

## **“The Deepest Level of Love”**

**John 15:9-17**

Preached by Dr. Robert F. Browning, Pastor

First Baptist Church

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### **Communion Devotion**

Seven years ago this month, Jackie and I met your Pastor Search Committee at a Bar-B-Que restaurant in Chattanooga to talk about joining you on your journey of faith at First Baptist Church. We enjoyed our time with the fine women and men who represented you that day. Obviously, they made a great first impression!

I recall many things we discussed that day as we shared our stories and talked about what was important to us. At some point in the conversation, I asked them what the church does or believes that was so meaningful or sacred even Jesus could not change it if he became the next pastor.

Immediately, someone said, “We observe the Lord’s Supper the first Sunday of every month. I don’t believe I would mess with that if I were you.” I smiled and assured them this was not the hill I wanted to die on.

I have to tell you I wondered how I would like observing the Lord’s Supper so often. I know some of our friends in other denominations take communion every Sunday, and they would feel something is missing without it.

Baptists, on the other hand, have traditionally taken communion once a quarter. This had been my custom.

So, how have I liked taking communion once a month? I have loved it, and let me tell you why.

Coming to this table the first Sunday every month has reminded me that the deepest level of love always involves sacrifice. Nothing around me will change for the better in the month that lies ahead without sacrifices by everyone involved, beginning with me.

Jesus' entire ministry was marked by the sacrifices he made, great or small, on behalf of others. Every attempt to help others began with his willingness to interrupt his schedule or agenda. Every day, he modeled the deepest level of love, especially the day he died on a cross.

Loving others the way Jesus did is not easy. It will require the highest level of discipline and determination every day.

Jesus could have called 10,000 angels to come and rescue him off the cross, but he didn't. In the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus prayed God would take this cup of suffering away from him. When God did not, Jesus drank from this cup.

Just because we have the right to do something doesn't mean we should.

Just because something is difficult doesn't mean we should turn away from it.

The kind of love Jesus has for us and calls us to model is built upon sacrifice. It is not merely a sentimental love meant to be traded with those who like us or are good to us.

Jesus calls us to give love away expecting nothing in return but the satisfaction of knowing I am doing my part to change lives and life for the better.

Loving others like this is challenging and difficult. It will demand the best of us and the most from us. To be candid with you, we cannot do it on our own. Loving others like Jesus did is only possible with God's help. This was true for him, and it is certainly true for us.

Once again, coming to this table the first Sunday every month has reminded me that the deepest level of love always involves sacrifice. Nothing around me will change for the better in the month that lies ahead without sacrifices being made by everyone involved, beginning with me.

For someone to receive another chance, a helping hand, a word of encouragement, a financial gift or an opportunity to pursue their dreams and achieve their goals, someone has to give.

For someone to learn to write their name, count to ten, solve the most complex mathematical equation, throw a ball, play a musical instrument, ride a horse or dance on a stage, someone has to teach them.

For someone to eat healthy meals, someone has to prepare them.

For someone to get to multiple practices and games, someone has to take them.

For someone to overcome a lingering illness or cope with an incurable one, someone has to do for them what they are unable to do for themselves.

For someone to overcome low self-esteem and despair so they can discover the joy of healthy pride and confidence, someone has to counsel them.

For someone to quit making a bad situation worse by refusing to take responsibility for their mistakes, someone has to tell them the truth.

For someone to find their way home after going astray, someone has to come looking for them.

For someone to overcome an addiction that is killing them, someone has to believe in them and be willing to spend all their money and borrow more seeking help from outside sources.

Who loved you this much? Who did some or all of these things for you? Who needs you to follow their example?

“One of the most difficult things I ever did was to go to Al-Anon,” my friend said. At the time, my friend had been the pastor of his church for eleven years and was well known and respected in his community. Going public with his teenage daughter’s addictions and eating disorders was extremely painful but necessary.

He needed a support group and the skills to help her. Doing so, however, meant he had to set aside his pride and risk losing everything.

When he and his wife married years earlier, they made a decision to set aside \$1,000 a year for the next twenty years for a special project. This money was going to be used to fund a trip they would take to celebrate their twentieth anniversary. This was a lot of money in those child-rearing years and was going to be a big challenge, but they were committed to it.

The fund had grown to \$18,000, and they were already making plans for their special trip. They never made this trip.

Instead, that \$18,000, and plenty more in addition to it, was used to pay for their daughter's medical and rehabilitation expenses. The only trip they took was to several rehab facilities over a five year period of recovery and renewal.

Why did they do this? The deepest level of love always requires sacrifice.

Always.

**Who needs you to love them this much this month?**