

## “Have to” or “Want to”

John 15:9-17

Let me begin by sharing a story about Farmer Joe. Farmer Joe had decided that his injuries from a recent accident were serious enough to take the trucking company responsible for the accident to court. In court the trucking company's lawyer began questioning Farmer Joe...Now didn't you say at the scene of the accident that you were fine, asked the lawyer. Farmer Joe responded: "Well, I'll tell you what happened, I had just loaded my favorite mule Bessie into the..." I didn't ask for any details," the lawyer interrupted, "just answer the question. Did you not say at the scene of the accident, I'm fine?"

Farmer Joe started again, " Well, I just got Bessie loaded into the trailer and I was driving down the road..." The lawyer interrupted again and said, "Judge, I am trying to establish the fact that at the scene of the accident, this man told the highway patrolman on the scene that he was fine. Now several weeks after the accident he is trying to sue my client. I believe he is a fraud. Please tell him to simply answer the question."

By this time the judge was fairly interested in Farmer Joe's answer and said to the lawyer,"I'd like to hear what the farmer has to say."

Farmer Joe thanked the judge and then proceeded, " Well, as I was saying, I had just loaded Bessie into the trailer and was driving down the highway when this huge semi truck and trailer ran the stop sign and smacked my truck directly on the side. I was thrown into one ditch and poor Bessie was thrown into the other. I was hurting real bad and didn't want to move. However, I could hear ol' Bessie moaning and groaning. I knew she was in terrible shape just by her groans. Shortly after the accident, a highway patrolman came on the scene. He could hear Bessie moaning and groaning so he went over to her. After he looked at her, he took out his gun and shot her between the eyes. Then the patrolman came across the road with his gun in his hand and looked at me and said, "Your mule was in such bad shape I had to shoot her. Tell me, how are you feeling?" Of course, all I could say was, "I'm fine."

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So how are you feeling today? You know when someone asks us that, sometimes we would just rather not go into the details. And let's be honest. There are times when we ask people the question, how are you feeling, that we hope they just respond, by saying, “I'm fine”. And why is that? Because to go into more detail requires relationship. It requires spending more time with someone, being willing to listen and understand, and develop a relationship.

I am grateful for the privilege of working with an excellent staff who are committed to serving the Lord Jesus Christ and giving themselves in wholehearted devotion to the ministry of the First UMC. At this past week's staff meeting we talked about the importance of working together in team ministry seeking to accomplish the mission of Christ in this community and the world around us. We also talked about the importance of developing our relationships as a staff as we seek to give faithful leadership to our ministry. As we develop those relationships, we also develop trust and the ability to be open with each other, and hold each other accountable to the work God has given us.

The passage in John 15:9-17 describes relationship...what it means to be in a relationship with Jesus Christ. It is more than a casual encounter, it is being in communion with Someone who really cares about you. It is spending time with God through prayer allowing the Holy Spirit to speak to our hearts. And as this relationship with the Lord develops, it is the difference between a “Have to” experience with God and a “Want to” experience or faith. It allows me to see my walk with God as something I want to have and cultivate.

When I was in the 6<sup>th</sup> grade, our class was putting on a play on the story of Tom Sawyer. Somehow I got to be Tom. The only thing I remember was acting out the scene of whitewashing the fence. It's Saturday morning and Aunt Polly sends Tom out to paint the fence. Jim passes by, and Tom tries to get him to do some of the whitewashing in return for one of his special marbles.. Jim almost agrees, but Aunt Polly appears and chases him off, leaving Tom alone with his work.

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A little later, Ben Rogers, another boy Tom’s age walks by. Tom convinces Ben that whitewashing a fence is great pleasure and after some bargaining, Ben agrees to give Tom his apple in exchange for the privilege of working on the fence. Over the course of the day, every boy who passes by ends up staying to whitewash the fence, and each one gives Tom something in exchange. By the time, the fence has been painted with 3 coats, Tom has collected a hoard of miscellaneous treasures. Tom had discovered the value of getting people to do something because they wanted to rather than doing a chore that they were forced to do.

There is a big difference between have to and want to...

You see it all the time in life. How about a student who grudgingly carries out a homework assignment and the student who has found the joy of learning something new because of the inspiration of the teacher.

Or an employee who sees her work as just a job and can’t wait until the week is over, and the employee who has found joy and satisfaction in accomplishing a task.

I think there is a common denominator, a common component in making a change from “have to “ to “want to”. I believe what makes the difference is “relationship”. That when there is a positive quality to the relationship I am in, I no longer feel a so much a sense of obligation, but rather a desire to cultivate that relationship.

When it comes to living our faith, there is a difference between “have to” and “want to”

Today’s passage is about a relationship. Jesus describes it in terms of the relationship he shares within the Trinity. As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you. He describes it in terms of a vineyard. The Father is the gardener, Jesus is the vine, and we are the branches. We see ourselves as connected to the vine in order to have life, and in order to be fruitful. So my obedience to Christ’s commands are not to be seen as following a list of rules and regulations, rather there is a desire placed within our hearts to this relationship with Jesus Christ and

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to do those things he calls us to do...not because we have to, but because we want to. I want to follow Christ's teaching, I want to do those things which are pleasing to God. I want to bear fruit because of the loving relationship I have come to know in Jesus Christ.

So this is how Jesus would describe it: This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you. I do not call you servants any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing, but I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father. Brothers and sisters, that's a special relationship, You are no longer in a servant's position, a “Have to” condition, No you are in the position of friendship, and you serve God because you “want to”

It does make a huge difference when we see our relationship with God in this way. Following Christ's commands are not burdensome, but rather a way to deepen our relationship. And it is then that I can truly bear fruit, because people can tell the difference when you are serving God out of sense of ritual and obligation or if you are serving God out of the sincere desire of your heart. That's when Jesus' words become a reality within us: “ I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be full.

One of our retired United Methodist Bishops, Bishop L. Bevel Jones, said that when he was serving as the Bishop of the Western North Carolina Conference, he had the opportunity to stop by and visit Dr. John Redhead, pastor emeritus of the First Presbyterian Church in Greensboro, NC. Jack Redhead, as his friends, would call him, was 85 years old at the time. Jack had been one of the most influential preachers of his day and Bishop Jones got into a lengthy, intimate chat with Dr. Redhead. During their conversation, the Bishop asked Dr. Redhead this question. Dr. Redhead, what is the summation, the bottom line of your long life of over 60 years in ministry? He paused thoughtfully and then replied: “The satisfaction of doing God's will and enjoying fellowship with Jesus Christ in doing it?” To me, that's so powerful. That's a “want to” kind of faith. Serving God with that kind of passion and heart.

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What a wonderful week of Vacation Bible School we had at our church this past week, Over 200 children, singing, doing recreation, making crafts, watching drama, and learning lessons about living as a follower of Jesus Christ. The lessons centered around the missionary journeys of the apostle Paul and the witness he gave as a devoted disciple.

The apostle Paul is a great example of how having a relationship with God through Christ results in a life of “want to”. Prior to his conversion, Paul persecuted and killed believers, thinking he was serving God. But after he encountered Jesus on the road to Damascus, he immediately devoted the rest of his life to truly serving God by spreading the gospel of Jesus Christ (see [Acts 9:20](#)). Paul describes this transformation in [1 Timothy 1:12–14](#): “I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has given me strength, that he considered me trustworthy, appointing me to his service. Even though I was once a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent man, I was shown mercy because I acted in ignorance and unbelief. The grace of our Lord was poured out on me abundantly, along with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus.” Once Paul became aware of the love and grace that God had given him, his response was to serve God. He was serving God out of the genuine desire of his heart.

This morning I challenge you to think about your relationship with Jesus. To ask God to check the motivation of your heart How do you see your walk with Jesus. Are we saying:

Jesus, I want to serve you. Because of what you have done for me. I want to live for you, not out of duty or force, but a willingness in my heart to be your disciple, to follow you as my guide and friend.

To serve, as the Psalm writer expresses is: the Lord with Gladness, To come into his presence with singing.

When we grasp this understanding of our faith, it changes things. It gives us such a different perspective on life. It frees me from having a legalistic religion to having a living faith. It transforms my life from being barren in my witness, to being a fruitful Christian. “Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing”, Jesus says.

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The more we cultivate our relationship with Jesus Christ, the more fruitful we can be. I am no longer serving God because we feel we “have to”. We are set free to serve, because we “want to”.

To be able to say: What a friend we have in Jesus, all our sins and griefs to bear.  
What a privilege to carry everything to God in prayer.

Or as one of the newer contemporary songs says: I am a Friend of God

Who am I that you are mindful of me  
That you hear me, when I call  
Is it true that you are thinking of me  
How you love me, it's amazing (Who am I Lord)

### CHORUS:

I am a friend of God  
I am a friend of God  
I am a friend of God

I invite you to cultivate that special relationship, God has made possible for you, when He gave us the gift of the Savior. Let it truly be a “want to” experience, wanting to serve Jesus with all your heart.