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NOTE
TO
SELF

THE DISCIPLINE OF
PREACHING TO YOURSELF

JOE THORN

FOREWORD BY SAM STORMS

Note to Self: The Discipline of Preaching to Yourself

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1

LOVE

*For this is the message that you have heard from the beginning,
that we should love one another.*

*We should not be like Cain, who was of the evil one and
murdered his brother.*

*And why did he murder him? Because his own deeds were evil and
his brother's righteous.*

Do not be surprised, brothers, that the world hates you.

*We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love
the brothers. Whoever does not love abides in death.*

*Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no
murderer has eternal life abiding in him.*

*By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought
to lay down our lives for the brothers.*

*But if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need,
yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him?*

*Little children, let us not love in word or talk but
in deed and in truth.*

1 JOHN 3:11-18

Dear Self,

You have found that the command to love can be both inspiring and suffocating. On the one hand, you are made to love and want to love like Jesus. On the other hand, you know your own weaknesses, and the people God calls you to love aren't always the most lovable. But as with all of the commands of

God, you must not only see what God asks of you but also how he has met that need himself in the gospel on your behalf. This is especially true in the case of love.

You must love God and your neighbor, but only one can give birth to the other. Do you recall that the command to love God with all one's heart, mind, soul, and strength was the command that drove Martin Luther to hate God? It was a command that he could not meet, and the righteous standard of God nearly drove him mad. You are like Luther. Love is something beyond your ability as well, yet the command remains.

The reality is that you only love God because he loved you first. He loved you before you were born and chose you for himself. His love for you secured your salvation, and because you have experienced his life-redeeming love you love him in return.

But for love to continue and grow, and for you to love the unlovable, it is important that you meditate on the gospel. Get this—you only know what love really is by looking to your Savior. And we learn it from him continually, not just once. You must daily go to the cross and see your Savior's love for the unlovable (that means you).

You must learn, relearn, and remember your Savior's love and sacrifice for the wicked, the rebellious, the black-hearted—for people like you. And when you see the Holy One's sacrificial love for you, you not only see what love looks like, but also you find strength and power to love like him.

2

REJOICE

Make a joyful noise to the LORD, all the earth!

Serve the LORD with gladness!

Come into his presence with singing!

Know that the LORD, he is God!

*It is he who made us, and we are his;
we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture.*

*Enter his gates with thanksgiving,
and his courts with praise!*

Give thanks to him; bless his name!

*For the LORD is good;
his steadfast love endures forever,
and his faithfulness to all generations.*

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Dear Self,

I know, you see those words and you often ponder them with both longing and frustration. Joy? The way the psalmist describes it often leaves you with the impression that this kind of happiness is not real, but just an amplified expression of what you experience in small, real-life measure. Or you think that it is just a short burst of emotion that arises in a moment of deep worship. But let's be honest, the reason you do not experience the joy you read about in Scripture is because your heart is divided, and your interests are spread thin.

Why the call for joy? Why can all of creation sing and serve its Creator with gladness? Because he really is God. “Know that the LORD, he is God!” At times you have found yourself wondering, “Is this real? God, the Bible, Jesus, Satan, sin, and salvation—is it all real?” You don’t admit that to those around you, but there are times when you question it all. And in his grace God confirms by his Word and Spirit that it is true. He is God! And the reality of your theology gives you joy.

What you believe is not a religious game, or a manmade crutch upon which you lean for a little assistance. Rather it is the divinely revealed truth that makes you who you are and gives you cause to rejoice. You can rejoice not only because he is God, but because we are his people, and as such he protects us and provides for us in all ways necessary for us to know him more fully, enjoy him more deeply, and make him known more widely.

And you can rejoice because his love remains over you now and always. It never dries up, runs low, or fades out. His love endures forever. Because of all this, and so much more, you can know the joy the psalmists describe in their songs. You just need to return to these truths. You need reminding.

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“ The idea of preaching the gospel to ourselves is getting more press these days, but the actual work of preaching to ourselves seems to be slow in coming. We hear the basic concept and think, ‘Of course, I need to do that.’ But where do we start? What does it mean? [And] how do we actually do it? ”

“After reading *Note to Self*, you will not only have Joe’s notes on how to preach to yourself on issues related to God, others, and yourself, but also you will have a model for practicing the discipline on your own.”

Ed Stetzer, President, LifeWay Research

“*Note to Self* is a gospel-guided smart bomb scoring a direct hit on our strongholds of emptiness. But the explosion it detonates is life giving. It clears the way for Christ to enter in with powers of salvation where we really need help.”

Ray Ortlund, Lead Pastor, Immanuel Church, Nashville, Tennessee

JOE THORN is the founding and lead pastor of Redeemer Fellowship in Saint Charles, Illinois. He is an active blogger at JoeThorn.net and has written for *Founders Journal*.

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