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Presentation Transcript
Bare Minimums
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Today our title is *Bare Minimums*.

We all want to pay the least we can when it comes to taxes. That's not the kind of bare minimum I'm talking about. That's a good thing, because we only need to pay what the US tax code requires and no more. It's foolish to pay more, actually. Looking at it another way, we could say that we all want to pay the full amount of our taxes due, so as not to violate the law.

There are many areas of life where minimal effort is the smart thing – just like taxes I mentioned, or maybe, washing dishes. We call it efficiency. We want to wash the dishes completely clean so we don't get sick and so they look nice, but we don't want to take any more time doing it than we need to. So that's good. Be organized, develop a plan, make it go quickly.

Now, I was at Costco the other day and there was a girl gathering up all the shopping carts from the lot and moving them near the door. I was in my car, waiting for Elaine to come out of the store, with nothing else to do, so I was just watching what she was doing. She was in constant motion, but she was moving only a little faster than a turtle. She was putting in the bare minimum of effort to appear active, and I think probably, to retain employment. She looked busy, but any slower and she would have been dead! Now, I think we need to be careful not to judge this girl. She may have just gotten over Covid, or maybe she needed to work to support her elderly mother so she was working sick. We don't have the whole picture, so it's really none of our business. Nevertheless, she was as slow as molasses in January. If she was in good health, it was minimum effort expended. I mean, you've seen people like that, right? Maybe, you yourself get that way. Anytime people are paid by the hour, it seems like they go slower.

Almost everything in life that requires effort has this kind of tension around it, too. What is the most we need to do to finish the job, while requiring the least time and money. But there's one area of life where this bare minimum effort always leads to disaster – no exceptions, no

loopholes. There's no smart way to do the bare minimum in this area of life. I'm pretty sure you know what that is. And that is in our relationship with God and everything connected to it.

If we conduct our relationship with God in such a way as to do the bare minimum, it will be to catastrophic, disastrous, failed results for us. This is serious!

So, conducting our relationship with God, then, requires that we suspend our thinking about doing the least that will satisfy and begin thinking in a whole-hearted way, doing everything we can to please and draw close to God – the kind of effort Jesus put in to live a perfect life and then sacrifice it in a terrible death. That's whole-heartedness. He says that He deserves that same kind of whole-heartedness from us. And those of us who understand what He did for us naturally want to respond in that same whole-hearted way to Him.

Now, this can get a bit tricky. For example, have you ever been too sick to go to church? Would whole-heartedness cause you to go to church, even if you were sick? Or would it keep you from going to church and infecting others? How about being tired? Are we really too tired to go? Or, is it just not important enough? Have you ever been too tired to go to a pre-paid sports event or a concert? It's interesting how things like that show what we're really interested in. Sometimes, rest is a solution to tiredness, but whole-heartedness is a motivator as well.

So, when we suspend a way of thinking, like bare minimums, that is deeply entrenched, it takes some thinking to realign – to get out of that to go another direction. And that's what we're aiming for today – how to conduct our relationship with God without any minimum effort and to be whole-hearted instead. And why are we doing that? Well, this comes about our motives here, for one thing. At LifeResource Ministries, we're invested in the effort to help *you* develop your relationship with God. And since we are a youth-advocacy ministry, we also hope you will use knowledge to model whole-heartedness for all the children and all the adults in your congregation. A healthy congregation is what causes new people and children to thrive.

Let's look at comes scriptures that show us what God wants from us. The first one would be in Psalms 66, verse 20.

Psalms 66:20 – *Blessed be God, because he has not rejected my prayer or removed his steadfast love from me!* God always listens. His attention is always on us. Even when we've fallen short, He's always there for us. He's consistent. His love is unconditional. And it's steadfast – rock solid.

Let's notice another one: John 3:16 – we all know this one.

John 3:16-17 – *For God so loved the world – that word so – that means, how does God love the world? – that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.* It's not just that belief is the only thing. It's that belief leads to faith, and faith leads

to obedience, and obedience is a way to express love toward God. *For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned....* So, that phrase, *God so loved*, is a phrase that explains how much God loves us. And it is in a whole-hearted way – that same way He loves Jesus – *“My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.”* Of course, we have not accomplished as much as Jesus has, so He has preeminence over us and will for eternity. But He has that position because of what He did for us. And that says something about how important we are to God, doesn't it? When God gave up His Son for all of us, He gave the best He had. It was not a bare minimum effort, but all out – His best effort. And the same goes for what Christ did as well.

Now, this next scripture has some hidden meaning in it. It's Deuteronomy 16:17. God told Moses to pass on to the people:

Deuteronomy 16:17 – *Each of you must bring a gift in proportion to the way the LORD your God has blessed you.*

Since God always listens to us, He wants *us* to listen to *Him* and follow Him intently. And He wants us to have the same approach to Him as He has toward us. Since God gives us blessings, He wants us to give to Him in proportion as He has given to us. Now, sometimes, we equate blessings with physical material things. And I think, since we are talking about offerings, that might be a fair way to think about it here. But sometimes, God blesses us with money, and health, and things like that, and then, at other times, we may have lean times. And those are times that God is trying us to prove our faith and to strengthen it. So, if we have a good year, He wants us to give more to Him physically – in offerings. Tithe is always the same. It's always ten percent. But beyond that, there are offerings, and He wants us to increase those if we've been blessed, and then, to cut back a little if not. He doesn't expect us to give what we don't have. So, He wants us to express love to Him to the same degree that He expresses it to us.

There's another scripture that we should look at. It's in Matthew 22:35.

Matthew 22:35-38 – *And one of them, a lawyer – Jesus is talking to a crowd here – asked him a question to test him. Not really interested in the answer – just trying to trip Him up. “Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?” And he said to him, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment.”* It's the first because it's the most important. It's the great! So, love Him with everything you have, the same way I have given up My Son for you – not interested in bare minimums.

Let's look at another one. I found a bunch of scriptures in Psalms 119 that I think are interesting.

Psalms 119:2 – *Blessed are those who keep his testimonies, who seek him with their whole heart.* The law of God is called a lamp to our feet. It's our way to God. It's a tool God uses to perfect

us. So, He wants us to seek Him with our whole heart. And we do that by keeping His testimonies – not half-hearted, not using tiredness as an excuse not to follow God, but with our whole heart.

Psalms 119:34 – He said: *Give me understanding, that I may keep your law and observe it with my whole heart.* So, he wanted to know *how* to do that. He wasn't interested in just a perfunctory experience with the law, but to deeply search it, and then to observe it – even asking God to help expand its meaning in his life.

Psalms 119:69 – *The insolent smear me with lies, but with my whole heart I keep your precepts.*

I heard an interview with Bill Gates once, and they asked him what he felt about God. And he said he didn't have time for such things. But a Christian, with his whole heart, keeps God's precepts, because they know who God is – that He's the Creator.

We're in a post-Christian culture, where most of the people we vote for, or elect, don't believe in the law of God. They just believe that whoever has the most power – and getting that any which way you can – is fair game. It doesn't matter how much you lie, steal, cheat, hurt people. But those people who are strongest – however they got there – are the ones that get to make the rules – not God. So, there is no law anymore. There's no moral equivalency or God factoring into things.

Psalms 119:145 – *With my whole heart I cry – David said – answer me, O LORD! I will keep your statutes.* So, he wanted wholeheartedly to keep God's law and to be connected to God, because he knew that His statutes would do that.

Notice how being wholehearted is related to following God or obeying Him. They don't like to use that word *obey* so much anymore. They talk about *following* or *becoming disciples*. And those are all legitimate terms, but *obey* sounds restrictive to the godless people – or people who interested in bare minimums.

Thinking about obeying God in the spirit, rather than in the letter, how much more effort is needed to obey God's law now than it was back then? Love your neighbor as yourself meant don't steal from him, don't covet his wife. But now, we have to take care of him. So it's much harder. When we say, "Love your neighbor as yourself," it's just an incredible amount of effort – not just refraining from lying. I gave a presentation – or a series – on that recently. Go look it up on liferesource.org, if you'd like. So, "Give everything you have to the poor and follow Me," Jesus said to this one young man. Do you remember that incident? "Give everything you have to the poor and follow Me." Does that sound like a half-hearted minimum kind of commitment to you? No!

Psalms 119:10 – here's another one:

Psalms 119:10 – *With my whole heart I seek you; let me not wander from your commandments!* Do we ever do that?

I heard about an example that was good. I'm not putting anybody down for this. I've made similar mistakes in my own life, so I don't have any room to throw rocks. A friend told me about some people who he knew in the church that were near him. They were going to get together for holy days. And one group of them said that they were going to combine the Passover service and the Night to Be Remembered into one event, and that would be held on the First Day of Unleavened Bread in the evening. (So, the evening after Passover day ended.) And their reasoning was that they were both about the same thing and the same holy day, so why not? It would just make everything so much easier for everybody. It would require *less* effort. Maybe they were totally depleted and exhausted. There were too many elderly people to make the drive. We don't know the whole story, so we're not going to judge. But, they were wandering away from what God, in the New Testament, clearly tells us to do. Let's read it, so that there is no mistaking, and also, if new people are listening, this will be sort of a heads up on what the New Testament says about the same Passover Jesus kept. When He kept it the night before, on the evening part of the 14th day – remember, the day always starts with sundown the night before – the calendar day. It was the nighttime after the 13th was ended, and the 14th was the next day. So he said:

1 Corinthians 11:23-26 – *For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you – so that's kind of a backwards way of thinking about it. He delivered to them what he received from the Lord – that the Lord Jesus – here's what was delivered to him – on the night when He was betrayed – when was He betrayed? Well, He was betrayed in the evening part of the 14th, before the Jewish celebration of the Passover the next day – on Passover day, the 14th – took bread, and when He had given thanks, He broke it, and said, "This is My body, which is for you. Do this in remembrance of Me." How often does Passover come? Yeah, once a year. So, how often would they do it? Once a year. In the same way, also, He took the cup, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me." You say, "Well, isn't that kind of thin evidence?" Well, there's no clear command to do it at any other time. He tells us when He did. It was the night before – the night He was taken. Okay? For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup – that is, once a year – you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.*

Now, in the context of that time, Israel observed the Passover, which included the killing of the lambs, on the 14th of Nisan, during the daylight portion. So, when they got together the night before – in the nighttime portion of the 14th – the disciples were in new territory. All their lives they had celebrated it the next day in the daytime part. And that evening, after Passover was over and the First Day of Unleavened Bread was beginning – which is a seven-day festival, the day of which is a Sabbath and the last day which is a Sabbath – they came together for a dinner. Today we call it a *Seder*. Now, they may have called it that back then, too, but it was a meal of

celebration. In the Bible, I think, in the Old Testament, it was called the Night To Be Observed, or a Night To Be Much Remembered, because that night signified leaving Egypt. They had come out of sin. Egypt was a type of sin. They left without leavening. Leavening pictured sin in the metaphor. So, for us today, it pictures beginning a sin-free life.

Paul tells us that the night Jesus took the bread and the wine was the night *before* – the beginning of the 14th. He says it clearly. There's no way to combine these two observances. They were different. So, like the Psalm mentions, my friend's friends were wandering. How did that happen. Had they, out of the bare minimum for Bible study lost track of the truth? I suppose it's easy enough to do. I know I've forgotten things and had to learn them over again. Or, had they wandered from the biblical truth that God is the One who decides how He's to be worshipped and not us? I don't know the answer to that for them. But, I do know that we are told that the word of God is sharper than any two-edged sword and can divide the intents and the thoughts of the heart, as well as to point us to how God wants us to worship Him – which is in spirit – directed by the Holy Spirit, that is, which is the Spirit of the love of God – and it says, and in truth – which we are told in the Bible. So, while I don't know why they did that, God does. So, not judging – because all of us have at least, at one time or another, opted out of doing what God tells us to do – out of convenience or that bare minimal thinking, because it wasn't convenient, but the situation is a good study on what it takes to love God with our whole hearts, rather than going with the bare minimum.

Now, sometimes, looking at how God sees our relationship with Him, helps us to understand our relationship with Him more. For example, think about your marriage, if you're married, or if you have parents who are married – you can think about *their* relationship. Notice what God tells us about that in Ephesians 5:22.

Ephesians 5:22-25, 27-30 – *Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord.* Now, later on in this chapter, Paul says that he's speaking about a mystery when he talks about this topic. He says that it's really that a marriage pictures the relationship between Christ and the church. So, it could as well be saying, "Church, submit yourself to Christ, because He's the Lord." *For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior. Now as the church – this is verse 24 – submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands.* So, it goes two ways. Now, we don't often look at it this way, but this scripture is telling us that God wants us to follow Him and to submit in *everything* – wholeheartedly. And then in Ephesians 5, and verse 25, it says, *Husbands, love your wives, as – or in the same way that – Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her – so sacrificial love for our wives. In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies.* Wow! Two are one flesh. *He who loves his wife loves himself.* Now, think about that a minute. If a man loves his wife as much as he love himself, then he cares just as much about what she wants to do and what she think about any given issue as he's concerned about his own thoughts on it. So, if he loves her that way, then he's going to include her in all decision making, isn't he? I think so. *For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the*

church, because we are members of his body. So, how did God love the church? Wholeheartedly! And how does Christ love the church? Wholeheartedly! And how does He want us to love our mates? Wholeheartedly!

Now, think about this: If your mate put in the bare minimum into your marriage, what would you conclude from that? What if football came before you? Or, cars? Or, golf? Or, whatever? It would feel like they didn't really love you. Of course, the same could go back the other way, too. Wouldn't you, if you wholeheartedly loved your mate, and they liked golf, wouldn't you want them to be able to play golf? Yeah, you would. But you'd want them to love you more and to show by what was important to them.

So, you know how that some things people tell you, you just stick in your mind? I was talking to a woman one day a long time ago. She was in my counseling office. She was depressed. We had isolated the cause of it as thinking she wasn't good enough – one of those lies we believe. She told me about a time when she was seven years old. She was lying on the couch in the living room, watching the rest of her family who were watching TV. She had a terrible, terrible earache. Her parents knew about it, but were making no effort to take care of her. She said to me, "I knew they could do something." So she's only seven and she knows this. "They could have taken me to the doctor," she said, "but I knew they were not going to, because they never did. They just didn't care enough about me." Yeah, they were too busy. Or, they didn't her as valuable as they needed to think of her. Didn't care enough about her to take care of her. They were doing the bare minimum.

So, if we find ourselves that way with God, what can we do? I mean, if we'd rather go watch TV rather than observing the Night To Be Much Remembered, what do we do about that? Well, there are things that God tells us we can do. He knows we're like this. He knows we wander. So, He's given us some things to help us.

In Revelation 2:3, He's talking to a group of people – a congregation of the church – who were in Asia Minor. I think this is Sardis, and He said:

Revelation 2:3-5 – *I know you are enduring patiently and bearing up for my name's sake, and you have not grown weary.* So they had energy. They weren't exhausted spiritually. They had endured a lot – they'd put up with a lot – probably been persecuted a lot. *But I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first. Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent, and do the works you did at first.* So, what does He say? Remember! Think back and remember what it was like for you when you were first called and how far you've fallen from that. *Repent, and do the works you did at first. If not, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place, unless you repent.*

So, these people were all from the same congregation. That's an interesting thought, isn't it? They'd been hanging in there together for a long time and notice that they all still had energy. They were not so worried that they couldn't do what God wanted, but they had lost their *zeal* to

do it. Now, how did they do that as a group? Well, people tend to group think a lot. So, who you go to church with is really important. What kind of congregation you're a part of is really important. But they were doing the bare minimum instead of being excited about their calling. And God tells them to repent and go back to do what they did in the beginning.

Have you ever fallen in love with someone? Maybe you were a teen at the time? What happens? Well, you can't stop thinking about them. Every phone call from them is of vital importance. Every chance you get to be with them is hugely exciting and everything else becomes lower priority than that. Now, if you marry that person you were excited about, as the relationship ages, our nervous systems can't stay in that highly attuned state for long, so things start to get back to normal. And we still love the person, but it's not as exciting as it was in the beginning. If we love God – if He is the most important relationship in our life – being excited about His stuff comes along with loving Him automatically. But as time passes, we can lose our excitement for it. Our excitement about it is what draws other people to it, because people are looking for that.

So, God told this congregation to get back to that! What are the implications of that? Well, I think there are a couple big ones. One, it's a choice! You don't have to be lethargic. You can *choose* to be excited. We're not stuck in concrete. And changing, and going back to the way it was, is only a thought away. Two, He wouldn't ask them to do something they didn't have enough time to do. So, they would've had time to do it – never too busy, always ready to answer the phone call from our girlfriend or our boyfriend. So, it's a matter of prioritization. Are we going to put God at the top or down the list into the bare minimum category?

There's an interesting account in John 2 of something Jesus did and what it reminded the disciples of. In John 2:14, it says:

John 2:14-17 – *In the temple he found those who were selling oxen and sheep and pigeons, and the money-changers sitting there. And making a whip of cords – so that took some time, right? This wasn't just going off on somebody. It was a planned thing – he drove them all out of the temple with that whip, along with the sheep and oxen. So, it's talking about smacking those in the temple. And he poured out the coins of the money-changers and overturned their tables. And he told those who sold the pigeons, "Take these things away; do not make my Father's house a house of trade." His disciples remembered that it was written, "Zeal for your house will consume me."* It was shocking to them. They saw how fired up He was and it surprised them. Most of the time He was gentle and polite and kind, but every now and then, when His powerful feelings for God were present, it seemed to just burst out of Him!

Now, I mentioned earlier that, if our mate only does the bare minimum, it causes us to think they don't care. God is the same way! He dares not give us eternal life if we don't care. He doesn't need another devil somewhere down the road, so He's going to make sure that we really want it. And being fully engaged is the way He tests us. He looks at our level of engagement. So, that doesn't mean that, if you're stuck in lethargy right now, that's the end of it. You have a choice to

make. God's Spirit will guide you to it. And, in the meantime, you're going to be forgiven for the sin of lethargy, but God is *not* going to stop working on you about that issue! He's got a plan for you. It's called *sanctification*, and it is a process, not an event. So, if you're lethargic, and you want to get out of that, realize it's coming for you.

So, our relationship with God touches everything else in our life. That's true for how much we put into preparing a sermon, or how we treat our children, or how we treat our mate, or how much we value God's instruction. While I was preparing this presentation, I thought about what I would say at the end to summarize it. And since we're there, here it is: When something is the most important thing in our lives, the saying, "That's good enough," actually means, "That's our very best."

This is Bill Jacobs for LifeResource Ministries, serving children, families and the Church of God.