



## **Learning to Lead – Part 6**

### **More than a Task**

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We're here to study the word right now. And in it we find all kinds of things that God tells us that we're supposed to know, things we're supposed to believe and of course, there's a large part of the Scripture that tells us what we're supposed to do. And when it comes to that doing part there are always motives that can drive us to do those things that God says. We can be driven just by the basic fact that God told us to do them, which would make perfect, logical sense. You ought to do what God said. He's God. You're not. You're his child if you're a Christian. And so you should do what our Father says to do. And that's right. And it's good. And sometimes we call that duty. And sometimes duty gets us out of bed to do the things we got to do, whatever it might be. And that's not a bad thing.

But if you've been in church long enough you've heard people talk that there's a higher motive, a better motive, a more pious motive than just doing things out of duty because God said to do it. You could do it because you love God. And that certainly would be preferred and it'd be good for us to say we are, as the Bible says in First John, if we love God we'll "keep his commandments." We'll do what he says. Well, we've been studying in Acts Chapter 20, as you see there on your bulletin, this series that I have entitled Learning to Lead because here is a passage about Paul talking to leaders in the church. And in a sense we're all called to lead, lead in some way to help other people grow in Christ, be more godly, to help them along in their Christian life. And so we are supposed to, as we say around here, not just have your chairs side-by-side to attend church, not just having your chairs face-to-face to connect with people in the church, but at some point you've got to get out of the chair and be a good steward of what God has invested in you to serve, to serve in some way.

And all of us should have some service in our church in which we are saying, here I'm utilizing what God has invested in me to benefit the church, as it says in First Corinthians Chapter 12, for the "common good," 12:7, for the common good. I got to do something as God invests in me to help my body of Christ, my Christian church. And you can do that because God says to do it and you can serve out of duty. And that's not a bad thing because sometimes that's what we need to remember. And then there are times when we need to be more godly in our thinking and say, well, we're doing this because we love God. There's the duty motive and there's the piety motive.

But there's a third motive that I think is critically important, and it's one that we run into here in the last three verses of Acts Chapter 20. And Paul is just demonstrating this. We see it by what we observe in these verses. You can see how that third motive is going to change the way we do our work. Matter of fact, we'll go from duty to piety to something that is beautiful because work that is done with the motive that's here in these last three verses, at least as demonstrated by what's going on here, it will change everything about why you get out of your chair, why you're going to serve, why you're going to step up to volunteer to do something, to help someone, to Partner someone in our discipleship program, to host a Home Fellowship Group in your home, to have a ministry post at your sub-congregation here in the church.



These things will help you do your job even better. I'm not saying it's one motive to the exclusion of the others, but it's not enough to have a duty or a pious reason to love God in your work. You've got to also have this third motive.

Let me just read it for you and I'd like you to follow along. Your birthday gift to me is for you to open your Bibles and look in the text. That's all I ask. The occasional chocolate cake would be good, too, (audience laughing) but just reading in your Bible would be awesome. So look at these last three verses, Acts Chapter 20. And you saw in verse 35 there you might remember he ends with a quotation from Jesus that "it is more blessed to give than to receive." And certainly he wants them to be givers, givers of their time and their resources and their talents to make a difference in the church as he's going to send them back from Miletus where he is, this port city, back to Ephesus, to continue to work.

Now he's going to leave because God has called him to go back to Jerusalem and it's going to be a kind of departure that really has a clear feeling to it. And so let's look at this and just get a sense of it. If I were to give you a quiz, like, what is the tone of this text? As Luke then moves from his final line of his farewell speech to what he describes here, I don't think it'd be hard for you to accurately depict what's happening here. Verse 36, "And when he," Paul, "had said these things, he knelt down and he prayed with them all. And there was much weeping on the part of all; they embraced Paul and kissed him, being sorrowful most of all because of the word that he had spoken, that they would not see his face again. And they accompanied him to the ship."

So he's leaving. But there's so much emotion here that's spilling over. And even though he'd talked about the difficulties of serving other people, he talked about the wolves that would come in among them, the thing that they were brought to tears over, the thing they were crying about the most was that they weren't going to have Paul there anymore. Paul had been there serving and teaching in that church for three years plus. They're just torn up over the fact that he's not going to be there anymore.

That certainly speaks to a kind of emotional connection that Paul had with these Ephesian church leaders and that they had with him. And that's an indication of a motive that I've just got to underscore for our time together this morning that needs to be a part of our varied motives in doing what we do. This has to be. You can't do what God has asked you to do in occupying a ministry post in the church and doing something for the Lord in our congregation if you don't have this third motive. Which you could clearly summarize I suppose in one word, it seems like they loved each other. There's certainly love here among these people.

And if I were to make you imagine a gal who's got kids and she's going back into the kitchen again and it's 5:00 and she's going to cook this dinner and her husband is going to come from work and she's there just slaving away in the kitchen. And if I said, "Why are you doing that, Christian woman?" If she said, "Well, I'm doing it because this is what God told me to do, this is what I'm supposed to do. This is the instructions of God and me being that Proverbs 31 woman." You'd say, well, yeah, okay, the duty is driving her to do it. But then if she said, "But



more than that, I'm doing it because I'm a Christian, I love God. And because I love God, I'm doing what God said because I'm doing it out of love for God." You'd say, well, that's pious.

But what you would hope that would make this even more of a beautiful scene in your imagination is if she could say to you, "And also, I just want to make it clear, I love my family. I just love them. And I'm willing to make this a labor of love because I care for them." And you say, okay, now that's the trifecta of motivations. And I just want us to make sure that whatever we're doing in this church has the beauty of that kind of motive. And I frankly need to tell you that's just not what is common in churches today. And while we've tasted it, as Paul said, and I can say that because we have a church that I'm very proud of, and I think you are doing a great job at what God calls us to do and I feel and sense that there's a lot of love in our church for one another, I just would tell you what Paul said to the Thessalonians, I need us to excel even more and I need it to be a conscious part of our motivation for doing what we do. Okay?

So let's look at this first verse, and I want to start with a bit of a theological foundation with a very simple observation from what's being said in verse 36. So after he is all done with this what did they do? The thing that he does there is to pray with them. He prays with them all. Right? And to do that he kneels down. Now kneeling down, that word kneeling down, I don't know how often you kneel in your praying, but the kneeling in praying is certainly a reflection of our submission to God. It's the word that even in the Hebrew Old Testament is translating the word "Barak" in Hebrew, which is the word that is often translated "to bless." But it's the concept of worshiping God and recognizing God's greatness and to do it in the posture of kneeling. At least that's where the word comes from, to kneel down.

And in a sense, that's what is the goal of every evangelistic conversation. We even sometimes summarize it that way. I'm hoping that this guy will "bow the knee to Christ." Do you ever use that idiom? I want to bow the knee to Christ. And the point is I want them to see that God is God and that they need him and that they need to trust in his redemptive plan because no one's going to come to the Father except through Christ. And so we want them to trust in Christ for the forgiveness of sins and to be rightly related to the Father. Second Corinthians 5 calls that reconciliation. We want them to be reconciled to God so that God is God now rightly related to this person. We want them to bow the knee to Christ and to worship God. Or to pray to God in a sense is just recognizing that we're bowing and saying, you are the provider, you are the one we are to thank for when we have provision. You're the one, like in this context, we look to when we want something done in protection maybe, or the safekeeping of the people who we're parting with. We all look to God and together you can see them bowing down in this situation to pray as their last thing that they say, it is the last thing before they part they're going to pray together.

Which certainly reflects the theological thing that draws us together. And by the way, the Bible's very clear the world at large does not recognize God. They do not acknowledge God nor give him thanks, even though there's enough knowledge about God in conscience and creation, to quote Romans Chapter 1, for everyone to give thanks to God. But they don't give thanks to God because the way is really wide, the gate is really big, and that gate is occupied



by many people who enter by that gate that leads to destruction. And yet there's a narrow gate, a little flock, as Jesus called it, that's on this path that's going to go through that small gate, and there are few of those who find it.

So in the population, let's just think of the 3.4 million people in Orange County. How many people are gathered together in churches this morning saying, we know that God is our God/ We know that all good things come from him. We entrust our souls to him, our lives to him. We pray for his provision and his good. We pray for our daily bread. We pray that God would keep us and guide us. And we look to him. We kneel to God. We recognize him as God. Well, that's a small number. And the little pockets of people who do that, those we would call churches, Christian churches where people gather together and the reason that they're gathered together, the thing that brings them together is that they all together say, "I'm no longer going to ignore God. I'm not turned over anymore to my own foolish devices. I'm now seeing that I need God, and it's only found through Christ. I trust in him. So we're all related to Christ."

Well, when that happens that brings us together, not because of an interest in a hobby or not because of our social aspirations or not because of our income level or our career. We're brought together not by any of that. We're brought together because we all see Christ as the head of it all. He is the Lord. To quote again, First Corinthians Chapter 12, it is by the Spirit that we're able to say Jesus is Lord, he's in charge. As Paul said to the Ephesians "we want to grow up into him who is the head." He's in charge. And being the head, here's the natural flow of logic here, then that makes us, if we're joined together to the head like a nervous system to a brain, we're all connected together through that head because we all seek him. We all bow to him.

One day, even as people plop through the big gate that leads to destruction the Bible's clear and Philippians 2, "every knee will bow ... and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord." He's the king. So one day when it's too late for redemption they're going to acknowledge that. They're going to meet their maker and they're going to meet their God and they will kneel. But the thing that distinguishes us is that we kneel now, in your posture, not in your posture. It's not about posture. It's about the reality that their posture in this text is reflecting their heart of deference to the king. All of these people together who love each other so much are brought together because they see their common commitment to God and their common trust in Christ the Lord. And when that analogy starts to sink in in all the discussions in the New Testament, it naturally flows into, hey, the body ought to be taking care of itself. The people in the body should care because they're in the same body.

So turn with me to First Corinthians Chapter 12 and what I want to be motivated by, once you get there, I want your number one on your outline to "Be Motivated by Our Common Bond." And the common bond is you and I every day pray to God, you and I every day kneel to God. In some sense, we're deferring to God. We trust in God. We pursue God. We want to be like Christ. That's the reason we're here together. Unless you're visiting or you wandered in off the street, you're saying I go to a Christian church because I trust in Christ and I want to be reconciled to God. I want to grow in my faith. I am related to God. And that then makes us sit



side-by-side in church. And what the Bible would always say, you know what that makes you guys then? Parts of the same body, you're part of the same organization, your connection to one another is just naturally brought together and you are connected in this organic, spiritually organic way. And therefore, you ought to care for each other like a body cares for itself.

I broke my toe, health update on Pastor Mike, last Sunday. That was fun. My little toe. It produces big pain, by the way, I realized. And it's swelled up and it got black and blue and all of that. And here's something really interesting about my body, even though it was just my little toe. My whole body had a great sympathy and interest in the pain in my toe. Every part of my body responded. My stomach responded. My mouth responded. My eyes responded. The wrists of my hands responded between services because I did it, of course, before I preached in the morning. That was fun. And between service, I put my foot up and I'm here now doing all these things with the rest of my body to care for this black and blue little toe on my foot.

I could have said, "Well, it's not a big deal, it's just my little toe. Just keep plowing." Well, I couldn't just plow even though I got through my responsibilities. Trust me, I was keeping the weight off of my right foot because my right foot was throbbing through my dress shoe last Sunday and I was in pain and my body was in pain and I was aching and in pain all over my body. In my head. I was taking, you know, ibuprofen in my mouth to try and keep my foot from throbbing, every part of my body got involved.

And that's the picture of us being connected if we all are committed in a particular locale like they were in Corinth, all of us saying we want to relate to God, we want to relate to God through Christ and therefore we're devoted to him. And if we're devoted to him, that makes us connected with each other. And that's a theological foundation for the fellowship of us with one another in the church. And that just is the beginning of what's going to help us get to the place where we serve, not out of duty or piety alone, but we serve out of the fact that there's genuine love and care among us.

So let's look at this text. Let's start in verse 12 of First Corinthians Chapter 12, First Corinthians 12:12, and let's look at this text and just make some basic observations here about a text that I'm sure you're familiar with. Verse 12. "For just as the body is one," it's a whole, it's a whole complete composite. It "has many members," many parts. That's what the word members means. It's just the parts of the body, it has many parts to it. And your little toe is just a really small part of it. Right? All the members. Right? "And all the members of the body, though there are many, they're one body." They're all connected. And "so it is with Christ."

Here's the analogy. Here's the picture. Here's the illustration all of us. "For in one Spirit we were all "Baptizo," we were all placed "into one body." When you and I put our trust in Christ, we were drawn by the Spirit of God to be convicted of our sin, to be led to repentance and faith. The minute that happened in the particular location that you were in, if you lived in this area and you associated then with the church and maybe you were led to Christ by someone



in the church, you were immediately by that Spirit placed into that body. You became an organic part, a spiritually organic part of that group.

Some say, "Well, I don't have the same background as a lot of those people in the church." It doesn't matter, "Jews or Greeks." That's the biggest kind of cultural distinction you could have had in the first century in a place like Greece, where they were in Corinth. That distinction was big. It was a distinction that would involve what you dressed like, what you looked like, how you wore your hair, what kind of food you ate. Right? These are the customs of a particular culture and here are the customs of a Greco-Roman culture. And it didn't matter. But we were all now put into one body, "whether slaves or free."

Think about it. In the socioeconomic strata of a Greco-Roman world, you could be conscripted into a family to be a particular servant in that, or you could be one who is free and you don't have any of that. Actually, you don't need to conscript yourself because you're financially well-off. It doesn't matter what your socioeconomic strata is. "Jews or Greek, slaves or free. We were all made to drink of one Spirit." We all now imbibed in the same Spirit to become rightly related to the Father. The Spirit of God drew us through conviction to trust in Christ, and that made us reconciled with the Father. And now guess what? Whether you wanted to or not, this is your family, this is your body. This is your organic connection to a group of people.

And this is more than you, you need to recognize this, just having a similar interest in theology. This is about a real commitment that God says happens because God is related to us in a profound relational way and because I'm profoundly related to God and you're profoundly related to God. And we are together in the same local meeting, in the same organization called the Church, in our case Compass Bible Church, then we are organically connected.

And the body, as he goes on to say, even though it doesn't consist of one type of member-only, you can't just dismiss a part of it because it's not like you or it doesn't have the same function in the body as you. There should be to drop down to some of the punchline of this text. Look down to verse 24, in the middle of that verse, it starts a new sentence. "But God has so composed the body giving greater honor to the parts that lacked it." Because in this particular text, even if you think it's not an essential part, it is an essential part, even it has a small role to play. It's not a visible role on a platform, let's say.

And, verse 25, "that there may be no distinction," that's the point in the body, "but that the members have the same," now here's the concern, "the same care for one another." They ought to care for each other, just like my hand cares for my toe or my mouth cares for my toe or my brain sends signals to other parts of my body to care for my toe. Why? Because we are going to care about each other. "If one member suffers," one part suffers, "all the parts are going to suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together."

This is a connection where all of a sudden, because I'm looking up to my relationship with God, I've got to recognize this is not a solo, individual, isolated relationship. I immediately become a part of a team of people, a body of people. That analogy of head and body, we just



need to say, okay, that's why we have a connection with one another. If this is the place we go to learn and to be taught and we're connected here in fellowship, it is all really about our theological and personal relational connection to the living God, and that makes us a church. And being a church, a called-out group of people in this locale, we need to see that what God is expecting is a mutual care for each other.

Now he's made distinctions about a nose and a mouth and ears and all that. He's making those distinctions because the problem in Corinth was they were taking certain gifts within the church, certain roles of ministry within the church, people who got out of their chair to serve in the church saying, well, that one is really important. And we started to have this dismissing of the lower interest gifts, and then we started having an exalting of particular kinds of gifts to where there wasn't a mutual concern. And so then he goes to talk about the fact and he admits by the bottom of this chapter there is a distinction in the sense that some gifts become more critically important to the functioning of the church. There's no doubt about that. But every part ought to have mutual concern and what needs to happen, frankly, Chapter 13, look at it now in Chapter 13 of this argument, you better have that third motive involved. There better be love.

As a matter of fact, you can have some of the showier gifts in the first century, which were the miraculous gifts of being able to go evangelistically and speak whatever language the receptor people needed to hear even though you hadn't studied it in school, you could speak the languages of men and you could speak all the languages that the angels know. Which does not mean they have their special language. It means they are dispatched to any place on the earth if God so chooses, they can understand any language. Even if you had that and you do not love, which, by the way, glance down to verses 4 through 7, we're not talking about vertical love with God. We're talking about the kind of love with people that might lead me to be impatient or unkind or to envy or to boast or to be arrogant or rude, which is the whole concern of the church in Corinth, they were being all of that. "Insisting on my own way; being irritable or resentful; rejoicing in wrongdoing, or rejoicing with the truth" if I understand what love is.

"Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things." We're talking about love for each other. And he says, "If I have not love," verse 1, then even your most interesting, miraculous gift is, "noisy gong clanging." "If I have all prophetic powers," which he just said in the end of Chapter 12 that that's an important gift. We should desire those critical gifts of having a preacher stand up in the first century preaching New Testament truths. They didn't have a New Testament. They weren't called teachers. Those were called prophets. And until the New Testament was written we relied on the prophets to teach us New Testament christological truths and to present those to the Church.

"Even if I had those prophetic powers" to tap into that New Covenant truth without a New Testament, "I could understand all mysteries, all knowledge, if I had all faith," my relationship with God vertically was so pious and my knowledge was so good I could just get up and be the best apologist or expositor in the world, "so as to remove mountains," my faith was so big,



"but if I don't love, I am nothing." If you do not love the people you're serving, God says no commendation for that. There's no applause for that. God is not impressed with that.

"Oh, if I give all that I have," I could take everything I have, dump it into the needs of the building project of the church, send money to plant a brand new church in North Texas. I could fund it, I could write it myself, even if I was so sacrificial to give all of my income to something, some ministry in the church, "if I delivered my body" and said, you know there's persecution going on, I will volunteer to be on the front lines and even if they "burn me at the stake." Even if you did all of that because you are dutiful or pious "and you don't love" if you don't have the third motive and "gain nothing."

The ministry context of what we're reading here in First Corinthians 12 of simply recognizing that if we all kneel before God, we all pray to God, we see our relationship with God vertically we then become members of the same body. I'm different than the person here, and you're different than the person there. But all of us together should have mutual concern because we're all a part of the same thing here, because we're all growing up into Christ who is the head, then here's the deal, you better love those people.

When we get around to looking at all the doing in commands that God says, that requires you to get out of your chair and have a ministry post. If you're supposed to lead, if you're supposed to disciple, if you're supposed to host a Home Fellowship Group in your house, if you're supposed to lead in some part of our church, if you're supposed to serve in Awana or be a youth intern in our church and help those teenagers follow Christ, if you don't do it out of love, if it's not more than just duty and piety, then you are nothing. God is not applauding.

So we've got to see what the requirement is within this connection we have with God that makes us a family here. And I want to drive that point home in the next verse, verse 37, go back to our passage. We become more than just connected. There's got to be a kind of love that changes our relationship with one another. And it changes our relationship with one another to where there is freedom even to express ourselves the way these people who did not grow up in the same family and they do not live under the same roof, how they relate to each other. And how is that?

Let's look at our passage in verse 37. Here they are saying goodbye in Miletus "and there was much weeping on the part of all." So all these guys are crying. Do you like crying in front of people, by the way, at work, breaking down at work at three in the afternoon on Thursday? Do you feel good about that? Everybody walks by your cube like, "Hey, wow, what's going on?" "I'm just crying." No, that's not good. You don't feel good about that. You are uncomfortable doing that because it's a vulnerable thing. You're going to try and keep your emotions in check. Right? Or what's next here? "They embraced Paul and kissed him." The affection of that kind of connection between people you usually see that reserved for family relationships. You usually see the vulnerability of who's seen you cry the most are people within your family.





The things that happen within the home, within a family, that kind of utilizes that freedom, that vulnerability of lowering the wall to say, well, I don't like crying in front of anybody, but if I'm going to cry in front of others, I'd rather cry in front of my family. I mean, the expressions of affection, that's a kind of a familial thing within a family. And I just want to take it one step further. If I am in a particular geographic location with other people who say that we all defer to God as our king, I'm not only just kind of connected with them on an org chart. It's not just that I am because of this analogy, spiritually organically connected to them, but I am supposed to now love them with a kind of mutual care that goes beyond just caring for people in my neighborhood. I now must see them as my family.

Which by the way, is the number one word in the New Testament for describing Christians. Do you know what it is? Brothers. We are brothers in Christ. We are together as siblings in Christ. He is our Father and we are his children and therefore we are siblings. The number one word used to describe the people of God. That we are the kinds of people who have the freedom to be ourselves with one another, to let the walls down and be authentic and to care for one another in such a way that you would see family members caring for each other. That you'd see vulnerability and even pain being expressed in the way that you normally only see in a family context. This is important for us to catch.

We need to be devoted to one another with the kind of care that a body would have, the members of a body. That's an analogy. I'll put it this way, number two, we need to be devoted like you would see members of a family being devoted. Number two, "Be Devoted Like a Family." And that is where it's more than just trying to make people feel welcome at church. When you become a part of this church what we are saying is, if you are a Christian, we now become family. The mutual concern, it's going to bleed into the kinds of things that we do with one another that you would see happening within the members of a family, a biological family.

Just to speak of the affection here for a second, go to First Thessalonians Chapter 2. Everything we've talked about so far can but can rightly be summarized in one verse, First Thessalonians Chapter 2, drop down to verse 8. See how this works. The fuel for you getting out of your chair and serving beautifully in a church is motivated by this. Having this kind of brotherly affection, which, by the way, is a command in Romans Chapter 12 verse 10, "You are to love one another with a brotherly affection." We'll look at how that drives ministry. Look at how when there's an announcement that we need people for Awana or we need people for this, it immediately rushes people to the front because there's no question I'm ready to serve. Right? I'll stay the extra hour. I'll go the extra mile. I'll spend the extra dollar if there's a need in my family.

Verse 8, "So, being affectionately," Paul says to the Thessalonians, "to be so being affectionately desirous of you, we were ready to share with you not only the gospel of God." Check. That would be a duty, that would be a task, that would be even piety. But we're sharing everything beyond that, "even our own lives ourselves." Why? Because we are godly. No, because we are pious. No, because this is our duty. No. "Because you have become so very dear to us." That picture of a kind of brotherly affection, a love of saying, I'm going to serve because I love them like a mom fixing a meal or mopping a floor or picking up after a



kid or changing a diaper and saying these things are done not just because it's a duty, not because what Christian women are supposed to do, it is the thing that I am doing because I love these people.

When a dad goes and does the hard things that need to be done for a family, it's not just because you have to. It's not because it's what Christians do. It's because you love your family. If we don't get to that place within the walls of the church, then here's the threat of Romans Chapter 13, which is not a wedding reception embossing-on-napkin type of verse, you understand. It is that I am supposed to love. And if I don't love my service in the church isn't what it's supposed to be. So I'm just trying to move us from duty. I'm trying to move us to the place where, like the Apostle Paul, we're treating each other like family members. And we have to have this connection, this affection. That's the word that translates words that relate to in the New Testament the kinds of relationships and loves you would have within a family.

And if you say, well, I can't command myself to love people like a family in my small group. And I'm saying, I understand that it's hard for us to look at any command in Scripture that really affects our emotions and to say, well, I'm just going to tell myself to feel that way. I do want you to feel a particular way about the people in your church. I'm just saying this, I know that you can't just say, well, bam, I'm going to do it. I get that. But there is something you can do. And Paul has spoken of this often in the book of First Corinthians and Second Corinthians, in particular, Second Corinthians. I'd like you to turn there as he turns his attention toward defending himself from all the criticism that the Corinthians Christians are hearing about himself.

Second Corinthians Chapter 7. Let's start there. Second Corinthians Chapter 7. The people are hearing complaints about Paul because frankly, there are a lot of egotistical people trying to get the devotion of the Corinthians Christians and dividing up the church. And Paul is having to make a defense and he's saying, you're not treating me like family here to put it in terms of our sermon. Look what he says in verse 2. This is a command to them. Now, it's going to relate to feelings, but really it is an analogy that I think we can lock on to because it's used so often in the Scripture. And maybe it's the kind of thing you can say this is what I got to do. I've got to make this decision. Okay. Verse 2, "Make room in your hearts for us."

Now, if you just think about that phrase and think through the Scripture you can find examples like in First John Chapter 3 verses 16 and 17. When I see someone in my church in need, I've got a decision that I can make. It says, "If you close your heart up against them," right? And I just say things like, "Oh, be warmed and be filled," right? I'm not loving them. And you cannot say really that you're pious if you don't love them because to love God is to love my brothers. And if they have a need, I'm going to meet that need and I'm not going to close my heart. So I know it's an analogy, but I want you to think of your heart as the interior part of what does show your loyalty and the things that do where you experience affection and care and love. And I want you to say, okay, I'm going to look at my heart and I'm going to say things like this. I want to make sure I'm making room for people in my heart. I'm going to open my heart to these people.



That's a vulnerable phrase. I understand that. And Paul's going to get defensive here about what he has not done. "I haven't wronged anyone," middle of verse 2, "I haven't corrupted anyone, I haven't taken advantage of no one." I know that's what my critics are saying. "I'm not saying this to condemn you," like you believe all that necessarily, "but as I've said before you are in our hearts." Guess what? I've widened my heart for you. You're in my heart. Now what does that look like? Here's my mental resolve that will lead to affection. I've opened up my heart to you "to die together and to live together." That's just so good. And it's so much of what we feel innately when you bring a baby home from the hospital. It's not like well I'll try this out for a few months to see how it is, right? It's like, no, I'm in for the long haul.

Or you get married, at least that's how it used to be. You'd walk to the front of the church and you'd say, "till death do us part." You're making a commitment about the end. You put the end first and then we march on into this journey. And here he says, That's how I am with you. My heart has opened to you and I've put you in my heart to where I am willing "to die with you and to live with you." And that's a good orientation.

Commentators wonder, like, why is death here first, not live with you and die with you? Because it starts with that kind of open hearted commitment to say, I'm with you. I'm not looking to do, and just to be personal here, with you what is the national trend among pastors, which is for senior pastors to be in a church for 3 to 5 years? That's the norm, right? I'm ready to die with you and live with you until you kick me out or drive me out of town with pitchforks and torches. Right? I want to be here. I want to give my life. I want to have my heart open for you and I want you to open your heart for us. But it's not just us as leaders and you as congregants. It's with everybody in your family of believers, with everyone who is in your geographic location, in your church, under the leadership that God has put over you here in this church, that you say, I'm opening my heart for them.

"I don't say this to condemn you. I've said it before," but I'm going to say it again, "you're in our hearts to die together and to live together. I am acting with great boldness." That's a bold statement. Right? Till death do us part or I'm with you to the end. "I have great pride in you; I am filled with comfort" when I think about you, "in all affliction," even the hard times I'm having with all this persecution going on in his missionary travels, "I'm overflowing with joy." You bring me joy. I have decided to be joyful because I've decided to be with you. It's like your kid. You could sit there and objectively say, "My kids aren't as good as their kids. Well, then I'm going to get rid of my kids and get some new kids." That's not how it works, right? Your heart, you've already said I'd die with you and live with you. And that's the picture of being a part of your church.

And I know the text that we're studying this morning is about Paul leaving them. And the thrust of my argument is to stay with them. Right? I understand that. But why was it so hard for Paul to leave? Why were they crying and hugging and kissing and crying? Right? Because this was a really difficult thing. Are there times to leave a church? Yes, obviously there are times to leave a church. But today the church is left, much like people look for better restaurants than the kinds of family relationships that we should have within the church. Right?



It is hard for us to think about amputating a part of the body. It's easy for me to say, "Well, I like the ambiance of that restaurant better. I like the way they cook their steak better at that restaurant. I like how convenient it is and how the arrangement of things are." Listen, that shouldn't matter. It shouldn't matter how beautiful our auditorium is. It shouldn't matter if the music is exactly to your liking. It shouldn't matter if the preaching is all that wonderful for you, it shouldn't matter. It should matter that together you've made a wise decision about being a part of a particular body. And I think it would be good for us to say, barring God changing his will for your life in a way that is dramatic that you didn't foresee, I'm ready to die with you and I'm ready to live with you. If we have that kind of commitment it would feel a lot more like a family.

And you know what happens when you do that? Look back one chapter, Second Corinthians Chapter 6. It's the kind of thing that happens, right? It's a response to the widening of our hearts. Look at verse 11, Second Corinthians 6:11, "We have spoken freely with you, Corinthians; our heart is open wide." I just love that. "You're not restricted by us," we're not trying to hurt you in this, "but you are restricted in your own affections." You're shutting your heart to us. You don't have affection for us like you should. "In return (I speak as to children) widen your hearts also." We've opened our hearts. You need to open your hearts.

And I'm telling you that needs to happen here. And I do think that our leaders, we're about to go on another pastor's planning retreat, and I'm just telling you it is a commitment we make every time we come. We talk about our plans individually and God's gifts and his calling to our church. I can tell you our church pastoral team their hearts are open to this congregation. We're open to living in the state that we live in. We're open to doing ministry here where we do ministry.

And I know we're going to raise up more church planters and some of our staff are going to go. By God's will we're going to have a Paul moment when they depart and tearfully we're going to cry on their shoulder and say they're gone and that's going to be tough. But I'm telling you, we are in our leadership positions at least, opening our hearts to this congregation. And we would ask you to open your hearts to us. And we would say here's what families do. We open our hearts to each other. You should be opening your hearts. And that's a good image to everyone in your small group, everyone in your sub-congregation, the people you're sitting next to, the people who you're rubbing shoulders with as you're reaching for donuts, you should say I want to open my hearts to these people, which means you're giving opportunity for this affection to grow. And if you do that it's going to happen.

I just want to show you one more before we leave Second Corinthians. Go to Chapter 8. Second Corinthians Chapter 8 just to finish this analogy as Paul continues this concept of affection and care in the hearts of people. Look at verse 16, Second Corinthians 8:16. "But thanks be to God," Paul's not the only one, "who put into the heart of Titus the same earnest care I have for you." So I've opened my heart and I care for you with all the affection of Christ. And the good news is Titus, who I'm working with here, he's got the same thing going on.



And all I am telling you is that God has, if you are willing to volitionally open your heart to people in this church, which means doing some things to give opportunity for God's earnest care to be deposited in your heart by God's Spirit, you got to spend time with them. You got to do some meals and lunches with them. You got to hang out with them. You got to have them over to your house. You got to do more than just check a box by going to a small group. That's duty.

And don't just do because you love God, that's piety. But there's got to be love toward those people who are like a family. The familial love of the people you go to church with, that you're a part of their lives and they're a part of your lives. Let God deposit this same earnest care in your heart. I'm just saying it's a lot about you opening that door and volitionally we do that. I know it's an analogy. I think it certainly helps, helps us envision this. Be devoted like a family.

Let's go back to our text. Just one simple observation at the end of this passage. Verse 38, "Being sorrowful most of all." Why? Because they didn't want to have a part of their church amputated. They didn't want Paul to go. "He had spoken the word, that they wouldn't see his face again." So they patted him on the back after praying. They got up from praying and they said, "See ya." And they went up through the hills and he walked down to the port and he waited for the ship to leave. No. "They accompanied him to the ship." I know it's a small observation. But that, again, speaks to the earnestness of their care and love for him. Paul loved them. They loved Paul. The connection, a family familial affection, weeping together, the vulnerability of it all, the commitment that they all would kneel down before God. They all sought God together.

Now, when Paul was leaving, they didn't just go back to Ephesus. They walked him all the way down. You can imagine how this is, right? They went all the way down to the dock. They sat there. They probably not only walked him to the boarding ramp, but when he got on the ship they probably all sat there like parents do when their kids fly off to college. Right? They probably waited till that ship sailed off into the Aegean Sea till it became a little tiny dot, wiping their tears and sniffing and thinking about old times with Paul. They were going to get every last minute of their time together with the Apostle Paul because that's what people do who care for each other with the kind of affection of Christ.

That's a big standard. But I would ask that we start to think in those ways. Number three, we need to "Guard Our Time Together." We need to make sure that we get as much time together as we possibly can. We need to make sure that we are not in any way meeting together and gathering together less. We need to make sure that we are working to do that more.

Once you jot that down, go to First Thessalonians Chapter 2 with me. Paul, of course, as a traveling missionary, this was an occupational hazard for him. He was leaving these people. But look at what he says here in this particular passage about his having to leave the Thessalonians a lot like he had to leave the Ephesians. He considered that like an amputation, verse 17. "But since we were torn away from you," I love the old translation, "we were bereft from you." I remember as a young Christian having to look that word up, "bereft."



What does that mean? Torn away. It's like we're just an integral fabric of intertwined lives and we were extracted from you, we were torn out from this relationship.

"Brothers, for a short time," because we can't wait to get back. And I love this, "in person, but not in heart," right? Not in our hearts. We thought about you. We cared for you. We still loved you from a distance. "We endeavored all the more eagerly with great desire to see you face-to-face. I just wonder, by the way, just by reading that phrase, how often you feel that feeling when you're driving to church. I mean, that's just not the standard for most people. It needs to be there. It needs to be there because our hearts are purposefully, volitionally opening to the people, investing in those lives and saying, God, I want you to fill me with the same earnest care for the people in my church that Paul had and Titus had for the people at Corinth. I want to have that.

"We wanted to come to you -- I, Paul, again and again -- but," and I always point this out when I read this to you, "but Satan hindered us." And I just need you to think, what is it that's keeping you apart when you know that it's not just the standard norm for Christians to want to be with their spiritual family more and more but that God said prophetically that it ought to be "all the more as the day draws near." So I need to remember that we live in a time that we recognize the need biblically to meet together more than we have in the past. Whatever the church was doing in the 10th century or the 5th century, we have an onus upon us from Scripture to see the need more and more. And I just have to make this a part of my thinking that if there's something keeping me from being face-to-face with the people of God, I've got to start to consider this a spiritual battle. What is it?

There are things that are happening in your life, I guarantee you, that you do not see the connection between that obstacle for you being more involved in the lives of the people in your church and you don't see it as a demonic problem. You don't see it as Satan's hindrance. But Paul saw it that way. Why? Because "what is our hope or joy or crown of boasting before the Lord Jesus at his coming? Is it not you?" Now, that's a strange thing, right? Because all the fanciful songs and the poems and the thoughts about meeting Christ is all about, the attention is all on Christ. That's going to be the joy. Being called the Blessed Hope in the New Testament of seeing the appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ. That's true. I get that.

But Paul says here, you know, "what is our hope, or joy, or crown of boasting before the Lord." Do you know what it's going to be, is that I'm going to have my arms around the people who are in my spiritual family. I'm excited as a team to be there. This lateral connection with the people of God, "is it not you? For you are our glory and our joy." I got to say, we may love each other in this church but we don't love each other enough to be able to say, well, that's true. And for the few of you that it is true, great. We want everyone to be more like you, because that's what we need. And then I guarantee you, no one's going to say, here's a need and not have more people than we ever need to fill that need stepping up to say, "I want to be there. I'll help. I'll do whatever it takes. I want to be with the people of God. I want to serve the people of God. I care for the people of God. I have an affectionate desire for the people of God."



And again, just to quote First Thessalonians 2:8, just such a great summary verse "being so affectionately desirous of you, we were ready to share with you not only the gospel, but" not only to go through the curriculum in that program, but also our very lives, "our own selves, because you had become very dear to us." You better guard your time with your church family. You ought to seek to make sure you're maintaining as much as possible.

I was a facilities worker in my church when I was growing up and 15 got the job. They were dumb enough to give me a whole ring of keys to open every building on the campus. And, you know, I cleaned a lot of toilets and set up chairs and vacuumed the parking lot, I did all that in my job. And one of the jobs we had, we would rotate on lock-up duty, which our facilities guys still know something about. Right? Someone's got to be there to lock up at the end of the night, turn the alarms on, all that that we have going on. Well, I remember being, you know, 15 years old and thinking, I want to go home. I'm tired, I've got homework or whatever. And so we once or twice, it had to happen a couple of times, we wanted people to leave the building so we started dimming lights around the place, just like when you're at the mall. Right? And it's like 15 minutes before closing, they start turning lights off, like, you know, oh, that's a pet peeve, it's so irritating to me.

But in church, I remember doing that and our associate pastor read us the riot act, which we needed so badly. From a theological perspective, was driven, I'm sure, by passages like this. He said to us, and I remember it like I was a recruited M.C.R.D. and he was a drill sergeant in the Marine Corps. He's like, "You will NEVER do that. If people in this church want to be here in this building and they want to stay till midnight, you are on the clock and you will stay until the last person was there. There is not a light bulb in this building that's going off until the last person leaves. And I remember thinking, well, you know, that's kind of an inconvenience for me when I want to go home at 9:00. Right? And yet I recognize now that I'm a pastor was like, dude, that's exactly what should happen here. And by the way, if any of our facilities guys start turning lights off on you, (audience laughs) it need not happen because we as a church should be so desirous of being face-to-face.

I could go through a long laundry list of passages about the need to be facing. From John to Peter to Paul, they're all trying to say what we need is more face time. And then I can tell you the writer of Hebrews says, "We need it all the more as we see the day drawing near." We've got to shut this down. I remember a conversation I had yesterday about our Angel's baseball night. Which by the way, the picture of that as I asked Pastor Kellen, how are we doing on the tickets? And he said, "We're sold out." And I thought, that's the way everything should be around here, right? And so we had hundreds of tickets to the Angels game and the Angels game, it's just a dumb thing, we're just going to watch baseball and half the people don't care about baseball and half the people don't even pay attention to the baseball game. And according to Pastor Kellen, they're not good enough to watch or whatever. (audience laughing)

But we're sitting there and doing that. And I had someone saying how I saw you in conversation. That was a great conversation. And they said, "Well, we moved our



conversation out of the stadium into the parking lot and we were there until," whatever time he said, "very late." And I made a joke. I said, "Well, I bet the players were already, you know, the visiting team's already on the bus and to the hotel." He said, "not only that, they're probably asleep by the time we left the parking lot." And I thought to myself, that's the way the church should just as a default be. We are going to guard our time together. When we get time together we're going to soak it up. And this is a priority. Our kids are going to go to bed too late. We're going to miss meals. We're going to have all kinds of things that we're going to put to the backseat because we as a church are so affectionately desirous of one another.

We're willing to share not only our ministry post curriculum or whatever we've got to do to check the box in duty and piety, but we are going to love people enough to want to be with them. And I just encourage you, I exhort you in Jesus Christ, to love more and more. "Let your love for one another abound still more and more."

Because if that happens, the whole point of this series is everyone in the Body of Christ should be out of the chair at some point serving in some ministry post. And whatever that ministry post is, if it's driven by love, your duty will become a beautiful expression of love for the body of Christ. We should have the affection, as Paul said, all the way to share that affection to the standard of what Christ cares for the church. And we have a long way to go. I love my church, right? I love the people of my church. But I can say I got more to go if the standard is I should have the care and love for them that Christ has for them. So let us all see if we can go to the next level motivated by our common bond, devoted like a family and guarding our time together. That'll make our service what it ought to be.

Let's pray. God, help us as Christians, knowing that you've told us to do things that are reflected in the leaders of the church at Ephesus, to care for the flock, to serve the flock, to put our gifts to work in the church, to take on ministry posts, and to find the blessedness and the joy of giving that's even better than the joy of receiving. And as we do that God let us have the kinds of relationships like the Apostle Paul had with these leaders in the church that even if we have to go, certainly if it were ever a final goodbye, that it would be like extracting a tooth. It would be painful. It would be a sorrow-filled, embracing and crying and kissing and clinging to every last minute.

God, certainly you desire churches that are so devoted to one another in love that there is a commitment that shows in all that they do, a commitment that turns their work into something beautiful, people who are willing to come early and stay late. People who are willing to give and sacrifice of their time and their treasure, their talent, their attention. God, just I pray that our church would be filled with that, that you would motivate more love amongst our Christian believers here. I know that the world they look at us and they have a hard time understanding our doctrine, and they have a hard time understanding our commitment to the instructions of Scripture. But as you said in John 13, we'll look at it in our small groups this week, you said that all people are going to know that we're your disciples if we have love for one another.

You say it so clearly and profoundly in John 17 of the great high priestly prayer. We want to be people like that who have such a distinctive relationship, which I get to see from my





vantage point. God, I pray that all of us could see it more specifically, that the love that the people in this church have for one another, you don't want to go through a crisis without it. You don't want to go through loss, personal loss or pain or some big problem with a loss of a job or a home or a spouse without the love of their church family. So help us God to bring that kind of commitment to one another like a family would. And I pray you'd be honored by it, that it reflects more of your love for the church, that we follow your good example in laying down your life for us. Let us lay down our lives for our friends here in our church.

In Jesus name, Amen.