God's love and grace to ignore His commands. Paul asked, "Are we to continue in sin so that grace may increase?" (Rom. 6:1). He answered his own question with an authoritative, "May it never be!" (v. 2). Later, he explained, "[You have] been freed from sin, you became slaves of righteousness" (v. 18).

Love is cheap, but obedience to God proves we love Him (1 John 5:3).

B. Obedience Is Not Oppressive

The Devil is a harsh taskmaster, but God is a loving master. He does not drive us; He leads us. He gives us joy as we obey Him, and someday He will reward our faithful obedience.

It has been said, "Love makes labor light."

Consider a housekeeper for a bachelor who performs tasks as assigned by her employer: "Wash the dishes. Dust the furniture. Vacuum the carpets. Clean the bathroom. Etc, etc." She finds that completing those tasks is tedious, hard work. But an amazing thing happens. She falls in love with her employer and he falls in love with her, and they get married. Now, as his wife, she performs the same duties, but finds that love has removed the burden of the work.

God's commands are not burdensome. We gladly obey them because we love Him!

CONCLUSION



Read a New Testament book this week, highlighting every command you find in it. Out of love for your Father in heaven, obey each of those commands. Your loving obedience will glorify your Father, bless your fellow believers, and perhaps persuade a lost person to believe in the Savior.