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Welcome to the New Life Podcast, a ministry of New Life Presbyterian Church in Ithaca, New York. Today we have this week's sermon, preached by Tim LaCroix, our senior pastor. Join us for worship each week at 10 o'clock at 950 Danby Road, Ithaca, New York. You can also visit us on our website, www.newlifeithaca.org. Now here's this week's sermon.

00:43

A reading from the first epistle of the Apostle John, chapter four, verse 15, through chapter five, verse five. Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him and he in God. So we have come to know and to believe the love that God has for us. God is love, and whoever abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him. By this is love perfected with us, so that we may have confidence for the day of judgment.

01:12

because as He is so also are we in this world. There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. For fear has nothing to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not been perfected in love. We love because He first loved us. If anyone says, I love God and hates His brother, he is a liar. For he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen. And this commandment we have from Him, whoever loves God must also love his brother.

01:40

Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God, and everyone who loves the Father loves whoever has been born of him. By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and obey his commandments. For this is the love of God that we keep his commandments, and his commandments are not burdensome. For everyone who has been born of God overcomes the world, and this is the victory that has overcome the world, our faith. Who is it that overcomes the world except the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?

02:09

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

02:16

Couple of years ago, YouTube frontman Bono released a memoir and this is an expansive tome, nearly 600 pages. If you haven't read it and you want to read it, I suggest listening to an audiobook because he reads it and they also produce music for the whole thing. So it's really an experience to listen to it. But this book he titled Surrender.

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It's the story of his life from his birth in Northern Ireland, the death of his mother when he was 14, his complicated relationship with his father, to the formation of the band, and all of their exploits throughout their life. But as much as is a story of Bono's life, it is also a story of Bono's fate.

03:10

Essentially, that is how the book is arranged. There are 40 chapters in this book for 40 different songs that they have written. And also the number 40 is, if you are a U2 fan, is an allusion to one of their most treasured songs, which is called 40. They close every concert with this. It is essentially a paraphrase of Psalm 40. And they close every concert with it. At least...

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the ones I've been to. think they still do that. So the book is shot through with faith and the story is not one of Bono's pursuit of God really, but God's pursuit of Bono and also of his bandmates and Bono's sense of surrendering to God.

04:03

There's one quote that I thought was particularly

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hits hit on this point this is Bono talking he talks about how the Bible when he was a younger person the Bible held me wrapped the words stepped off the page and followed me home I found more than poetry in that gothic King James script this is what I found moving he said I'd always be first up when there was an altar call he just kept going down when they said who wants to follow Jesus he would be

04:40

He would go every time. He said, the come to Jesus moment, and I still am. He said, if I was in a cafe right now and someone said, stand up if you're ready to give your life to Jesus, I would be the first to my feet. I took Jesus with me everywhere, and I still do.

04:58

The notion of surrender for him does not mean that Bono lives a perfect life. In fact, his biography is brutally honest about his failures, about his sins, about his shortcomings. But what he keeps coming back to is that surrender to Jesus, the fact that he is ready to stand up and say, I will follow him at any moment. And I love that image. Can you just imagine in a cafe, Bono standing up and saying,

05:25

Me? I will! I will follow Jesus. every time he said, if anyone would ask him, he would say that he would. He later said, I will tell you deep down, there is an anchor. I am fixed to a rock, and that rock is Jesus. The idea of surrender is also in the text that we read today. And as we come to the close of this sermon series, you probably saw some things that repeated.

05:54

In fact, it's getting quite difficult to continue to preach on this because he just keeps saying the same thing over and over. That's another reason why I'm going to draw to a close because we've kind of gotten the point now, haven't we? He says that Jesus came in the flesh. Jesus really came as a human being. He says that we should love our brother. He says that we should obey his commandments. These are kind of the three things he keeps repeating because...

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That is what the false teachers were leading people astray. But I think what's a little different here in the text that we read today is not just that these three things are repeated, but actually John is calling us to something deeper, and that is the idea of surrender. So we're going to have, we're going to look at three points here today. The first is not just knowledge.

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but surrender to belief. The second is not just duty, but surrender to love. And the third is not mere presence, but surrender to abiding.

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This text, and you can look, we'll start in verse 15 and we're going to verse 5 of chapter 5. This text presents a problem. It presents a problem that apparently John's listeners had and I would guess that many of us have and that's confidence. He addresses their lack of confidence or their fear. If you look in verse 17 it says, by this love is perfected with us so we may have confidence for the day of judgment. And then it says, there is no fear in love.

07:40

but perfect love drives or casts out fear. When I was a young man, this verse, John 4.18, was one of my favorite verses, and it really still is. I was a very fearful person in my early adulthood. I was anxious and I was afraid of many things. Many of you know my story, how I experienced abuse as a child at the hands of my parents and...

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When I became an adult, I was afraid. I was a very fearful person. I tried to hide it, and if you knew me back in those days, you probably wouldn't see it because I was stony-faced. I really shoved all that trauma down and really didn't even deal with it till my 40s. But because of all that, I was fearful. I was anxious and I was afraid. And I went to this verse,

verse 18, over and over and over. I almost repeated it like a mantra. There is no fear in love because perfect love drives out.

08:38

This is the problem that John Sears have, they're afraid. What are they afraid of? He doesn't go into details and I'm glad he doesn't because we're afraid of different things. You we may be afraid of losing financial means to support ourselves. We may be afraid of losing a person in a relationship. We may be afraid of peril, of death, or pain, or something like that. We may be afraid as believers of

09:07

not being able to stand in front of God at the judgment. We may be afraid of his judgment. That's at least part of what the people that John is writing to were afraid of because he talks about that. He says that there is no fear in love because fear has to do with punishment, you see. And if we're afraid, ultimately, you know, whatever our fears are, and I don't mean to simplify them and I don't mean to minimize them, but

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the ultimate our fears boil down to some sort of lack of trust in God, God's goodness and God's provision, God's power to sustain us and what John is pointing out is that when we're afraid fear has to do with punishment we haven't really gotten the point that John and Jesus was trying to make sink in. John says that Jesus came

10:05

and gave his life as a propitiation for our sins. That is a big word, but it essentially means a gift that is given to a deity to appease that deity's wrath. If we understand this concept that Jesus Christ gave his life to appease the wrath of God, we should have no fear because that perfect love, the love that God the Father gave his only begotten Son,

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The love that God the Son gave his life as a gift to appease the wrath of God for the sins of the world should mean that we have no fear of punishment because Jesus paid it all. Right? And that is essentially what John wants to drive home. Is that love drives out fear because the love of God has taken away our risk of punishment.

11:05

as long as we abide in Him. So with this problem in mind, with this lack of confidence, with this fear, whatever it is for you, let's go to these points that John is making here today. The first is that not mere knowledge, but surrender to belief. How is it that we can really appropriate the truth

11:33

that there is no fear and love. I repeated it as a mantra, but I don't think the real, what this is teaching ever really sunk into me as a young man. Because the point of the gospel is that we are not under threat of punishment if we are in Christ. A lot of people though treat the faith as something to know, something to do, and something to show up for.

12:01

John starts out this way. verse 15, really goes back to verse 13 if you'll allow me just to back up two verses. By this we know is how he starts. And then if we go to verse 15, it says whoever confesses. Confess is the verbal form of professing something that you know. We're going to confess our knowledge of

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Jesus after the sermon we're going to confess the Apostles creed we know we confess that Jesus is the son of God and in verse 16 he says we have come to know it is good to know things John wants us to know things we should know things about our faith we should be educated about what the Bible teaches and what our theology is

12:56

It is good to know to be able to give an answer as Peter says to give an answer in defense of our faith to others. John is not saying that we shouldn't not know anything that we should not pursue knowledge. It is good to do that. But what John is saying is to know is not enough.

13:16

There plenty of people that are in churches of all kinds, liberal churches, conservative churches, Roman Catholic churches, Protestant churches, Greek or all kinds of churches that know things but have not surrendered to belief. There's an old saying that the longest distance in all of creation is between your head and your heart. Now that's cheesy but it's so true. It can be sometimes easy to know things

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but very hard to believe them. John is saying we surrender to belief. He says in verse 16, we have come to know and to believe. For those of us who struggle with doubt, especially those of who are highly intelligent and there's lots of folks in this room that are, we may struggle with the lack of certainty in our faith. How can we know?

14:14

How can we know for sure that God exists? How can we know for sure that the stories we read in the Bible are true? How can we know these things? And we should seek to know them. We should seek to discover answers to these problems. You know that I am not saying that that is a bad thing to do. We should do that. But ultimately, we are never going to get 100 % certainty. We're never going to get it. At some point, we have to surrender to belief.

14:45

At some point, we have to let go and trust God because we're never going to be able to know our way into God's kingdom. And to know something is not the same thing as to believe it. And so John says we are to know and to believe. He wants us to surrender. And in order to believe something, you have to go beyond knowledge. And for those who

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like myself who do have struggle with doubts sometimes or have questions about how we can know things about the ultimate things about God and about what we read in this book here part of what John is saying is at some point you just gotta let go and trust God and trust that God is good and trust that His Word is true because we're never gonna have all the answers and we're always gonna have doubts

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And we're always going to have questions. And that's okay. But at some point we have to surrender to belief. And maybe some folks here today need to surrender to belief. And it's not... you don't do this in ignorance, right? You don't do this foolishly. We do it in an informed way because John says to know and to believe. He wants us to know. He wants us to confess. He wants us to have solid answers.

16:14

But ultimately, we have to surrender to belief. We're never going to be able to get all the answers. We just let go and surrender to belief in God and belief in Christ. The second thing is, John is teaching not mere duty or not only doing things, but surrender to love. This is the companion

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to works, companion to doing good deeds is love. just as there are many people in the church who know things, there are many people in the church who do things, and they do them out of obligation. They do them in order to perhaps appease God's anger. That's why there's fear. That's why there's lack of confidence, because I can never know enough.

17:11

And I can never do enough. It's not possible for me as a fallen human being.

17:19

But when we understand, as I've already said, that doing things comes out of a love for God and a love for other people. That doing the right thing comes out of a response of gratitude for what God has done for us. When we surrender to love, we will not just do things, but we will do them in a way that

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that builds life and builds confidence. I think there are many, many millions of Christians who lack confidence because they have not surrendered to love and they have not surrendered to belief. There are many Christians, maybe some here today, who obey God and are very earnest about it. And John is definitely saying we should do that. He says that there are God's commandments. Let me just read

18:18

To you a few of these verses He says beginning in verse 19 we love because he first loved us. So love is a response Our works are a response to God's love if anyone says I love God and hates his brother He's a liar and he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen and This commandment we have from him

18:47

And then he goes on to say in verse 2 of chapter 5, by this we know that we love the children of God when we love God and obey his commandments and his commandments are not burdensome. So yes, we do, we are bound to obey God's commandments. We are bound to say, look, if God said it, then as a believer who trusts in God and is surrendered to belief, that we are to do those things, part of being a Christian.

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is not having all the answers. Maybe not understanding why God says not to do this or why He says we should do that. And I'll be honest with you, I don't understand all of them. I understand some of them why God says, but I don't understand all of them. But being a believer is submitting ourselves to God and God's commandments. Because when we trust God, we trust that God is good and we trust that God is wise.

19:47

So, things, observing commandments is definitely a part of being a Christian. But being a Christian is not just knowing things and doing things. Being a Christian is surrendering to love. The life of obedience out of duty and out of fear is a very difficult life. It is a hard life. Walking in your own...

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ability to obey God, walking in your own goodness is a terrifying way to live. It puts so much pressure on us. John is calling us to a better way. He's saying, yes, we are to observe those commandments. But look, you cannot do it perfectly. John is very clear about that. He says in the very beginning of this book, this letter, that if you say you have no sin, you make God a liar.

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John is not saying that we have to perfectly obey his commandments. He is saying that we keep them, we observe them, we acknowledge that what God says is true and we do our level best to obey, even when we fail. We surrender to love. We surrender to belief. So part of the message here today for some of us may be that we need to actually surrender to God's commandments, either in believing that they're true and real and good.

21:13

Or by beginning to confess and deal with sin in our life. What a better season than Lent to talk about introspection in our lives and actually beginning to do something about our secret sins. There may be folks here who need to really come to an account for the things that we've been doing or the things that we've been thinking.

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And what John is saying is not you have to be perfect, but what he's saying is that you need to be repentant and you need to be accountable. So maybe some of us need to begin to repent of things and begin to seek help from brothers and sisters in Christ to be accountable. But that's not the main point. That is a point. And that is something that John is calling us to, definitely in this letter, that we confess our sins.

22:10

But the main point is that obedience to God is not enough. It's not enough because we can't do it. We have to surrender to love. We have to surrender to love. And so he talks about loving God and loving our brother and sister. This is the commandment. This is verse 2. Sorry, this is, yeah. Verse 2 and 3 of chapter 5.

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that we love the children of God when we love God and obey his commandments for this is the love of God that we keep his commandments and his commandments are not burdensome. Verse 21 of chapter 4, and this commandment we have from him, whoever loves God must also love his brother. We love God and we love our neighbor. It flows from love. One of the things that Bono observes in the book is he talks about

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amazing it is that the Apostle Paul who he called a fundamentalist you know Bono grew up in Northern Ireland during the Troubles when they were fighting bombing each other Protestants and Catholics so he has a certain perspective on on faith that comes from that but he said look Paul was a was a fundamentalist and he was persecuting the church we're gonna talk about that in the New Life University lesson today Paul was a was a raving fundamentalist he's persecuting the church he was murdering people and somehow this person

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became the person who wrote the most profound treatise on love that we have ever seen. How does that happen? How does it happen that the Pharisee, who completely depended on his own effort and his own works and who murdered others who didn't agree with him, how does that person become the person who wrote this? Love is patient. Love is kind.

24:08

Love does not envy or boast. It is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way. It is not irritable or resentful. It does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails. We surrender to love when we surrender to God's way for our life.

24:39

but not in an effort to justify ourselves, not in an effort to earn favor with God, but out of a response to His love for us. And out of an overflowing love for God and for our fellow human beings, we can do nothing but obey God's commandments, because that is the natural response. So we surrender to belief, and we surrender...

25:08

to love. And lastly, we surrender to God's abiding.

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It's not enough merely to be present, but we surrender to God's abiding. Being present is good. Being present in the church is good. That's part of what John is arguing in this letter. His opponents are saying that you don't need to be a part of a church. You know, don't need to obey commandments. There's no such thing as sin. Jesus didn't really come into flesh. These are things that they were saying and John's repeatedly saying, no, you need to be a part of the church. You have to be a part of the church. Early church father Cyprian of Carthage who wrote in the

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fourth century said one cannot have God as his father without the church as his mother. It is not possible to be in the body of Christ without being in the body of Christ. Our own theology, our own confession of faith says that there is ordinarily no possibility of salvation outside the church. The word ordinarily is doing a lot of work there, but that's what the church is taught. The church is taught that ordinarily

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You have to be a part of the church in order to be a part of God's family and His people. Now, the exceptions we can talk about, the thief on the cross is the primary exception. The thief on the cross never was baptized, never went to church, but he was in paradise. There are obviously exceptions, but ordinarily, you need to be a part of the church. So John is not saying that we don't need to be present. We do need to be present.

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We need to be present with God's people. This is the place where we hear the oracles of God read. This is the place where are fed with the food of God, the bread of heaven. This is the place where we worship God and experience His people. We need to be present.

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But there are many people, many millions of people, who know things, who do things, and are present, but have not surrendered. John is saying it's not enough merely to be present, but we surrender to God's abiding. If we go back and read this text looking for the word abide now, going back to verse 15, whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God,

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God abides in him and he in God. And so we have come to know and believe the love that God has for us. God is love and whoever abides in his love abides in God and God abides in him.

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This word, abide or remain, appears in the letter of John more frequently than any other text in the Bible. The only other text that comes close is the Gospel of John, which makes sense because the same guy wrote both works. John is emphasizing that it's not just being present in the church. It is abiding in God and God abiding in us. Now, I can talk to you about practically

28:14

What does it mean to believe? I think we can conceive, we believe something, we surrender to it, we accept it, we hold fast to it. I think we have a good conception of what love is. I've just read to you from 1 Corinthians 13 about how love is patient and love is kind and it bears all things. But I don't really know how to tell you how to abide. Like, what does this mean to abide in God and God abiding us? What does it mean to surrender to God's abiding?

28:44

I don't know. But I know what it looks like. It looks like when someone says, who here wants to respond and follow Jesus? Me! Me, I will, every single time. That's what abiding in God's love looks like. It looks like this eagerness. It looks like this joy, this surrender. You almost have to become foolish in order to really surrender, don't you? You know, we're worried about what we look like, what our friends think about us.

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I mean, this is why we would probably never stand up in a cafe and say, hey, I'll follow Jesus. We wouldn't do it because we're interested in what other people think about us. In order to surrender, you kind of have to become foolish. You have to look foolish in some way. But abiding in God and surrendering to God's abiding, how do we do that? I don't exactly know. But I do know.

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that we are presented with these opportunities throughout our life. And what I'm not saying is that, you know, if you haven't had this religious experience that you're not a believer, you are, but there is a certain letting go and surrendering that changes a person. And you hear people talk about, not about conversion to the faith, or not about becoming saved, but you hear...

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You hear people talk about other kinds of conversions. People changing. People having a deep sense of repentance for their sin. People experiencing this unique closeness to God. And who can really put their finger on what that is except you know it when you see it. We

have an opportunity, and you'll be presented with opportunities throughout your life, to surrender to God.

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and surrender to his goodness and surrender to his abiding presence. And I encourage you when that happens, take it. Say, yes, me. I'll do it. I'll follow. Surrender when that comes. I don't know when it'll come. I don't know how it'll come. It could be a moment in nature. You see something beautiful. Surrender. It could be a moment in a relationship that is beautiful.

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that really touches you. could be something that you read. It could be a song that you hear. It could be almost anything. But I encourage you, don't care about what you look like. Just surrender to God's abiding. You'll never regret it. You'll never regret it.

31:23

When essence, God, surrendering to God's abiding is simple and it's very profoundly complex. It's simple because God abides in you. That's the fact. If you believe in Jesus, God abides in you. But then surrendering to that truth and really giving up your life to that person, that is the hard part. That is the hard part. There are lots of people who know things, who do things, and who show up to church

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that have not fully surrendered. John is saying if these things have life it's because you have surrendered completely to God.

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Bono tells a story in the book. He says that one time he found himself being prayed over in the office of Senator Jesse Helm.

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Some of you younger folk may not know who Jesse Helms is, but he was a long-time senator from North Carolina, and he's a pretty staunch conservative.

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And in the 90s, again, some of you weren't even alive in the 90s, but if you know history, in the 90s we faced a crisis, a health crisis in our country because of the spread of AIDS. And it was ravaging certain communities and it began to also move into other places internationally. And there was a certain response to this by conservative Christians that was frankly wrong.

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It's not to say that anyone should condone sinful actions, but to completely ignore the suffering of people and not care about them is wrong. And that is something that Jesse Helms did. But he found himself, Bono found himself being prayed for by Jesse Helms because Jesse Helms had surrendered. And what it looked like for him

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As a person who called AIDS the gay disease and had been an opponent of civil rights legislation, what it looked like for him is to have tears in his eyes and publicly repent of the way he had spoken in the past about AIDS and to begin to support Bono's effort, it was called PEPFAR, to send over \$100 billion of taxpayer money toward eliminating and helping people with AIDS in the continent of Africa. It was called the One Camp.

34:00

What does it look like for you to surrender? It probably doesn't look like getting a hundred billion dollars given to something. But I think it looks like a changed life. It looks like realizing that you've maybe been wrong about something. It looks like maybe repenting of a sin that you've been hiding secret. Maybe it looks like melting a cold exterior, a hard exterior, melting away and surrendering to the goodness and the love of God. I don't know exactly what it looks like for you.

34:30

But I know that when it happens, when you have the opportunity, it will be very obvious. And I encourage you to surrender. Let's pray. Thank you for listening to this week's podcast. Please rate and review us on your podcast service and share with anyone who may be interested. The intro and outro music for the New Life podcast is provided by Sandra McCracken with her permission. Please visit her website at sandramcracken.com.

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We'll see you next week.