Lasting Legacy – Part 2

# The Perfect Love of God

# (Matthew 5:43-48)

This morning, we’re celebrating Father’s Day and I want to share a message that I believe has the potential to significantly impact your lives. I not only want to encourage, challenge, and strengthen fathers, but also women, boys and girls to leave a lasting legacy. You see, a person’s legacy is not determined as much by who a person is, as it is by that which they’ve done of lasting value, that which is done for Christ, and done for the eternal kingdom of God. And so, what kind of lasting impact, what kind of eternal difference are you making in your workplace, home, school, or church? What will people say about you when you’re gone? Are you leaving a lasting legacy?

Just consider that for a moment, because it doesn’t matter who you are, what your position is, or your social or economic standing, because God has called each born-again believer to a place of spiritual leadership. In fact, the Bible says it this way,

“You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light” (1 Peter 2:9).

And so, that’s a cut above the rest. You’re kings and priests, and yet for those of you that are fathers, is that the kind of leadership example that you’re leaving in your home or could it be that you’re missing out on what matters? That instead of proclaiming the Word of God, declaring the truth of the kingdom of God, and pointing your children to Christ, you’re pointing them to worldly achievements in athletics, academics, or entertainment? Now, I’m not saying that athletics, academics, and entertainment don’t have value, that they can’t be enjoyable, but they shouldn’t be your obsession. Leaving a lasting legacy means that you’re passing on the most important realities of life and eternity to your children.

Video: The Influence of Fathers - Presented by The Increase

And so, our children need to know the love of God the Father, they need to see that demonstrated in our lives, so that they can embrace the grace of God for themselves. You see, we want to seize every opportunity to impress upon them the eternal truth of Scripture, and here’s the title for today’s message, we need to show them THE PERFECT LOVE OF GOD. For those of you who are fathers, as well as those who are single mothers, we have the responsibility to raise the next generation for God.

An article in Christianity Today said, and the author makes an excellent point, but he said, “Perhaps the best way for fathers to lead their homes spiritually is to embrace the work of the home rather than build an identity outside of it” (Chris Pappalardo. “The Best Gift for Dad this Father’s Day? Diaper Duty?” Christianity Today, June 15, 2018). And I think that’s so true because too often we’re consumed with what we do outside of the home, attempting to succeed, to achieve greatness or make a name for ourselves, but we give a lot less effort at home where it really matters. I believe God is calling us to be the kind of people who would leave a legacy in our homes as well as in our community. And so, number one, we need to begin the pursuit of what matters.

## 1. The Pursuit of What Matters

In other words, we need to give up that endless pursuit for approval, the desire for perfection in our children, our homes, and our work. We need to begin seeking that which really matters instead of trying to feed that unhealthy craving for more and more. This is so important because many of us think to highly of ourselves, others of us think too lowly of ourselves, and so we want to lay down that sacred image. We talked about this last week, that Sacred Selfie, and so we want to lay down what we think of ourselves at the altar of God. It’s the pursuit of what matters that helps us not to strive to be who we think we are, who others think we are, but to be exactly who God thinks we are.

Now, I don’t know about you, but it’s amazing to me how quickly I can feel incredibly inadequate. You know, I can read an article about a successful pastor, drive by a beautiful home, or meet someone who just seems to have it all together and instantly I’m feeling like I don’t measure up, I’m wondering what I’m doing wrong; but it’s really just as Pastor Steven Furtick said, “We compare others highlight reels with our own behind-the-scenes.” And so, you may see the Instagram or Facebook version of their lives where they look beautiful and they’ve got it altogether, but we know the behind-the-scenes. We know that we just yelled at the kids, they haven’t taken a bath for a week, nobody’s cut the grass, we’re having macaroni and cheese for dinner again, and we don’t like our hair or lack of hair, and so, suddenly we feel very inadequate.

I’m hoping that maybe a few of you can relate to the way I sometimes feel, because I’ve always struggled, feeling like I had to prove myself, or had to perform up to a certain standard. And so, I’m hoping that I’m connecting with some of you who like myself have this unhealthy need to live up to others’ expectations, maybe your own unrealistic expectations, as well as God’s expectations. You know, the standard that Jesus gives us in Matthew’s gospel can be incredibly intimidating because we often don’t get it right. He said in chapter 5, verse 48, and this just feeds those feelings of unworthiness, guilt and shame, but he said, “Be perfect…”

“Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect” (Matthew 5:48).

In other words, Jesus says, “Just be like God, don’t sin, don’t ever have a bad thought, just be perfect. It’s a problem for all of us who are trying to live up to the expectations of others, the unrealistic expectations of ourselves, or trying to live up to what we believe God wants us to do. And so, if you struggle with trying to achieve a certain standard, you need to realize that obsessing over something until you get it just right is the peak of inefficiency or ineffectiveness.

It’s for this reason that the pursuit of what matters is so important, and so we need to back up a few verses so that we can grasp the context of Jesus words. You see, we always need to be careful not to pluck a verse out of context, because Jesus’ teaching wasn’t about our performance or about our behavior, but about our response to God’s love. In verse 43, Jesus said,

"You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous” (Matthew 5:43-45).

“If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? And if you greet only your brothers, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect” (Matthew 5:46-48).

Here in this passage, Jesus is saying to pursue what matters. In other words, to be perfect in how you respond to God’s love, perfectly loving him and loving others. He’s not talking about your behavior or your performance, but to be mature and complete in your love; letting your love grow into the perfect love of God. And so, number two, it’s just a different way of thinking.

## 2. A Different Way of Thinking

For so many years I worked so hard to be good enough as a husband, a father, and a pastor; you know, just trying to be perfect. But Jesus revealed a different way of thinking, not trying to win the approval of everyone, but simply loving my wife, my children, and others so that they can understand the perfect love of God. It’s a liberating thought to understand that is not about me or my performance, but it’s all about the love of God, it’s all about Jesus Christ and his righteousness, and so we need to have a different way of thinking.

Pastor Craig Groeschel said it this way, he said, “Our lives move in the direction of our strongest thoughts.” And so, we must consider what we’re thinking about, preoccupied with, what our thought lives are dominated by; because if your life is moving in the direction of your strongest thoughts, are you excited about the direction you’re moving in? Is it what you were expecting or do you need to go in another direction; maybe you need to have a different way of thinking?

In fact, Romans chapter 12, verse two, is a verse that’s been so meaningful to me for many years. And the apostle Paul said,

“Let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think” (Romans 12:2, NLT).

In other words, the change in our lives comes from the renewing of our minds, from thinking differently. And I think for most of us, if we would just change our way of thinking it would change a lot about us. But this change, this transformation, isn’t you working to change yourself, it’s God transforming you by changing the way you think. And this is really incredible because God’s view of you is so much different than your view of yourself.

You see, God’s view of you isn’t clouded by your false expectations, your need for approval, or your desire to achieve more attention, praise, and stuff of this world. As a matter of fact, God see so much more in you than you can even see in yourself. He sees the hope, the promise, and the potential for which he has created you. The Bible says it this way,

“We are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago” (Ephesians 2:10, NLT).

In other words, long before you were born, God thought of you and created you with the potential to do everything that he’s called you to do. And so, you might not see it, others might not see it, but God sees you as a masterpiece.

We see this when God sent Samuel to Bethlehem, to Jesse, in search of the chosen one, the anointed king of Israel. Jesse presented seven of his sons to Samuel, but God hadn’t chosen any of them, because the Bible says,

“The Lord doesn’t look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart" (1 Samuel 16:7).

You see, Jesse had overlooked his youngest son, he’d rejected David, because when he looked at David all he saw was a little shepherd boy, but God saw him differently. God saw something that Jesse and his other sons didn’t see. God saw a mighty warrior who was able to stand up against the giant Goliath. God saw David as a man who was in pursuit of what matters most.

Or Peter, he was a man who never seemed to get it right; he messed up again and again, but what did Jesus see in Peter? He saw a rock, a mighty shepherd of his people, someone who would preach the Word of God fearlessly.

And so, I want to encourage you today to begin thinking differently about your priorities, about what matters, recognizing that God sees more in you than you see in yourself. In fact, some of you have been listening to the wrong voices and this morning you need to begin listening to God’s voice, listening to God’s word, and believing and becoming who God says you are. Because the Bible tells us in second Peter, chapter 1, that by his divine power,

“God has given us everything we need for living a godly life…” (2 Peter 1:3, NLT).

And so, since God’s given us everything we need, we just need to let go and let God do that perfect work in us, changing the way we think, and aligning our hearts with his. This morning as we begin pursuing what matters, having a different way of thinking, and then number three, pressing on toward the goal, moving in the direction of leaving a lasting legacy.

## 3. Pressing on Toward the Goal

You see, we’re the happiest and the most content when we live with the knowledge that we’re moving in the right direction. Now, you might ask what direction is that? And it’s simply moving toward God, in a personal relationship with Jesus, where he’s the center of our lives and the motivation behind all that we do.

In other words, we’ve turned our backs on pride, ego, and self-advancement, we’ve closed the door on the past once and for all, and we’ve fixed our eyes on Jesus. That’s what the Bible encourages us to do in Philippians chapter 3,

“Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, we press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called us heavenward in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 3:13-14).

This is so important, because it’s really a matter of perspective. In our day-to-day routine of living life any one of us could choose to wake up and hit the snooze button again and again; grumbling and complaining, focused on the negative, going to that stupid job, with those stupid people, can’t seem to get ahead, too much to do, life is just overwhelming. But the fact is that it’s a choice that you make each day when you reach for that first cup of coffee, reach for your Bible, or whatever you do first thing.

And so, it comes down to what kind of legacy do you want to leave? If you want to be blessed you need to develop the habit of focusing on the right things, thinking on better things, and thinking good thoughts, because your life is moving in the direction of your strongest thoughts. The apostle Paul said it this way, he said,

“Fix your thoughts on what is true, and honorable, and right, and pure, and lovely, and admirable. Think about things that are excellent and worthy of praise” (Philippians 4:8, NLT).

Now, why would he say that? Why would the Holy Spirit inspire him to write those words? It’s because your life moves in the direction of your strongest thoughts and you can be sure of this, whatever your situation, whatever your conditions are today, they will certainly change. It’s the roller coaster nature of our existence. If you’re in the valley right now, there’s a mountaintop in your future, but your perspective, your attitude, and your focus can remain the same.

As you press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called us heavenward in Christ Jesus, God is viewing you through the loving lens of his grace. He wants you to understand that you’re his masterpiece, you’re his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works. You’re special, you’re loved, and you’re uniquely created in Christ to do his work. That’s why the apostle John burst out in praise saying,

“How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!” (1 John 3:1).

God wants to encourage you to know who you are because in knowing who you are you know who you don’t have to be and you can be you who he created you to be. As we come together as the body of Christ, responding to the perfect love of God, loving one another, serving one another, and worshiping Jesus together, God weaves us all together in a way that brings him glory as we express our uniqueness. His desire is that you would leave a legacy of the perfect love of God being secure and confident in who he created you to be. And so, as we begin to pursue what matters, having a different way of thinking, and pressing on toward the goal his love will be perfected in us. Let’s pray.

Pastor John Talcott

Christ's Community Church

303 West Lincoln Avenue

Emmitsburg, MD 21727

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[www.cccaog.org](http://www.cccaog.org)

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