

Discovering Joy in Shared Ministry

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[0 : 00] he's a very relevant, relevant theologian. He looks at the issues of the day and compares them with Scripture and responds very appropriately.

Anyway, he begins his little message on the first part of Philippians, the first chapter of Philippians, about the gospel with this scenario.

I would like to buy about \$5 worth of the gospel. Please. Not too much. Just enough to make me happy.

But not so much that I get addicted. I don't want so much gospel that I learn to really hate covetousness and lust. I certainly don't want so much that I start to love my enemies, cherish self-denial, and contemplate missionary service in some alien culture.

Uh-uh. I want ecstasy, not repentance. I want transcendence, not transformation. I would like to be cherished by some nice, forgiving, broad-minded people.

[1 : 18] But I myself don't want to love those from different races. I would like enough gospel to make my family secure and my children well-behaved, but not so much that I find my ambitions redirected or my giving too greatly enlarged.

I would like about \$5 worth of gospel. Please. Carson says, of course, none of us is so crass as to put it that way.

But most of us have felt the temptation to opt for a domesticated version of the gospel. It's tempting, and it's a common temptation among Christians to opt for a gospel of convenience, a gospel that's user-friendly, that's a self-help kind of gospel.

It has form and the right words, but no power. I don't want it to change me. I just want it to make me feel good and make me feel safe.

So many choose for a gospel of comfort without any challenge, a gospel of solace with no sacrifice, of affirmation without agony, a gospel of happiness without holiness.

[2 : 57] Paul's major concern, especially in chapter one, is with the gospel. In fact, he brings up the word gospel six times in the first chapter.

Gospel, gospel, gospel, gospel. You kind of get the impression that he's all about the gospel. It's kind of a passion for him. In fact, he'll live and die for it.

He doesn't want \$5 worth of gospel. He wants his whole life for the gospel. For him, it's like the treasure found in a field where you sell everything else that you have just to buy that field so that you can have the treasure.

That's what the gospel is. It's something that really, really matters. So what is this gospel that we're speaking about?

It's a gospel that brings, in the ministry of it, brings joy, Paul says. It brings joy. And when this gospel ministry is shared with others, that joy increases more.

[4 : 15] It's one thing to share the gospel and receive the joy of that. It's another to do it with others and experience the joy of that.

Well, last week, we gave an introduction to this little book of Philippians. We saw the theme of discovering joy in the Lord recurring over and over. As I said, the noun, the word joy, appears five times in these four chapters.

And the verb, rejoice, recurs nine times. So we saw, I just kind of gave an overview of where these joy and rejoice words spread throughout these four chapters.

And he relates joy, first of all, in chapter one, to ministry and then to hardship, then to expectations. Chapter two, he relates joy to unity and then to faithfulness.

He relates it to witness. He relates it to relationship with other believers. He talks about in 3.1 and 4.4, joy in the Lord specifically.

[5 : 26] Rejoice in the Lord. And he talks about the long run, about forgetting what lays behind and striving forward to what's ahead, running the marathon, that he finds joy in that too, in the long haul.

He talks about joy in relationship to anxious problems. And then he ends the letter talking about, I've learned to find joy in every circumstance.

I've learned the secret of contentment. And I rejoice in whatever my circumstance is. And so by the time you get to the end of these four chapters, man, there's a broad scheme of finding joy in all these different kind of circumstances.

So what is joy? What is joy? Now you look up an American dictionary, you'll find, oh, happiness is one of the synonyms for it.

But no, it's not at all like happiness. Happiness is based on what happens to you. Happiness is an external caused emotion.

[6 : 38] Right? So if good things are happening, you feel happy because it's happening good. Bad things happen, I'm not happy. Why? Because this happened. Joy is different.

Joy has an internal source. It's more of a delight and a gladness that comes from within because of an attitude or a mindset or a recognition, a view of life.

And it's found in the Lord and in those things related to the Lord. So no matter what I go through, I can find delight in the Lord in spite of whatever might be happening.

So he begins in chapter one, the first subject that he relates joy to is shared ministry, a deepening, and he talks about a deepening kind of joy in shared ministry.

He talks about a shared source of joy in ministry. So in this opening paragraph, one through 11, the first two verses, of course, being simply the greeting.

[7 : 46] He names himself, he names the recipients, he gives them their greeting of grace. And then in verse three, he begins to talk to them. And he begins with a prayer of thanks, first of all, in verses three through eight.

I give thanks for these reasons. And then verses nine through 11 is his prayer going forward for them. So first is prayer about what his relationship is with them.

I thank God for my relationship with you for these reasons. And then verses nine through 11, here is my prayer for you. This is what I pray for you all the time. This is what I pray.

This is the content of my prayer. And so there's two roots of joy I see here. One, in verses three through eight, he relates it to a shared passion of the gospel. What brings joy?

First of all, a shared passion for the gospel. Not just a shared passion, but a shared passion for the gospel because the gospel is the source of joy.

[8 : 51] And then secondly, in his prayer, he talks about love. The love abounding. And so what maintains that passion, what springs, where that passion springs from is a love Paul's going to talk about that matures.

A love that matures so much that it now changes its mindset and it gets its power from Christ having been filled.

Okay, so two roots here of joy. Really, one, but then the other one, the prayer then feeds back into it and I'll show you how that works.

So first of all, Paul's joy, his joy is rooted, first of all, in a shared passion for the gospel. Now, Paul has joy in the gospel, but he mentions joy in praying for them because they're sharing that ministry with him.

I see it in verse 4. It talks about making my prayers with joy. Why? Verse 5, because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now.

[10 : 05] That's what brings him joy. I have joy in the gospel, but what particularly enriches my joy is your partnership with me, your involvement with me.

So we share that passion for the gospel. So notice in verses 3 and 4, first his pleasure. He's pleased to pray for them. I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, always, in every prayer of mine for you all, making mention, making my prayer with joy.

So there's a delight. There's a pleasure here. He's always praying for them. That doesn't mean he never stops praying. It means he, whenever he's praying, he remembers them.

He has set times of prayer, in other words. Obviously, he's not praying while he's writing this letter, so he's talking about always, in other words, at the times of my prayer, I have set times for prayer.

When I'm praying, you always come to mind. And I'm, and when you come to mind, I get joy. It brings a smile to my, it brings, it doesn't, it doesn't, it doesn't make me go, oh, those Philippians.

[11 : 16] it's like, yeah, those Philippians. I love those people. They're such a delight. Why? Because, one reason is because they participate in the gospel with me.

They don't just write a check and send it. No, they're involved. They're plugged into this. They're engaged in it. They give me delight and gladness. That's what we see.

We see this partnership in verse five. Why? Because of your partnership in the gospel at the beginning and then no longer. No, from the first day until now.

From the very first time I met you back in, which we'll see in Acts 16, there was something different about you guys. I saw it in Lydia.

I saw it in the jailer. you know, I saw it in you people and it started then and it kept going. It wasn't just that you were glad to receive the gospel but man, that gospel transformed you right away and you wanted to be engaged with giving that out to others too and you wanted to do anything you could to help me do that.

[12 : 28] So you were engaged. You were passionate about it. We talk about the gospel. What is the gospel? What do we mean by that? You know, and Carson talks about \$5 worth of gospel.

What is that? Is that part of the message without the rest of the message? Well, apparently. When we talk about gospel, remember we have those four areas, four words that kind of remind us of what the gospel is in its completeness.

Remember, it's God, man, Christ, and faith. Those four areas wrap up with the gospel. It's a message about God.

Who's God? God. He's holy, righteous, just. He's also merciful, forgiving. Right?

We see that in Exodus 34. He's all of these amazing qualities together. He's forgiving and merciful and gracious, abounding in loving kindness. He's also just.

[13 : 30] How do you square those up? How can he forgive when he's just? Right? So there's that tension in the very nature of who God is. And then that creates a problem for part two.

Man. Who's man? Well, man who was made holy or made good by God, right? And then fell and sinned and has had a problem ever since.

He's led his life in ruin. Right? He walks away from God. So he's got a problem with God. However, you've got this God who is holy and just and must hold his standard and cannot bend the line.

He is holy and just. But he's also merciful. So how is he going to do that? How is God going to rescue this man and still be just and holy? Well, that's part three.

Christ. He sends his son to live a righteous life, to fulfill the law, and then to put himself in man's place and pay his penalty.

[14 : 32] So God can be both just because he punishes the sin and he can be merciful because for all those who believe in him, he can exchange and forgive and be that merciful, abounding, and loving kindness God.

And that's the fourth part, faith, is those who believe in him, those who trust in Jesus and accept this message. That's the gospel. So they're partners in the gospel, this message of salvation.

But notice, they're partners in the gospel. Literally, they're partners into the gospel, which means there's more of a process going on. It's not just in the gospel and, you know, love the gospel, let's just keep it right here.

It's into the gospel. In other words, into the progress of the gospel, into the advancement of the gospel. So they're partners not just in, yeah, we love the gospel, let's keep it to ourselves.

They love the gospel and they go, we gotta get this out. And Paul, you're pretty good at it, so we're gonna, we're gonna put our tag next to you and let's go.

[15 : 40] How can we help? So they're into that gospel. They're partners. And it's interesting this word, partnership is the word koinonia. Perhaps you've heard that word before.

It's a more popular Greek word. Koinonia, meaning commonness, often translated fellowship. So we talk about having fellowship with one another, right?

And that means what, we go down in the basement and we have food together, right? We call that fellowship. Well, yeah, we're sharing in food, but of course, for Christians, that goes much deeper than that. Food's just a reason to get together and then our fellowship goes beyond that.

Our commonness in Christ. So here he's talking about, they have a commonness with me and it's not just a commonness, but it's actually a participation, an engagement, a sharing in this ministry.

And so they have a passionate engagement. They get involved and it's more than just, he is going to say in the last chapter, chapter four, about how you've sent gifts, you've sent support for me.

[16 : 45] We've got to get this picture of Paul's the missionary and they're sending gifts, whether it's money or supplies or whatever it is. And he talks about, you guys have done it from the beginning. You've done it more than once. You've done it in your poverty.

I mean, you push me to do it. I'll tell you, no, I don't need it. You say, oh, we're going to give it anyway. You're those kind of givers. No, we want to give because we want to be part of you and we know you need it.

And Paul's like, no, I'm okay. I can get along with nothing. No, we want you to have something. They're those kind of folks, but they don't do it just in their giving. It's not just like they write a check and okay, now I've given.

Nothing wrong with writing a check, by the way, unless you're trying to avoid being involved and say, okay, I've done my part. That's a way of, you know, writing a check is that's fine.

That's great. That's good because yeah, I want to help. I know that helps, but I certainly want to do more than that. If I have a passion for the gospel, then I'm also going to be praying for them. And we see that the Philippians do that.

[17 : 46] We see that later in chapter one, verse 19 there. He says, I know by your prayers, I know you're praying for me. And then also their suffering at the end of chapter one, he talks about, hey, you suffer too.

You're suffering for this gospel too. See, they live in a Roman colony. And in a Roman colony, see, Philippians is a little different than most cities in Greece.

Philippians is actually a Roman colony. Like Rome itself, it's like Rome little. And in Rome, big Rome, they've already kicked the Jews out.

And it is illegal to worship anyone besides Caesar in a Roman colony. And so to take your stand as a Christian in a Roman colony is daring and risky.

That's why Paul gets arrested because they say, oh, he's doing things that are contrary to our laws. Which is true. He's talking about worshiping a different Savior other than Nero. Or, wasn't Nero at that time.

[18 : 58] Anyway. So, so suffering too. And then in chapter 2, he talks about their witness. Right? To not be grumbling, but instead, right, be holding their light, you know, in that community and holding forth the word.

Their witness. So, they're involved more than just kind of gifts. They're involved in praying and suffering and witness for the gospel. And then, interesting, Paul then shares another reason for his joy.

It's not just a partnership in the gospel, but then he shares a promise in verse 6. And a lot of people hear this verse. They kind of know this verse from Philippians, but they don't always usually know the context.

You know, we just hear this, you know, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion. Well, yeah, that's what it says, but it's within a context. Why does Paul know that?

Why does Paul have that confidence? He says, I am sure. In other words, I am confident. I'm convinced of this about you.

[20 : 06] That he who began a good work in you will complete it at the day of Jesus Christ. And it's right for me to feel this way about you all. Excuse me.

Because I hold you in my heart. Why? For you are partakers with me of grace. There's the reason. Again, he brings up this participant, this partnership, this partaker.

So, he's confident in God's working. He's saying, if God began a work in you, he will complete it. He's not saying to anyone and everyone who has mentioned God in their verbal or prayed the prayer or whatever.

He's not saying and giving an open promise to them or a guarantee that, oh, God began a work in you, he will complete it. No, the question is, has he began a work in you?

Just because you asked him doesn't mean he has. Your salvation does not depend on your prayer, your act, your work.

[21 : 07] It depends on his doing. That's why Jesus, whenever Jesus talks about praying, he doesn't say, oh, just pray once, that's fine. If you prayed, then you got it. I used to hear that.

I went up to the altar and called, oh, if you prayed the prayer and if you meant it, it's good as done. And I went through many more years of not seeing the prayer answered because God was teaching me something.

Just like Jesus taught always, keep praying, keep praying, keep praying until he answers. Once he answers, then you know.

So my faith is not based on what I did and my faith is based on what he did. And Paul says, how am I confident? Why is it that I'm confident that he began to work in you? Because, verse 7, you are all partakers with me of grace.

I've seen it. You've been partakers, at the end of verse 7, you've been partakers with me of grace both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel.

[22 : 11] In other words, you've been there. I've seen it. I've seen it. I've seen the grace come through you. He's not saying, I see your work. I've seen grace in you.

I've seen God working in you because I remember who you were and that wasn't you. That was a new you. And you were there when I stood before the trial and you backed me up.

When they claimed that I'm a disturber of the peace, you said, no, he's not. He didn't start that disturbance.

You're there willing to, you know, you're witnessing alongside me. You're willing to back me up. We'll read that in a moment in Acts 16. So they're partakers.

They're sharing in it. They're engaging in it. So how did, let's look at Acts 15. How did these Philippians participate in the ministry of the gospel?

[23 : 16] And in Acts 16, we get the first glimpse of the Philippians. And we get it through just a couple of people. And this is 12 years before Paul's writing.

This was back in, what year, what, 50? I think. Man. I don't know.

Check my notes from last week because I lost the date. Anyway, I know it's 12 years between when he visited Philippi and then when he wrote to the Philippians. So 12 years has passed.

So in other words, their faithfulness has been over 12 years. Not just at the beginning, not just your partnership with me in the first day, but until now. You've been consistent all along.

Your passion has kept me going and brought me joy. So how did these Philippians participate? What does it look like? How were they engaged? So here's Acts 16.

[24 : 13] I just want to read it because we get a picture of these people. So verse 11, Acts 16, 11. So sailing on from Troas, we made a direct voyage for Samothrace, and you know where that is, and the following day to Neapolis, and from there to Philippi, which is the leading city of the district of Macedonia and a Roman colony.

So he's standing them out, see? We remained in this city some days, which for Paul could mean weeks, which I think it did mean weeks.

And on the Sabbath day, we went outside the gate to the riverside, see, because they didn't have a synagogue. No synagogues. Not that many Jews. So no synagogues.

So where are you going to find the religious people? Out by the water. So on the Sabbath day, we went outside the gate to the riverside where we supposed, see, we just, that's the normal thing, we find a place of prayer.

And we sat down and spoke to the women who had come together. Interesting. Women started this church. Is that okay? Well, it's here. You know, what are you going to do?

[25 : 21] The women had come together, and one of the women who heard us was a woman named Lydia from the city of Thyatira. See, she's an import too.

She's a seller of purple goods who was a worshiper of God. So she's a Gentile, and she's a worshiper of God. She was seeking the true God.

The Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what Paul had said. See, it's God moving first. He moved in her heart to pay attention. She was already ready.

You know, she's already seeking God, but now he's like, okay, now you're going to see the rest of the story. You can see where that God makes connection to you. The Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul. And after she was baptized, and her household as well, so it's not just her, but her household, which would be her husband, her children, her mother-in-law, and you know, whoever all, it's, I get a picture, it's a big house because she's going to invite them to stay at that house.

Her household as well, she urged us, look at this, she urged us saying, if you've judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come to my house and stay. And then notice the next statement. She prevailed on us.

[26 : 39] She wouldn't let us say, no, we're good. No, you'll stay. This is Lydia. She's a businesswoman. She gets things done.

And here God's changed her heart, so she's going to get a good thing done. That's not enough that you get baptized, you know, and you're going to stay. We're going to take care of you. So I don't want you to worry about rent.

I don't want you to worry about eating. I don't want you, you know, you work out of here. So verse 16, as we're going to the place of prayer, so probably a week's gone by, so probably going back again the next Sabbath.

We were met by a slave girl who had a spirit of divination and brought her owners much gained by fortune telling. She followed Paul and us crying out, these men are servants of the Most High God who proclaim to you the way of salvation.

Hey, that's a pretty good deal, isn't it? They're getting good publicity. Problem is, it's publicity from a demon. It's true publicity, but it's from a demon.

[27 : 47] You going to take it? What's Paul feel about that? And this she kept doing for many days. So, days go by, days go by. God, Paul having become greatly annoyed, hmm, turned and said to the spirit, I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her and it came out of her that very hour.

Why didn't they just do that days ago? Well, he's not flippant. And he's careful and I'm sure he prayed about it. And maybe the Lord said, okay, next time, just say, that's it.

So, he does that. So, anyway, verse 19, so when her owners saw that their hope of gain was gone. See, this is a business adventure. They made money from this little girl. They seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace before the rulers.

When they had brought them to the magistrates, they said, these men are Jews. See, Jews, Roman colony, Jews. We don't want no Jews around here. You got to hear that language.

These men are Jews and they're disturbing our city. Is that what they were doing? Let's see, Pax Romana.

[29 : 00] Romans are all about peace. Any disturbance, we quash it. Rome ruled with an iron hand.

Okay? Especially in Rome and a place like Philippi where the citizens are all Roman and we want the peace. It's disturbing our business.

Well, they didn't tell them that. Disturbing the peace. They, verse 20, they advocate customs that are not lawful for us as Romans to accept our practice.

There it is. They're talking about this Jesus. They're talking about another savior. They're talking about another king. Uh-uh. And they're talking about worshiping him.

That's anti-Roman. Caesar, right? Remember when they crucified Jesus, they even appealed to Pilate. You know, Caesar's our king.

[30 : 03] I mean, I want to spin it for the Romans. So the crowd joined in attacking them. There comes the mob. Magistrates tore the garments off them and gave orders to beat them with rods.

And when they had inflicted many blows on them, they threw them into prison, ordering the jailer to keep them safely. Having received this order, he put them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in the stocks.

About midnight, how did this affect Paul and Silas? About midnight, Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God. And the prisoners were listening to them.

Interesting. And suddenly, there was a great earthquake. Okay, that was just a coincidence, I'm sure. It was a great earthquake so that the foundations of the prison were shaken and immediately all the doors were open and everyone's bonds were unfastened.

Now, how does an earthquake unfasten the bonds? I get the doors jarring off, but how do the, you know, the personal, eh, okay. I don't know. I'm just saying. Everyone's bonds, not just one.

[31 : 08] And when the jailer woke and saw that the prison doors were open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself, supposing that the prisoners had escaped. Of course they would escape. If they're unchained, they'd go, wouldn't they? Unless they're dumb prisoners or Christians.

But Paul cried out with a loud voice, do not harm yourself. We're all, we're all here. And the jailer called for lights and rushed in and trembling with fear, he fell down before Paul and Silas.

Something's happening to this guy. Then he brought them out and said, sirs, what must I do to be saved? How did he go there? Something was happening in this guy.

I don't have time to look at that, but he asked the, he asked the \$10,000 or \$25,000, \$100,000. What's the question now? What's it worth nowadays? Used to be, you know, days ago, the game show was \$25,000 question.

Million dollar. Yeah, that's right. He wants to be a millionaire. What's the million dollar question? Who wants to be, what must I do to be saved? What effort? What work?

[32 : 16] And they said, believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved, you and your household. All that believe will be saved. And they spoke the word of the Lord to them.

So that wasn't all they said to him. They spoke the word of the Lord. They told him the gospel. And to all who were in his house. And he took them that same hour of the night and washed their wounds.

And he was baptized at once. He and his family, all who had heard the word. Then he brought them up to his house and they set food before them. And he rejoiced along with his entire household that he had believed in God.

But when it was day, the magistrates sent the police saying, let those men go. And the jailer reported these words to Paul saying, the magistrates have sent to let you go. Therefore come out now and go in peace.

Paul said to them, wait a minute. They have beaten us publicly, uncondemned. Men who are, by the way, Roman citizens. Who? Paul knew what to say.

[33 : 19] He's in a Roman colon. Excuse me. I'm a Roman citizen. I've been treated unjustly. And have thrown us into prison. Do they now want to throw us out secretly?

No, let them come themselves and take us out. Paul's not ready to go. I'm going to take a stand here. Injustice has been done. I'm going to point it out.

Interesting, isn't it? The police reported these words to the magistrates and they were afraid when they heard that they were Roman citizens. Because now it's going to come back on them because Rome would say, there's a process to order here, folks.

You don't punish before you find out some information. Even in Rome. Now, if they weren't Roman citizens, we don't care.

These are citizens. So police reported these words to the magistrates and they were afraid because they heard they were Roman citizens. So they came and apologized to them and they took them out and asked them to leave the city.

[34 : 20] So, okay, they got their apology. And Paul got his name in that city. And they said, affirmed. Okay, because he wants to come back. They're asking me to leave now, but it'll settle down.

I'll be back. So what do they do before they leave? So they went out of the prison and they visited Lydia. Let's go get a meal.

We need some food. We need some comfort. We need to be around some folks that will encourage us. So they went to Lydia.

And when they had seen the brothers, now who are the brothers? Where'd they come from? Well, apparently, starting with Lydia and then her household, there's a little church girl.

Probably going to add that jailer and his family because they just got saved. So they're going to be joining this church. I don't know about the slave girl. We just know that she got set free. We don't know that she got saved.

[35 : 23] But there's a little, there's a little growing little community here. So before he left, I'm going to go see the church. I didn't call it that. It's just a little group of brothers. Lydia and leading women and good place to start church.

So how are they engaged? They're engaged by hospitality, room and food, supporting them with their means, providing their needs.

Later, they're going to engage by their prayers and suffering themselves for the identity with Christ, for their own witness. Remember, Paul said, you've done it from the first day until now.

12 years of continued support. So joy, first of all, is rooted in a shared passion for the gospel. Have I used up all my time already? I don't know.

I didn't look at the clock when I got it, so I'm, you know, I'm ignorant. So that's the first, so joy springs. Joy is rooted in a shared passion for the gospel. Where does this passion come from?

[36 : 26] And more importantly, what I'm more interested in, because I think we've all experienced joy. We've all experienced joy in the gospel. We've experienced that the first time we got it.

You know, when God opened our heart, we got that joy. We're like, oh, oh, what that means, right? Joy, oh. So we all know, so how do you maintain it?

Right? What about when bad stuff happens, how do you keep the joy then? And that's what I think is what Paul is going to talk about here in this prayer. He tells them what he prays.

I'm so glad he did that, because I like to see, how did he pray for his church? Because I pray for my church. Yeah, you. How did he do it?

And one of our Bible studies a while back, we kind of looked at all of Paul's prayers, because he records a lot of them, and they're not always the same, but they have some key elements. Fascinating the way he prays, and he prays a little different for this church.

[37 : 29] He prays for their love. So his concern, here's how he prays. This is what I pray, verse nine, that your love may abound more and more with knowledge and all discernment.

His concern is for their love. So in other words, what I think happens here is the passion for the gospel springs from a maturing love that is empowered by Christ, because that's what he talks about here in verses nine to 11.

A maturing love that is empowered by Christ. So look at the prayer, first of all, in verse nine, he prays for their love, that your love, you already have, not that you get love, but that you already have love.

So I know you already love one another, and you already love God, you love me, I pray that your love will abound more and more, so I want it to grow. Well, what does he mean by love? That's important that we define it, because today, love means what?

Whatever you want it to mean. So what is love? So this is the word agape, that Jesus took that word, remember, that meant about the same as our word for love in our culture. Back then, agape didn't mean anything.

[38 : 38] And that's why Peter argued with him. Peter, do you agape love me? No, I feel I love you. None of this agape stuff, I'm committed, right? So agape didn't mean a lot back then.

Jesus took that word and infused it with all this other meaning. So to love means, Jesus said, to lay down your life, right? It means to act sacrificially.

It's others focused, not me focused. And Paul defined it, he got it later in 1 Corinthians 13, right? Love is what? Patient, kind, right?

Self-control and all these things. It bears all things, believes all things. It's not a quitting kind of love. It's not a come and go kind of love. It's a consistent, faithful, selfless, sacrificial kind of love.

So that's the love he's talking about. Real love, real Christian love. And he prays that it abounds, that it grows, that it deepens more and more, and it gets richer. In other words, I think that it matures.

[39 : 42] It matures. Why? Because look at how he says that it abound. More and more, what? With knowledge and all discernment. That's interesting. How does love grow in knowledge and in discernment?

Isn't love kind of the warm fuzzies? What does knowledge have to do with that? What does discernment have to do with loving one another? We just want to, can't we all just get along?

We just want to love. Well, Paul's saying, no, there's actually boundaries to love. It abounds within the area of knowledge first.

And the word for knowledge there is the experiential kind of knowledge. It's the walking with Christ, the walking with God kind of knowledge. To know by experience, to know personally.

So, in other words, that your love grows in personal relationship with God and others. And then in discernment, that's interesting. That your love become discerning.

[40 : 47] That your love recognize kind of what situations you're in and how to apply my love. It's not indiscriminate. It's with discernment.

See, mature love doesn't just kind of without thought. it's, okay, here's the situation. How can I love best in that situation?

Do I confront? Do I comfort? Do I just come alongside? Do I say something? Do I not say anything? It's a maturing love.

It's learning. It's growing. It's deepening. See, how do I apply it in that situation? That's discernment.

So, praise for this love to abound. Why? Verse 10. Here's another interesting thing. Where does this love lead? What's the goal of this kind of maturing love?

[41 : 49] Verse 10. So that you may approve what is excellent. That just seems odd to me. Doesn't that read odd? Wouldn't we expect it to say his love would abound so that, you know, we're all united and we're in oneness and we're...

I mean, I expect something like that, you know, so that peace will flow and... But he's talking about that you come to some kind of understanding that your love matures so that there...

so that you might approve what is excellent. So the word for approve there is that word for testing metal, right? You test and you approve metal by putting the heat to it, right?

And all the... You know, you scrape off all the impurities on the top. It's testing. Test the metal that he talked about. So approve. So approve means you show what's genuine, what's real.

So you see where the real metal is by heating it up, right? You test it. You approve it. So in other words, you come to recognize, you see what's real. And then he says, so that you may approve, test, recognize what is excellent.

[43 : 00] What has what has distinguishing value? To put it another way, that you come to recognize what really matters.

The things that are excellent. The things that stand the test. The things that that are in the long run, the things that really matter.

So maturing love that grows in knowledge and discernment will come to recognize the things that matter.

What matters? We hear a lot of statements about what matters. Well, black lives matter. Yeah, absolutely they do. But is that what really matters?

Yeah, they matter. No argument for me. We're talking about what really matters. Is there something that matters more than black lives?

[44 : 07] Or white lives? Or yellow lives? Or red lives? The gospel. And see, that will affect how you love those black lives or how you love those red lives.

Because it's not going to matter what the color they are. Because they're people. when love matures in a relationship that deepens with God and a discernment about what's going on, we begin to see what is really essential, what is vital, what is of value, what really matters.

We will major on the majors and minor on the minors. We'll put people over programs. Because people really matter. Programs don't really matter.

Do they? Ultimately, they matter sometimes at the time as long as they're serving people.

Programs minor, people are major. Gospels major. God's way and then there's man's way.

[45 : 43] There's God's ways and then there's church growth principles. Which are basically pragmatism and man-centered ideas.

Some of them are fine. But I was ready to quit seminary when it came into my seminary. I'm like, what is this?

Where did Jesus say that? That'd draw a big crowd. It seemed like Jesus was kind of anti-big crowd when I read the gospel. He was kind of afraid of the wrong message getting out here.

Okay. And then notice, here's the thing. Where's the power for this love to grow? When this love matures and come to this understanding what really matters, how?

How does the love grow? Do I make that grow? Is that something I got to force up? Is that something I just got to get my act together? You know, is that what that is? Is Paul telling me, okay, okay, I want you to go out and start loving now.

[46 : 51] You're not loving. Shame on you. Is that what he's saying? No, he's not praying. I'm not asking you. I'm asking God to cause your love to grow so that these things happen.

And how's that going to happen? Verse 11. Filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ. A couple of words missing there so that we understand it fully. Having been filled is the literal.

Sorry, I love my grammar. And here's a case where grammar is really, really important. It's not me filling myself. It's not getting new filling.

It's perfect passive. Having been filled. Having in the past already gotten it and been, in other words, received it, not done it.

Having been filled. Having been filled. I've already received this gift which produces fruit. Having been filled with what?

[47 : 54] The fruit of righteousness. The fruit. What's this fruit? Well, it's a fruit that comes from righteousness. It's a fruit that is characterized by righteousness. It's a fruit that this gift of righteousness that you've gotten back when you were converted becomes now fruitful.

and it's this fruit of righteousness that he then defines as specifically comes through Jesus Christ.

So it's not just that you got the righteousness long ago from Christ. It's that the fruit, the ongoing fruit keeps coming through Jesus Christ. It's the fruit.

Not the righteousness. The Greek's very specific. He's defining the fruit that comes through Jesus Christ. Not the righteousness. Right? So you had those gifts. But the ongoing fruit.

In other words, fruit. What's the fruit of the Spirit? What's the first fruit of the Holy Spirit? Yeah. Fruit of the Holy Spirit? Love. Coincidence. And then what?

[48 : 56] What's after love? Joy! Wow. Isn't that interesting? It's number two.

I wouldn't have put it too. But I'm pretty flawed. Love. So what's the fruit?

The fruit's obviously fruit of the Holy Spirit. It's not the fruit of Bill. It's not up to you, Bill, to do the love. It's up to you to be attached to the one who gives you the power to love.

He'll do it. You bear fruit, not produce it. That's an old hobby horse I climb on a lot. But it's really, really important. Because it's not what you hear everywhere.

It's not me producing love. It's me bearing love. Because I don't have power to do it. I don't even have the will to do it sometimes. I'm ashamed to admit.

[50 : 01] But as Philippians says, he's working within us to will what I don't want to will and to work what I can't work. I love Philippians. So here's how I want to wrap it up.

Because we said this passion for the gospel springs from unmaturing love empowered by Christ. So that makes sense, right? So I have a passion for the gospel. But then I go through life and how do I keep that passion alive for the gospel that gives me joy?

And so it's God continuing in my life by deepening my love. Love is key to that joy continuing. Love is key for my passion for the gospel.

If I don't love people, where's my passion for the gospel? So they go hand in hand. My love both for God and for others is going to be well, the best way I can love them is give them the gospel.

And if I can't give it to them right away because they're not quite ready because they've got a bunch of barriers up, then I've got to love through those barriers. I've got to love them long enough and kind enough like God loved me right through all the bumps till they're ready.

[51 : 22] So I thought of 1 John 15, not 1 John. It'd take you a long time to find 1 John 15 because you get to 1 John 5 and go, where's 15?

John, Gospel of John 15 where Jesus puts these three terms together. He puts the term fruit, love, and joy all together. Watch this.

He's talking about bearing fruit. So John 15, he talks about fruit first. I am the true vine, my father's the vine dresser, every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away, but every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it may bear more fruit.

It's about fruit. Already you are clean because of the word that I've spoken to you. Abide in me, here's the key, abide in me and I in you as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me.

See, I'm the vine, you're the branch. I'm the vine, you're the branch. If you're not attached to me, if you're not abiding in me, if you're not drawing your strength from me, if you're not drawing everything from the vine, if you're just over here by yourself, nothing.

[52 : 43] Right? I love this analogy. It helps me understand faith. Yeah, abiding in the vine. I'm attached, I'm drawn.

I'm not just attached, I'm not just a dead branch on there like in my tree at home. It's actually growing. It's actually going to have fruit because there's life running through it.

So he goes on, he says, whoever abides in me and I in him, he is that bears much fruit. For apart from me you can do something every once in a while, right?

Oh, you can do all kinds of stuff by yourself, right? Nothing. If anyone does not abide in me, he's thrown away like a branch and withers and the branches are gathered and thrown in the fire and burned.

But if you abide in me and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish and it'll be done for you. By the way, you want to name it and claim it? In this context, you're abiding in him, he's abiding in you, ask whatever you want.

[53 : 49] Because you're going to ask for things I want if you're abiding in me. Guarantee you won't ask for a Ferrari if you're abiding in him. I don't know why, I just guarantee it.

By this is my father glorified, oh, that you bear much fruit and so, what? prove to be my disciples. As the father has loved me, so I have loved you.

Abide in my love. Now, here comes love. He's talked about fruit, now he's going to talk about love. Abide in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love. Just as I have kept my father's commandments, and abide in his love.

And oh, by the way, now we talked about fruit and love, now I want to talk about something else. Here's a result that comes to all this. these things I've spoken to you about abiding and about fruit and about love.

Why? That my joy might be in you and that your joy might be full. What's joy got to do with it? How does this all tie together?

[54 : 57] Fruit comes from abiding in Jesus, right? We just talked about that Philippians 1. Maturing love comes because of that power that comes from abiding in Christ.

So abiding, fruit comes from abiding in Jesus. That's driven by love and it results in joy. Joy. Joy is rooted in gospel passion and that passion comes from love that's empowered by Christ.

Do you experience this joy? Have you experienced this joy? Do you experience this joy? So, do you participate in the gospel?

gospel? Are you engaged in praying for it? Witnessing? Get Walt's book. Really?

I mean, it's brilliant. It's the most helpful practical thing I've seen on evangelism. Because it talks about all that priest stuff that none of the other books talk about. You know, the hard work.

[56 : 10] Like loving people. And earning a right to be heard. it's great. Walt, if you're listening, I'd tell them that.

Is your love maturing in that sense, you know, God help me love. Well, pray like Paul says, help me love in knowledge, personal, experiential knowledge, and discernment.

So help me to love. Because I don't always know how to do that. Apply it, right? That's the wisdom thing. And are you growing and recognizing there are things that matter and things that don't matter?

And you're not getting that from the internet or from the news. You're getting that from prayer and walking with God and seeing what real love and what really matters.

Lastly, do you know the gospel? Because the gospel is a source of joy. Do you know the gospel? And I know you've all heard it and maybe, you know, it brought you joy a long time ago.

[57 : 32] Does it bring you joy still? And if it doesn't, then revisit it. We used to say in the men's group, right Dan, we say, preach the gospel to yourself every day. we need to hear it again.

Because I still sin. And I'm still not all I want to be. But God's patient, so I need to be patient.

So here's the gospel. John 3, 16, God so loved the world that he gave his only son that whoever believes in him will not perish but have eternal life. All four elements of the gospel are there. God loved.

God. That tells me about God. He loves the world why? So that by sending his son, why do he have to send his son? Well, that's a whole story. So the people believe won't perish.

Okay, so there's an issue. So God loves, but there's an issue about that love rescuing somebody. So then it's about man. So man what? Man is perishing, man's in trouble. God so loved the world, the world is in trouble.

[58 : 37] the world needs the son to come and do something because the world's in trouble. It's going to perish if it doesn't believe in that son. Then there's the son who comes. It's the God who gives the son away.

That's love, sacrificial. It's the son who gives his life. That's love, sacrificial, to lay down his life. Now that verse doesn't tell us all of those details of the gospel, but it tells us about God, tells us about man, tells us about Christ, and tells us about believing.

See all the elements of the gospel right there in John 3.16. Did you know that? Just unpack it. It's all there for you to unpack. Hey, your neighbor, have you ever heard that verse in John 3.16?

Oh, yeah, you know what it means? No? God loves. Yeah, but look at who he loves, and look at how he loves. Oh, I never thought of it that way.

Yeah. that's the kind of God we have. Y'all ran out of notes. And some of you are going, whew, about time.

[59 : 50] So, let's pray. Father, we thank you for this gospel that you've given to us. Thank you for the joy that it brings, that has brought us. Lord, we want to know this continuing joy that Paul has in gospel ministry.

We sometimes lose that and get off track because we have many, many things to do. There's a lot of things that matter, but not a lot of things that really matter. And so, help us, Father, in our own discernment, in our own lives, to keep the things that really matter foremost.

So that those other things that matter some receive due treatment as well. Give us especially a mature love in responding to our culture right now.

Give us a love, oh Father, that has a full experience of you as well as wise discernment in how we respond.

Help us to respond like you and with love, not with fighting. Help us to respond in a way that truly reflects what really matters.

[61 : 09] These things we pray in Christ's name. Amen. Amen.