



The Ups & Downs of the Christian Life – Part 3

The Unsettling Concerns of Love

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But one of the biggest reasons that Christians do not love the way that Christ called us to love is because real love, biblical love, it costs more than what most Christians are willing to pay. Now you add to that the unique features of this generation. Take FOMO for instance, FOMO, F-O-M-O, you hipsters know what it is, FOMO stands for what? Fear Of Missing Out, I don't like that. Because of that, and you add to that the ubiquity of social media, which doesn't help, and the endless choices you have at the supermarket, on your phone, just everything that we have at our fingertips, it leaves you with a generation of cultural reflection of this attitude that we don't want to get locked down, we don't like commitment, we want to keep our options open, we'd like to be flexible enough to look for whatever's next. That may be better, it may be faster, it might be more fun, it may be more convenient, it may give me more comfort. We're always looking that way and unfortunately it doesn't leave us a lot of room, just by definition, for what the Bible defines as biblical love. But as Christians we can't afford to just reflect the cultural mores or the norms of our generation. We have to go back to what God has to say is a prerequisite, actually a central prerequisite for Christianity, and that is that we love each other the way that Christ loved us. And that's going to be costly. That comes with a price tag attached to it. And it's Sundays like this, we need to stop and say are we willing to pay the price? Are we willing to go into a place that really reflects more of Christ-like love, a kind of love for the people around us that is really unique and distinct? The kind of love that Jesus says, my people will have this, and all people will know they're my disciples because look at how they love each other. That'll be a challenge, but it will always be worth it. And in two little verses in Second Corinthians Chapter 2, we have an example of the Apostle Paul who does something here that I think that illustrates the concept so well. It'd be good for us to learn how to do this and what it looks like and maybe redefine a little bit of how we understand love to work because it certainly isn't as the world defines it.

So turn with me to Second Corinthians Chapter 2 and see if we can't learn from these two little autobiographical narrative sentences from the Apostle Paul regarding his time in coming to a city called Troas. Now you might remember Troas, if you were with us back in the study that we did in the book of Acts, where Paul in his second missionary journey comes to Troas and he gets the Macedonian call. So he can't even take up residence there and do his work that he's used to doing, evangelism and church planting. He ends up going across the sea there to northern Greece called Macedonia back in the day, and Achaia ends up even down in southern Greece, and he ends up having a ministry over there because God had called him to go help. Now on his third missionary journey he's in Ephesus and gets run out and heads to Troas after what we learned in Second Corinthians Chapter 2 was writing a painful letter to the Corinthians. We assume that's not the letter of First Corinthians, though some argue it was. It is probably a second letter he describes in verse 4 of this chapter being one that was very difficult for him to write, that he wrote in anguish. And he's very interested to know how the Corinthians responded. Now Titus was his courier on this letter, who had gone across to Corinth, which is between Macedonia and Achaia, it's actually in Achaia. And apparently, we



assume by what's going on in this text, that he had arranged with Titus to meet him there in Troas. But he didn't make his way back to Troas, and here's where we pick up this story.

So follow along as I read it and see what we can learn from this about the way we are supposed to love one another. Second Corinthians Chapter 2 verses 12 and 13, "When I came to Troas to preach the gospel of Christ, even though a door was open for me in the Lord, my spirit was not at rest because I did not find my brother Titus there. So I took leave of them and I went on to Macedonia." Sometimes you'll hear me talk about that great text in Second Corinthians Chapter 7 where it says, "God who comforts the downcast, comforted us by the coming of Titus, and not only by his coming," not only was I happy about that, but I was so comforted and so refreshed by the fact that he brought good news back from you guys that you were doing well. Now, when Paul writes this letter, of course, we already know that because the early part of this chapter we already learned that the man who was being addressed in Paul's painful letter had repented and Paul was saying, okay, now you just need to reaffirm your love for him, forgive him. And we've dealt with issues and themes of forgiveness in this series called The Ups and Downs of the Christian Life. Well, what we're going to find here is that there's a down in the Christian life, the down that's associated with loving the way Christ calls us to love and what's happening here is that while in Chapter 7 he picks up the narrative of what takes place when Titus shows up, we really have a parenthetical, a purposefully parenthetical, section between Chapter 2 verse 14 and what he ends up picking up and describing as Titus' reunion with him in Chapter 7. We'll deal with all that in the interim, a lot of it in the next series.

But for today, let's just deal with what's happening here, which seems quite unusual that Paul having an opportunity to advance his career, and I say that not because it's a secular career, but it still is what he does, what he's known for. He's a missionary. He preaches the gospel. And we could have a thriving church here in Troas, and who knows, maybe even a letter in the New Testament called Paul's Epistle to the church at Troas. But instead, he leaves this place. So this is twice now he's been here with probably a five to six, seven-year interval. And he doesn't stay here, not because of a Macedonian call, but because he is bothered in his spirit that he has not heard from Titus. Now we learn in Paul's discussion in Chapter 11 about how dangerous it is to be a missionary traveling on the old Roman roads of the ancient world, and he's concerned about robbers, and he's concerned about all these things that he talks about, not having places to stay and so I'm sure he has a personal concern for Titus. But you know in the context, the ultimate concern as we pick up in Chapter 7 later in our study, it's because he wants to know how the Corinthians responded. And so, all of that knowledge that he's going to get from Titus it predates this letter, but he's telling the story about how he was very anxious to know what they were going to do in response to his rebuke and his loving correction.

So, how in the world are you going to say no to what it seems your business card says you're supposed to do? You're supposed to be evangelizing and planting churches, and it even says this is "an open door in the Lord." Same kind of phrasing that's used over there in First Corinthians Chapter 16 when he talks about open doors and he says, yeah, I'm ready to power through it, even if there are lots of obstacles and adversaries. But in this case, he sees



an open door and he leaves it. And that was part of the Christian life we all need to learn that we are not just choosing between, you know, good and bad. And often we're not even choosing between good and better, we're often choosing between better and best and if you want an example of that it's certainly here in this passage. I mean, how good does it get to say you're a missionary and you got an open door and people are receptive to the gospel, you can preach the gospel and see people status move from the kingdom and domain of darkness to the kingdom of Christ God's beloved Son and you're going to walk away from that? You're going to pack up your backpack, throw the scrolls in it, and head up the Roman road to get over to Achaia? This seems unusual. You're going to go to Macedonia? This seems like you should probably stay and do your job. But he doesn't do his job and he leaves.

Now some commentators, well I should say most commentators, almost all commentators think he made the right decision and I think so too based on Chapter 7. Maybe a few sermons here and there you might hear some preacher say, well, I think he made the wrong decision, but I don't believe so because this is so corroborated, it's so affirmed by so many other passages of Scripture that we'll look at today. So let's consider this, verse 12, "When I came to Toas to preach the gospel of Christ, even though a door was open to me in the Lord." We know what happens in verse 13, he didn't go through it, he did not stay. If you want to talk about passing on something good, you better have a good reason for passing on it, and my premise, the whole proposition for today's message is to say that the reason was, the motivation was, biblical love. And biblical love comes with a price tag and the price tag here right out of the gate is it's going to make him pass on a great opportunity, a strategic gain for his life, for his job, for his what seems to be his calling although this would not be considered God's best for him and so he passed on what was part of his calling that everyone might say why are you doing this Paul? Just trust God with the Corinthians, just trust God with Titus, do your work, put your head down and do your work. He couldn't, he said no, I got to go find Titus, I got to find out what's going on with the Corinthians.

Number one, let's just put it this way, love's going to be the pivotal decision maker here, "Prioritize Sacrificial Love Over Strategic Gain," strategic gains. Now I say strategic gains in a purposefully ambiguous way and that is that can be strategic gain in a lot of areas of your life that may not seem a spiritual as Paul's because Paul happens to be doing career work that's Christian advancement of the Church. But if you're working at a job and you're a real Christian, I hope you understand that job to be a place where you're seeking to glorify God, represent Christ, you want to do excellent work there, you want to do it for the Lord, and all that's great, and it's good. As a matter of fact, as you advance in that job as a Christian, much like Joseph did in the book of Genesis, I mean, there are all kinds of things that can happen like Daniel, where because you live by God's rules, I mean you've got opportunities for advancing in your career. And if you see that as part of your responsibility to provide for your family and all the rest, you can say, hey, why wouldn't I take every strategic advantage that I can in my job? It certainly falls in line with the priorities of the Christian life, but sometimes you've got to say no to those because of biblical, sacrificial love. That's important for us to understand, but you can't understand that without defining it.



So let's define it, and I often go, in your mind at least, to Philippians Chapter 2 to define what love is. It's not just a feeling, although it involves our emotions. Chapter 2 of Philippians verses 19 through 22, reminds us that Paul, as he brags on Timothy, calls him out as uniquely committed with a genuine concern for the welfare of the Philippians. He has a genuine concern for your welfare. Those five words, I think, as I've often said from this platform, they certainly define and codify in a short little five-word phrase what biblical love is. It's not self-seeking, it's not interested in itself, it's not competitive, it's not all the things we read of in First Corinthians 13, but it is certainly concerned with the other person. It's concerned with, in this case, Timothy cares about the Philippians and he has a genuine concern that they do well. And that is coming on the heels of one of the greatest passages about Christ laying aside the independent exercise of his divine attributes to come and live among us in the form, the humble form of a human being. And then being submissive to the Father so far that he gets crucified on a cross. And that, the Bible says, is the ultimate act of love, and God took that humble state of service, the thing Jesus kept on saying, "I didn't come to be served, but to serve, and to give my life as a ransom," a payment, "for many." And at the end of that, it says, "God highly exalted him and gave him a name which is above every name." God here is saying, this is what love looks like. And then Paul says, I got someone like that here, Timothy. Timothy's got a genuine concern for your welfare.

So, there are times that you are going to, just to put it in these words, have a genuine concern for the welfare of someone or some group of people that may take your strategic gains in finances, in career, in whatever else it might be that you value in the world or that the people that love you value, they want to see you do well in all these areas, you may say no to that to be able to exercise what the Bible calls sacrificial love. I'm going to put their needs before mine, and that includes, in this case, Paul being able to say, I planted another church. Look at all these people who came to Christ in Troas. I appointed some leaders here, some pastors in the church, and now they're in charge and off I go. Look, I've planted another church. He doesn't take time to do a very good thing because he says this is a better thing. And that's an amazing sacrifice. And it's a sacrifice that needs to be a part of our thinking because we often, in our self-interest, just look at what's going to be another good gain for me and my family. And sometimes we need to say, you know what, what might be best for me and my family may not be the best exercise of real biblical love, the kind of love that Christ had. Christ could have made a lot of excuses about staying in the glories of heaven, but he said I'll come and step out of my comfort zone to do something sacrificial for the good of someone else, in that case for our good and for our redemption.

Now, to understand why you would do this, because a lot of people, and I've heard sermons, people say this was wrong for Paul to do, I need to point out this. First Corinthians Chapter 4 verses 14 and 15. And this may help us. You can turn there if you're quick, but if not, let me just read it to you. Paul's writing in First Corinthians, he says, "I do not write these things to you to make you ashamed." I'm not just saying bad things or hard things to you, or corrective things to you, just to make you feel bad. He says, "but to admonish you as," my loved children, "my beloved children." Now that's important. Why would he leave a brand-new mission field with people who are eager to hear the gospel, where he's having success and he says I'm going to leave this behind. Well, because he's got his "beloved children" who are



in another place that Titus has information about. He can't find Titus. And Titus, by the way, he calls elsewhere his son in the faith. And he's like, these people are super important. And you can look at this in a lot of different ways. You can talk about proximity. You can talk circles of concern. You can talk about priorities in terms of how God calls you to love. But you're going to see that there are issues that demand your attention because love would demand that you give it attention to prioritize it over something that's going to make your life look more successful because you're like my children. Paul says in the next verse, "Though you have countless guides in Christ," you have a lot of teachers, you have a lot of mentors, you have a lot of counselors, "you don't have many fathers. For I became your father in Christ Jesus through the gospel." And that is really carefully assessing who are the Corinthians and who is Titus to me. Titus is supposed to come, he's supposed to meet me here. Could he be dead on the road somewhere? Is he held up because he's got some problem?

Chapter 11, he is recounting all the costs involved in traveling on the ancient roads with all the criminals, all the robbers, all the problems, all the threats. And he says, this is really hard. Maybe Titus has fallen to some travesty on the road to Macedonia or on the road to Troas. You old timers remember the PSA, the Public Service Announcement back in the 70s and 80s. They often got some of the celebrities involved and they would say, "It's 10 o'clock, do you know where your children are?" Remember that? Anybody? That's Cyndi Lauper and I think maybe Michael Jordan, I don't know. They got a lot of stars that said, "It's 11 o'clock. Do you know where your children are?" Now, even before Life360 and Find My Friends and all of that, I'm safe to say my parents usually knew where I was at 10 or 11 o'clock at night. But one PSA that they wouldn't respond to, even though I don't know, maybe mom opened the door to check to see if I was there as a little kid in my bed. They wouldn't respond to this. Hey, "It's 11 o'clock, do you know where the neighbor's kids are?" I guess that's interesting, and someone should care about that, but that's not the appeal that you're going to have to care about the neighbor's kids. And we had some neighbors down the street, no one knew where those kids were at 11 o'clock. And I know this, my parents didn't see it as their responsibility to know where they were. As long as they were out of our yard and our house, we wanted to keep them as far away as possible.

The point though is this. You have a special responsibility for the welfare of some people. And it's good to start in your life to kind of create some of those circles. Now I'm not saying that just because of proximity or relationship or marriage, those are your only obligations. Please note that. You have plenty of concentric circles to which you are accountable. And if you're functioning in the local church the way you ought to, you've got not only your church, but you've got concentric circles within that. Sub-congregation, a small group, maybe you're involved in Partners. You've got all of these connections and there are serious obligations for you to say, I know that out of love that God has tasked me with, I have a concern for the welfare of a lot more people than just my biological family. And please know this is always the thing that should help us decide between options. The option to go find Titus and find out about the Corinthians over evangelizing in Troas, which must have been a very hard decision, love was the distinguishing feature, and that's always at the top of the list. The Fruit of the Spirit, Galatians 5:22. The Fruit of the Spirit is, what's first? Happiness. No? What is it? Love. Always love. Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness and on it goes. But it always starts with



love. Paul wrote the letter to the Corinthians the first time, the first letter to Corinthians that we have, and he talks about service in Chapter 12. You ought to serve. God's gifted the church. It's going to function well. Every part's got to do its work, and everyone's gifted with a way to contribute to the common good. And then he's going to deal with in Chapter 14 the problems of self-aggrandizement and self-promotion and all the nuttiness that was going on in Corinth.

Well, sandwiched in between is the 13th Chapter of First Corinthians. It was not written just for you to brand on your napkins at your kid's wedding receptions, the reason that love chapter is there is because that is how you're supposed to go about doing anything to serve people in the church. It better be motivated by love. The first four verses in Chapter 14 are all about the fact you can do all these things and do them really well, but if you don't have love you're nothing. It results in nothing. God doesn't credit you with anything. He says this is bad. You're just doing something. You're not loving people. And, of course, the end of Chapter 13, if you know that passage, it says, now remain "faith, hope, and love, ... but the greatest of these is..." Faith. Right? I mean that is the thing that saves people, right? I want people to exercise faith in Corinth. I want people to exercise faith in Troas, Well that's good and it's important. And it's good to have hope, that'll keep you going in the Christian life. You'd better strengthen the disciples, go back through Asia Minor and strengthen more disciples. No, "the greatest of these is love." So Paul, you've got to check your heart. It's not just obligation, it's not just duty, it's not even the good of faith and hope. The ultimate, if you're going to prioritize, the greatest of these, I didn't prioritize it, God prioritizes it for us, is love. So look at all the things that you've got going on and be willing to pay the price of setting aside some opportunities in your life to say, you know, I know what love's demanding of me right now. Sometimes I've got to say no to some good things, maybe some great things, to do the best thing.

And please know, it's not just about things that you'd say, well, yeah, that is worldly attainment. Sometimes it could be you're trying to become a biblical counselor. Maybe you're going through a program at Compass Bible Institute. Maybe you are trying to get prepared to lead some sub-congregation in the church. Those are all good things. And sometimes it's your ministry in the church that you need to look at and think, well, maybe this isn't what God wants. Even though everyone in your small group, if you said, here's what I'm going to try to do to be useful to God, and they may all say, that's great. It's like what we read in our Daily Bible Reading when David goes to Nathan and says I got a great idea. You know the kingdom is safe. I've pretty much quelled all the enemies on the borders of Israel. I've extended the borders of Israel. I mean he's cleaned all the swords and all the blood off the swords and now he's sitting around saying I'm living in a palace. Do you know what we need? We need to get the Ark of the Covenant outside of a tent. We need to put it in a permanent structure. Let's build a temple. And Nathan is number one spiritually minded prophet, his number one advisor says what? Do you remember that in the Daily Bible Reading this week? Great idea, do whatever's in your heart. Now we know later Nathan is definitely a spiritually minded man. He certainly is used by God but in this case the knee-jerk reaction of Nathan to say do it, just because it looks good, is not what God wanted David to do. Now God had his reasons for it, but all I'm saying is the obvious next step for you isn't always something that makes you look



like a spiritual success or a personal success or a family man's success, but it's something that is going to demonstrate sacrificial love. You just got to remember that.

Even when David was chosen as the king, do you remember that? His dad, Jesse, didn't even bring him to the "who will be the next king of Israel" party. He's left out to keep the sheep. And when Samuel goes down the line, he finally has to say to Jesse, hey, Jesse, do you have any other children because God's given me a no for every one of these guys? Well, I got one more. He's out tending the sheep. Well bring him in. I'm not leaving. I'm not leaving until we figure out why God sent me to your house. And in comes David and David is the guy. And Samuel pours the flask of oil over David's head. You're the next king of Israel. And out of that comes a statement we teach our kids in Sunday school but it's a very important thing. God does not look at people the way that you and I look at people. God looks at the outward appearance. No, God's looking at the heart. You guys are looking at the outward appearance. You're looking at a measure of success. There are a lot of things people may praise you for at your funeral that really weren't the things that God really wanted you to do. As my old pastor used to say every need is not a call. Jesus walked past a lot of villages that he didn't preach in. He passed a lot of sick people he didn't heal them. He passed a lot of people and didn't train them for ministry. He trained twelve and one of them was a loser. I'm just telling you this, God's going to call you to some things that don't look like success because what it's going to be driven by is you sitting down carefully and saying I know this is the right sacrificial loving step to take and you can't be everywhere at once, you can't be successful in everything and you're going to have to say no to some things. We talk about that a lot. It could be in your career, it could be your kid's sporting endeavors, it could be your kid's academic achievements. It could be in a lot of things that may look good and a lot of Christians will applaud you for it. But you've got to know that God is going to value sacrificial love above for all kinds of visible achievements.

As a matter of fact, I'm scared to quote it, but Luke Chapter 16 verse 15 says, "For what is exalted among men is an abomination in the sight of God." It's one thing for Samuel to say, "Man looks at the outward appearance, but God looks on the heart." But Jesus says you know, "For what is exalted among men is an abomination in the sight of God." Of course he's talking to the Pharisees at this point and they were all in it for money and self-promotion and self-aggrandizement but still there are a lot of things that we, even in a biblically saturated subculture, think well that would look good, that success, that's good. Well just be careful that you don't choose visible strategic gains over something that may be done with a small group of people or a singular person leaving the 99 behind to do something that God would call you to do. You're finite. Paul, just like Jesus, didn't do everything he could have done. But at the end of it all in John Chapter 17 verse 4 when he prayed just before he went to the garden, Jesus said, you know what, I've done everything. I've accomplished everything, Father, all the work that you gave me to do. And if he passed a lot of opportunities up for doing the best things, we've got to follow in suit and do the same.

Paul left behind Troas, even though it was an open door, "an open door in the Lord," he left it behind. Look at verse 13 back in our passage. It's printed on your worksheet there, Second Corinthians Chapter 2 verse 13. "My spirit," why did you leave that open door and didn't walk



through it? "My spirit was not at rest because I did not find my brother Titus there." I've referred to this passage many times and I think it's really helpful, particularly if this is the right decision, which I think Chapter 7 proves that it was the right decision. He is troubled in his spirit. He's unsettled in his spirit. So based on that, the verse ends with another sentence that he goes and he responds to that. But first, I just want to talk about the unsettled feeling. It was the right thing for you to feel unsettled. Some people in this auditorium right now have been Christians for a long time and you have worked to try and isolate yourself so much that you never have to feel unsettled because the care and concern and even the information and the knowledge about other people doesn't exist. You've kind of gotten yourself in a mister, mister, nod your head, hey, good to see you again at church, how are you doing, great, and off you go. It's people who truly love other people who are going to feel these unsettled feelings. Number two, you need to "Accept the Emotional Cost of Christian Love" and there's a lot that goes with that. The emotional toll that it takes to truly love is really hard and most Christians aren't willing to pay the price. I thought about many ways to try and drive this point home. But I went back to the definition of love in Philippians Chapter 2 and I thought, well, I think it would be good for me to start there. So my study this week, it was helpful for me to go through all the words that I could find that relate to the issue of caring for others the way Christ would have us care.

So let's go to that classic text. The five words that I often say are a great definition of biblical love in Philippians Chapter 2 verse 20. This is about Timothy. Look at verse 19, "I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon, so that I too may be cheered by news of you." Just like Titus. I want Titus to come back and give me good news about the Corinthians, here he says I want Timothy to come back and give me good news about the Philippians, "For I have no one like him, who will be genuinely concerned for your welfare." Now I encourage you to bring your tablets and your phones and your laptops. We've got free Wi-Fi and it's fairly fast. We do all of that so that you can do things like right-click on this word in your Bible software, or maybe on some website that does this for you, but all you'd have to do is to right-click on this and look at what this word is underlying the Greek New Testament word. It's the same word that is translated most of the time, here it comes, "anxiety." Not the only time that anxiety is posited in a good sense. He says, I have no one else like him who will be genuinely anxious for your welfare. That's the word. This word is used 19 times as a verb. And most of the time it's translated "anxious," one time "care," one time "concern." Here's the concern time. Now why do you think the translators put the word concerned instead of anxious? Because sometimes we're going to scratch our heads and I will take part of the blame for this. Because when I preach about anxiety, I kind of assume that you're anxious about the things that we're not supposed to be anxious about. It's kind of like ambition. Ambition is a word that we should really qualify. You should not be selfishly ambitious. Selfish ambition James says that just all kinds of disorder that is demonic wrong. This is not about you, but ambition is good and C.S. Lewis was right to point that out in his writing. We need to understand there's a place for spiritual and biblical ambition. A lot of teachings of Christ were about that. I mean you ought to pray big, you ought to work big, you ought to pray big, you ought to be doing things for the Lord in an ambitious way. That is great. It will not always be according to the world's standards of success. And it certainly won't be about your concerns about your own comfort and convenience.



Now, go in your mind to the classic text on the central passage on anxiety. It's Jesus preaching in Matthew Chapter 6 on the Sermon on the Mount, and he says, "Don't be anxious about what you're going to put on, what you are going to eat," where you're going to live. Stop worrying about all those things. The pagans chase after all those things. Now, that is the kind of wholesale teaching against anxiety we have. Matter of fact, we use phrases like in Philippians 4, "Be anxious for nothing." And we think, okay, there you go. I never want this unsettling feeling in my life. Well, here's the thing you cannot love without this unsettling feeling in your life. Because what we're talking about to "be anxious for nothing" are all the things you shouldn't be anxious about. But you know one thing we should be anxious about, the welfare of other people whom we love. Nothing wrong with that. Right? If Cyndi Lauper comes on at 11 o'clock, says, hey, Melba, it's 11 o'clock, where's Michael? Right? And she goes and opens the door and looks in to see if I'm there and I'm gone. I wouldn't want her to close the door and say, well, we trust the Lord for things like this. I think she'd want to find her nine-year-old, right? There should be some anxiety in this. It would be appropriate to be concerned for my welfare, it's 11 o'clock and Cyndi Lauper reminded her to check and now all the sudden he's not there and who knows, he's out taking drugs like Michael Jordan said he would. I mean this is not good. I need to remind you that ambition isn't always wrong and anxiety isn't always wrong.

So, let me give you six words in the New Testament about the emotional costs of loving people. Number one is an anxiety or a concern for the welfare of others. And if you think that maybe, like maybe I'm misunderstanding, look at the next verse, "For they all seek their own interests, and not those of Jesus Christ." It's just like verse 33 of Matthew 6. I'm not supposed to worry about all the stuff I might have to have in my bank account or my closet. But he does say, "seek first," that's a strong verb, "Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you," don't worry about those. I want you to worry about this. And so we need to understand, even as Paul says, you've got the daily pressure, this anxiety on him for all the churches that he cares about. And of course this is right. Now you don't want to feel anxious and unsettled, then don't love anybody. Then I'd say, well, that's not a very Christian thing to do because the number one hallmark of Christianity is you loving, loving like Christ loves.

By the way, you could mirror all these things in Christ's ministry, but let me give you another one, verse 26. He shifts from Timothy bragging on Timothy to bragging about Epaphroditus. Look at verse 25. "I thought it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus my brother and," fellow worker, "my fellow soldier, your messenger and minister to my need." That's an amazing resume. Wow, Epaphroditus, he seems like you really like this guy. Oh, I do. "He has been longing for you all and has been" here's another cost, here is the second word, "distressed because you heard that he was ill." You heard that he was ill. Now, concern or anxiety, that's the first word. Let me give you another one. Number two, distress. If you are a Christian who loves other people, you will be distressed. Now I think about when I'm ill, you know what I'm distressed about? Me. But here's what Epaphroditus was so godly, without text messaging and emailing and telephones, he knew it would be a long time if he's really sick they won't know in Philippi whether Epaphroditus has died or not, and he's distressed that they don't



know that he's still alive. Why? Because he loves them. He doesn't want them to be freaked out that he died. He's distressed over their grief. I don't know, do you ever get distressed over other people's grief? I mean, really distressed. We had a funeral here yesterday. Another dear saint in our church went home to be with the Lord, and I'm just thinking you know there are people who are grieving over that and here's someone who says I love people and when they're grieving I'm distressed. Love is going to do that, and so too if you're a small group leader, you don't see someone for three or four weeks, and you're losing sleep over that, that's a godly thing. I understand that seems like you're talking out of two sides of your mouth. I thought, I'm not supposed to be anxious. Well, we love those sermons because we like to be always calm and tranquil inside. Well, godly people like Timothy have anxiety and concern for people. Godly people like Epaphroditus have distress for people.

Drop in a verse 27 now, the next verse, "Indeed he was ill," Paul says and, "near to death. But God had mercy on him, and not only on him but on me also, lest I should have now," here's the third word, sorrow and not just sorrow, picture a stack of pancakes, "sorrow upon sorrow," upon sorrow, like a large stack of sorrow. That's what it would be for me had he died. You know, there's a kind of grief that you have when someone you love is no longer there, if indeed you loved him. That's why I'm always talking about people at these funerals. This is not a celebration of life or a time to get up and see how many jokes you can tell at a funeral. This is the time for grieving. If you love people you grieve when they die. People say, "Oh, I know, but they're going to be with Christ far better for them." I get that. But you love them. Paul knows where Epaphroditus is going. Epaphroditus is going to be with the Lord, but he still says, if I were without him right now, I love him so much, it would be "sorrow upon sorrow." You don't want to be sorrowful? Don't love anybody. Ah, but then you couldn't be a Christian, because that's what Christians do. They love to go to the place of anxiety and concern. They love to go to the place of distress, pain. They love to go to the place of sorrow when someone and something or some issue. I mean, think about people. There are people who love people in this church and something happens to that person. I mean maybe it's not a physical death, maybe it is a spiritual wipeout, maybe it's some apostasy. It should break your heart, it should bring sorrow.

Go to the next chapter, Chapter 3, another one from Paul's life. Look at verse 18, Philippians 3:18, "For many, of whom I've often told you and now tell you even with tears." I've often told you and now I tell even with tears, there's our fourth word, tears. They "walk as enemies of the cross of Christ." Paul is saying this, there are people out there misrepresenting the truth, and they're misrepresenting the truth to you, and you know that causes me sorrow. He is now, probably in front of his amanuensis, who's taking the note on this, he's saying these words and crying as he says them. He's tearing up. It seems like Paul was a beta male, you know, crying a lot. No. Here is a man willing to go through the stuff he went through bravely, courageously taking stripes on his back. But when he thinks about people threatening the flock, when he thinks about people being led astray by false doctrine, he's willing to cry over that. You don't want tears? Well, don't love anybody. Oh, but you couldn't be a Christian then. Concern, distress, sorrow, tears.



Let me give you two more. Find these in Galatians Chapter 4. Let's go to Galatians Chapter 4. I thought about passages like where is there pain in loving? Well, here's an example. And it's a lot like the Corinthians. There's a problem that's threatening the church in Corinth and he writes all these correctives. And then he's concerned, in the painful letter he's concerned that they would respond rightly. Well, he's writing this letter to the churches of Galatia. And as he's writing these churches, they're going to circulate this letter. He's coming down pretty hard on them about the Judaizers saying you've got to get circumcised to be acceptable in the church. And in all this hard admonition he stops in Chapter 4, look down at verse 19. And he says, "My little children, for whom I'm again in the," here's our fifth word, "anguish of childbirth until Christ is formed in you!" This word, "anguish," is used in Scripture three times to describe labor pain, anguished, pain, labor. Each time it shows up in the New Testament it's translated differently. One time anguish, one-time labors, one-time pains. Here it's anguish of childbirth. This idea of going through labor pains, he says, that's what I'm like in thinking about your progress in Christ. He cares about their progress. You take someone through Partners. They flame out, or they're not doing well, or their struggling. They can't pray, or they won't get baptized, or they are struggling in their temptations, or their Bible studies are just hit and miss. Here is Paul saying, it's like I'm in labor pains to see you make spiritual progress.

Now if it's just a box to check, just so you can say you took another person through the discipleship program or you're leading a small group and it's good because I want to be a leader, I don't want to be a follower. Well if you're going to be a leader, even in a small group, you're going to have anguish, pain, you're going to have tears, you're going to have sorrow, you're going to have distress, you're going to have concern or anxiety. When you don't know things and if you want one word by the way that I think rightly summarizes Paul's concerns of unsettled spirit in Second Corinthians Chapter 2, I think it's the next verse, in verse 20, Galatians Chapter 4 verse 20, "I wish I could be present with you now and change my tone," because I don't know, maybe this is all hitting the mark and it doesn't even apply to you. I want to know but right now, "I am," here's the sixth word, "perplexed about you." Perplexed. This word perplexed, I think, is exactly what Paul was feeling, because he doesn't know. It's the word for uncertainty. I'm not sure, and it bothers me that I'm unsure. And I hope there's not a parent in this room, certainly of adult children, who hasn't been perplexed about the pathway that your kids are taking or your grandkids are taking. It should perplex you. It should give you painful feelings of having an unsettled spirit. If you don't love them, you won't feel that. But you're supposed to love them. That's supposed to be the hallmark of the Christian Church.

So just in short, I'm not big on laundry lists, but here we go. What are the emotional costs of Christian love? Well, he just summarized it with unsettled in my spirit. But I look at Scripture, I see concern, distress, sorrow, tears, anguish, and perplexity. And by the way, do you think Jesus felt any of this? I went through these words and I thought, where was Jesus feeling like this? I found even more words attached to his life. But I know this, even as we look forward to the coming of Christ, 700 years before Christ, when the prophecies were given in Isaiah 53. It's what theologians like to call, it's what Bible students like to call, the Suffering Servant passage about the coming Messiah. It's the thing that a lot of people miss. They saw him as a coming king, but they had a hard time seeing him as a suffering servant. I just want you to let



those two words marinate in your mind for a minute. The picture of our hero is described as a suffering servant. And if I'm supposed to love like Christ loved, I'm going to be a suffering servant. And of course in that passage, the Messiah, the coming Messiah is predicted to be "a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief." So I can't get through the Christian life without loving because that's the hallmark of the Christian life. That's the thing I'm supposed to be doing. I want to love more like Christ and less like me, and to do that I just know the emotional toll is going to be there, the price tag is going to be there and it's going to be more like Christ. I'm going to serve more, thinking less of myself, more of others, more about their welfare, and with that's going to come all these associated costs. Perhaps I'll be known, at least if I think about myself and knowing myself, "a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief."

Well, how does that jive with the whole joy thing? Well, yeah, "Rejoice in the Lord." I get that. But there's a tempered reality and a complexity to who we are that you're going to have these periods of really having a broken heart for the people around you because you're wrapped up in their welfare. And Jesus, he was so often hurting and weeping and crying, saying, look at Jerusalem. I just wanted to "gather your children together as a hen" would gather her chicks. He's lamenting. He sees the crowds. And he doesn't see them as a project, he has "Splanchnon" and he has an emotional compassion for them. Look at them, they're "sheep without a shepherd." So many examples of Christ feeling the feelings that Paul and Epaphroditus and Timothy and Titus felt. Christ-like love, it hurts, it weeps, it gets confused, it gets confounded, it gets pained, it's perplexed, it's all these things. But look back to our text, the bottom of verse 13, the new sentence there just at the bottom of this verse says, "So I took leave of them and I went on to Macedonia." What are you going to say about that, Pastor Mike? Well, I'm going to say exactly what it says. He packed up his backpack, he put his scrolls in it, he got his sword that Jesus taught him to carry around, he put his sword in his belt, and he got on his donkey or whatever he had for transportation, maybe on foot, who knows? And he starts out going to find Titus because he wanted to know about the Corinthians and was really unsure whether Titus was even alive. Who knows what might happen to him on the road? But I'm going to leave behind this stage, the platform, the lights, and I'm going to go follow what I know is the best thing to do right now, which is to be faithful to the demand of love. I'm going to go.

He made a decision. It was decisive. Number three, you got to "Act Decisively When Love Demands It." And this is a problem for our generation. We're not good at it. We're not good at it, we're not at it! I read some studies about what happened when COVID hit and it just really rocked people. In the midst of it, it was really bad, but at least coming out of it a study said a 36% increase in people's stress over making decisions both daily and long-term. 36%, I think, was on daily decisions, and 35% was on long-term decisions. This really messed us up, and I don't know if anybody has really rebounded completely from this. The anxiety that swept across our generation made us even more noncommittal, made us even more paralysis by analysis. We're not great at making decisions. And yet love is a decision, right? Love is a verb, as they used to say, or to put it in the words of the Scripture, First John Chapter 3 verse 18 says, "Let us love not in word or talk but in deed and in truth." And you know where good Christians often have the word and talk? In their own brain. Their brain. They're saying, yeah, really, I care about that person. I wonder where they are. I'm kind of worried about, you know,



are they still walking with the Lord? I haven't checked in there in a long time. They have all this talk, and that's the end of their love. And they think they love because they have concern for people, but that concern just bounces around inside their brain and it never gets turned into action. You need decisive action. You've got to do something about it. How many people have said, I just really appreciate the musicians on the stage and how they serve and I should really appreciate them? That's a great thought of concern and appreciation and encouragement to people, but if you've never really done anything about it, then you haven't loved them. Love is the action. You're supposed to love in deed and in truth, do something.

Gen Z is sadly known to be one of the worst at this. They have decision-making paralysis worse than any other segment of our sociological strata in our day, wanting massive information before they make a decision that will cost them anything, they don't want to get locked into anything, and they definitely need massive peer affirmation. I've got to have my buddies think this is a good idea. Now I'm all for talking about wisdom and consulting and all the rest, right? We should have wise counselors. That's great. But you know when there's no one else who sees the sacrificial need, and you see it, you better jump on it. You'd better do it. Do you remember that great scene in First Kings Chapter 18 when Elijah is there with the prophets of Baal? I just love the way it's put, and it translates into English. "How long will you go limping between two decisions?" It's kind of like Joshua in Joshua 24, right? "Choose this day who you will serve." Prophets of your forefathers, they'll do that. "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord." I like the decisiveness of that. And he says the same thing, and there's so much sarcasm in Elijah there, what are you guys doing? What are you doing? You got 500 prophets of Baal there. And by the way, to speak to Gen Z for a second, in the next chapter, in First Kings 19, he says, "I'm the only one left," the only prophet of Yahweh at this point. He didn't need the peer affirmation to do what was right. And he's tired of everyone kind of saying, well, I'm not sure, Baal, Yahweh, I don't know. And when it comes to loving people, we've got to make these decisions.

One old book, Future Shock 1971 is a good seller, if not a best seller. This was a long time ago, watching all the variety of decisions and choices we have, all the choices in toothpaste and potato chips. And they had no idea we'd carry around the biggest supermarket in the entire world in our pocket, get everything delivered to our door the next day. I mean, if he could only see the shock of the future. But in 1971, he wrote this. He said this problem of what's called today in sociological circles, "over-choice," so many choices. He says, "The advantages of diversity and individualization," are canceled, "by the complexity of the buyer's decision-making process." In other words, we will have so many options that we'll always want to keep those options open and therefore all the advantages of having a million different potato chips, actually dozens of different barbecue potato chip options, it's going to really cancel out the advantage and end up being a disadvantage for the average person. And all I'm telling you is that God would have us make decisive decisions because that's the only kind of decision you can make. And if you want to do good and you want to love here's what I want to say, all your good thoughts about caring for someone, going after the lost sheep, saying something positive to someone, thanking someone, encouraging someone, all of that has got to go into action. If it's not a decision, if it's not something that turns into action It's not much



good. It's a nice thought. It's like they used to say about intention, it's good intentions but it's not anything that matters, and it never is translated into love.

There are a lot of things in this world that have been blasphemed. The name of God, blasphemed, right? Taken from something important and with great grandeur and brought down to people seeing, you know, I don't know, someone jump out from behind a water fountain and saying, oh my god. It doesn't mean anything. You've cheapened this. Or someone who uses the word of "hell" and saying what the hell are you talking about? What the hell? What? Hell! Why are you using that word? That's an important word. That's a word that should make us shudder and you're using it as garnish on your sentences. Or "damn it." Think about that. Damn it. Is damnation a biblical concept? It is a biblical concept, and it should make you sweat to think about damnation and hell and God or Jesus Christ. You know, they don't hit their thumb with a hammer and say, oh, Gandhi, or oh, Mohammed. And they do this because Satan is active in our culture to take things with great meaning and make them so common that no one thinks about what they really mean.

Now let me add a word and a phrase that we use as Christians all the time in the lobby, out on the patio, in the parking lot. We say this phrase, "how are you?" And we don't really mean it. I want you to think about that. There's nothing else going on in our passage in Second Corinthians Chapter 2 verses 12 and 13 but this, how are they doing? How are they? And you know what Paul means by that? His heart is broken to know how they are. Don't say "how are you" unless you mean it. Let's put back into that the biblical concern for the welfare of people. Isn't that really what those words should mean? I'm concerned for your welfare. "How are you doing?" I just want us to be Christians who love each other, because you know what? When a non-Christian walks into this environment and this community, when they're used to people at work saying all the time, how are you, and no one really expects a response, because it doesn't mean anything, it'd sure be good when they come here that someone really cares when they say, "how you are." I'm just saying let's not fall to this. I hope you're not out there using grandiose words, big words like "god" and "hell" and "damn it" and all those things when you don't mean what they biblically mean. Well don't use "how are you doing" because this whole passage is basically in two verses "how are you doing?" I need to know because I care.

And if this, for some reason, is triggering the impulsive just to act on feelings, I'm telling you, you can have concern and react in a rash way, and that's not biblical. Let me just give you one verse for that, Proverbs 19 verse 2, "Desire without knowledge is not good." You may have a desire to bless someone, to take concern for someone, and you just go for it. "Whoever makes haste with his feet misses the way." Listen to it. "Desire without knowledge." If you're not thinking carefully, it's not good. And "whoever makes haste with his feet misses the way." If you're rash, you feel something, you know, I'm just going to do whatever comes to my mind first. I'm going to pack it up and leave Troas and go find Titus. You better stop and make sure you got to think about this. How does God want me to act? What would God have me do? What would love have me say? What would love make me go after? Where would love make me go? What would God have me to do if I'm to be a loving Christian who truly cares for the welfare of people?



Sometimes we read things in the Bible, we don't think about it, but if you leave on a Roman road to go to a region called Macedonia, northern Greece, you're looking for one guy who you sent with a letter. I mean, what are the odds of finding him? Just amazing. And yet, of course, Chapter 7 says he did find Titus, and he was totally relieved. Not just that he found his friend and he wasn't dead in a ditch somewhere, but he also brought good news that the Corinthians responded rightly, so much so that earlier in Chapter 2, he could say, I know you. You had a repentant man and now I want you to reaffirm your love. Holy forgive this guy. And I'm just thinking, what are the odds of that? The prompting of God to make him unsettled, to act, I mean, this was at the right time and the right way. Sometimes we've just got to guess at this, but think, it's just providential that God has put this person on my heart.

Let me give you one verse here, two of them I guess. Proverbs Chapter 3 verses 27 and 28. You may know the "why" for your unsettling concern, but you need to trust God with the "when." When it surfaces and you think I should act, I should write, I should be concerned, I should call, I should find them in the lobby. Here's what Proverbs Chapter 3 verse 27 says, "Do not withhold good from those to whom it is due, when it is in your power to do it. And do not say to your neighbor, 'Go, and come again, tomorrow and I'll give it' --- when you have it with you." Some of you right now have the feeling, you have the sense of concern and I just don't want you to not act. I don't want you to act rashly, but I want you to know there are people in your life right now who need you to bear their burden. There are people right now who need your encouragement. There are people in your life right now who need you to take an interest in their lives. And I'm talking to the loneliest among us. You may say, well, I hope some people are listening to this sermon. God's trying to talk to you too. You. Don't just sit around and wait, right? It's your concern to care for those around you as well. It's your obligation. It is not always going to feel good. It won't always make you look like a success. It may leave you tired, it may leave you frustrated, it may leave you tempted to think is it worth it, but I'm here to tell you as I wrap this up, it is worth it. It is worth it. Christ, our ultimate example. He gave his life, he laid down his life for us. He says that's the ultimate example of love. Painful ministry that ended with him being exalted above every name. It's time to move, it's time to act, it is time to step into someone's life with real genuine concern for their welfare. Don't wait and know that love demands it. Don't be rash, don't be reactive. But "Don't withhold good from those to whom it is due."

God, in our world people know that it's going to cost them something. Engage in a conversation because there are 25 other conversations they won't get to be in if they really take an interest in someone's life even today. We just pray that you'd help us not to make decisions selfishly. We'd really take a concern selflessly, trusting you to meet our needs. We know you'll take care of that. It's just like Matthew Chapter 6 verse 33. We really "seek first your kingdom and your righteousness." We do that even as it relates to every relationship we have. We want Christ to reign supreme in people's lives. We want people to walk closer with you. We want people to be doing well, even in the midst of their trials. We want them to endure. We want there to be faithfulness. If we can help them and encourage them and bear their burdens, God, we know you'll take care of us. It's like we know you bore up Jesus, your own Son. And he gave himself to those around him, very imperfect people who let him down a lot. He kept giving, he kept serving. He laid down his life for them. So God help us to be



more Christ-like in our love for others. Let us be willing to pass up on what might be a strategic gain in our lives in order to love someone or some small group of people, set aside things that may not make sense to others, but we know it's going to be a selfless investment of time or effort or money or attention or whatever it is. I pray that would happen in ways that would make you pleased, that people would know on this campus the love of Christ exists, it's exercised, it's operating here in our midst.

In Jesus name. Amen.