

When You Don't Know How to Love

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Bible Text: 1 Peter 1:17-2:3

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A couple of weeks ago I received an invitation to speak at a biblical counseling conference hosted by a church in Montana next summer. Taking part in opportunities like that is actually one of our church's five core values and we call it strengthening others believing that God is pleased as we seek to strengthen other pastors and missionaries and key lay leaders. What's happening if that's something that might surprise you, the background of it is this: there really is a growing interest in churches and Christian colleges, seminaries, mission fields literally around the world in finding ways to use God's Word to address the practical issues of everyday life. It's a growing understanding that the gospel is not simply a message to believe in order to secure one's eternal destiny in heaven but the gospel is also to be lived out practically and powerfully each and every day. So, how do we use the Word of God to help one another grow?

By God's grace, we've been involved in that conversation for several decades now as a church family which is why a team from our church was in Brazil a couple of weeks ago providing training for pastors and missionaries on that very topic. Another one of our missionaries is heading to the European country of Moldova in just a couple of days now to do the exact same thing. It's why we're scheduled to be in Ohio next weekend, doing that and then San Francisco the weekend after that and then to another part of Brazil the week after that and then Alabama the week after that and on and on and on. And that's not to suggest that we think we're something special, it's just evidence of the way the Lord is magnifying himself at this particular point in the history of Christ's church by promoting a Christ-centered, gospel-focused, biblical-living for everyday life.

So, this invitation from the church in Montana, it really did follow a very predictable theme. We're seeing this happen over and over where it starts, a godly lay person and his wife attended our biblical counseling conference in February several years ago. That's our BCTC, our Biblical Counseling Training Conference, and this past February it attracted 1,700 persons from literally around the world. This couple from Montana when they took it personally several years ago so they went back to begin applying it to their own hearts, their own lives, their own family as well as the ministry opportunities that the Lord was giving them in their church. They also encouraged their pastors and some other key people from their church to come the following February which they did. In fact, after a while a rather large group was coming here from Montana every February just to learn and study.

This particular man's wife also enrolled in our Master of Arts and Biblical Counseling Program here in our seminary. She did so well that her master's thesis was published by PNR Publishing along with our own Beth Moore, which is a pretty significant accomplishment for sure. Their church in Montana eventually became so excited just about how those doctrines of the sufficiency of Scripture and biblical progressive sanctification were helping their church mature, helping them impact their community, that they decide they wanted to start their own conference which we're all for that, sharing those principles with people in their region.

So, our own Pastor Green and his family have participated the last couple of years and that conference has grown rather dramatically which is significant in that part of the country and so they've been adding to the list of outside speakers and they have also been gracious enough to encourage the speakers to bring their families and then after the conference to enjoy hiking and camping and some of the beautiful areas that are right around where their church is located. I'm Facebook friends with a number of these persons so I've actually enjoyed, over the years, watching the pictures of the conference and then also seeing their families afterwards for several days hiking and all that sort of thing, just enjoying God's creation together.

So, a few weeks ago they asked me if I would join that teaching team for this coming summer and bring my family: my wife, Chris, and our special needs son, Drew. I wrote them back and I thanked them for the invitation but I said, "You know, it might be better to ask someone else. Our son, Andrew, really wouldn't be able to go hiking or participating in those kind of after-conference opportunities. Maybe it would be better to ask somebody else." Well, this gentleman, along with his wife, and he's a medical doctor who I just learned also has a special needs child, he responded with a letter to Chris and me that is one of the most thoughtful loving letters I have ever received.

I want to share a part of it with you now to just prepare our hearts for what we're going to study from the Word of God. He said, "The reason we plan this conference to include the unique Glacier Park trip is to provide an opportunity for refreshment for the speakers with their families. We realize that many biblical counseling speakers sacrifice many weekends away from their families in their service for God. God has blessed us by allowing us to live in this beautiful part of his creation and we love to use this gift as an opportunity to bless others in this way."

Then he said, "Pam and I have often thought about you, Chris and Drew and have been considering how to make the above opportunity for you and your family work. On a personal note," he said, "I have a nephew who has cerebral palsy who could walk only with maximum support and we were able to take him on some of the hikes with the family which he totally enjoyed. It's true that when God takes away certain senses, he strengthens others. My nephew," he said, "particularly enjoyed putting his feet in the cold mountain streams. I suspect the same would be true for Drew."

So, Pam and I would like to offer for you and Chris and Drew to join us, though we don't know if it's possible to address logistical challenges with Drew. So, here are the options: 1. providing funds for Drew's care-taker from Lafayette to accompany you and Chris on your trip and to join us in Bozeman and Glacier. We'd be happy to do this," they said. "Or, Drew and the care-taker could stay at our house during the trip to Glacier. Or, having you come alone for a short time so you could be back to Lafayette before Sunday." Then they ended the note with this, "P.S. You might tell Drew there are bears in Glacier."

You understand, Chris, my wife, is Drew's primary care-taker and if we wanted to hire somebody to come along with us on a trip we could certainly do that, that's not the point. But here's why I share it: a letter like that is one of the reasons I love being part of the family of God. I mean, they could have very easily not given my answer any more thought, just found somebody else to speak at their event, but see, a Christian love is a love that extends. It reaches out as far as it possibly can to meet a need and when you see that in action, it really is a beautiful thing. It really is.

With that in mind, I want to invite you to open your Bible this morning to 1 Peter 1. That's on page 180 of the back section of the Bible under the chair in front of you. This fall we're doing a verse-by-verse study of the book of 1 Peter called "Decision Making in the Will of God." In fact, this book is a great illustration of what I was saying a moment ago about how practical and life-changing the Word of God is. You realize, when we're done, Lord willing this fall, we will have covered some of the most important areas of life that every person has to address, every person has to make decisions in and the beauty is that God has given us his clear will. He's given us his clear desires for how he wants us to live and how he stands ready to enable us to live in a way that would be honoring to him.

The dominant theme so far in this study has been the matter of trials. The recipients are facing significant hardship and so Peter has an extended discussion of that topic at the very beginning of the book. And what we have been learning is that the Lord stands ready to help us take personal responsibility. There's the key: to take personal responsibility when things are not going our way. And, thankfully, these verses are just filled with specific action points. The Lord doesn't want to keep us in the dark regarding his will so here's exactly what you do when times are hard. That's why the Psalmist said, "His word is a lamp unto our feet and a light unto our path." It tells us: here's exactly what God wants you to do when times are hard.

Let's look for some more of that light beginning in chapter 1:17 and I would encourage you to follow the argument of the text, look for the main verbs and that will help you understand what it is that God is especially trying to say to you.

"If you address as Father the One who impartially judges according to each one's work," and remember, this is in the context of trial. Here it is, "conduct yourselves in fear during the time of your stay on earth; knowing that you were not redeemed with perishable things like silver or gold from

your futile way of life inherited from your forefathers, but with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, the blood of Christ. For He was foreknown before the foundation of the world, but has appeared in these last times for the sake of you who through Him are believers in God, who raised Him from the dead and gave Him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God. Since you have in obedience to the truth purified your souls for a sincere love of the brethren," here it is, "fervently love one another from the heart, for you have been born again not of seed which is perishable but imperishable, that is, through the living and enduring word of God. For, 'All flesh is like grass, and all its glory like the flower of grass. The grass withers, and the flower falls off, but the word of the Lord endures forever.' And this is the word which was preached to you. Therefore, putting aside all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander, like newborn babies, long for the pure milk of the word, so that by it you may grow in respect to salvation, if you have tasted the kindness of the Lord."

We're talking this morning about decision making in the will of God when you don't know how to love. You say, "Well, how does this all fit together? Trials and love?" Well, here's the answer: trials have a way of making us want to cocoon up. Just think about the last time someone treated you in an evil fashion or a hurtful fashion. What was your natural response? And the answer is for many of us we want to cocoon up. We want to focus on our own hurt, our own pain and look for ways to insulate ourselves against further pain or to lash out at the others when things are not going our way and making them want to pay a price for what they did. All of that is the polar opposite of what we just read in this text.

You see, God's will is different that what would automatically come to us. His way is not our way. In fact, that's exactly what God said through the prophet Isaiah. He said, "My thoughts are not your thoughts." You say, "Well, I wouldn't have thought of that." Good, that means that God said it. "For my thoughts are not your thoughts nor are your ways my ways declares the Lord for as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts." Hopefully, you came to the church house today in part to hear some things that you would not have thought on your own which means it's highly likely some of what I'm about to say from the Word of God is going to rub you the wrong way which tells you, you need to start going the other way. Do we all understand our place in this process? Very good.

So, decision making in the will of God when you don't know how to love. With the time we have remaining, let's wring all of God's truth out of these verses that we possibly can looking for three actions to take when things aren't going your way. What should I do? There are three answers to that question: 1. choose your response to trials carefully. Key word there "carefully." These verses continue the theme we've been seeing in previous weeks of personal responsibility. Instead, during a time of disappointment or hurt of thinking about how the other person needs to change, the Lord says we are to "gird up

our own minds for action.” That’s what we saw last week, to think about the steps the Lord wants us to take.

When you just stop and chew on that for a minute, friend, that gives us a huge amount of hope because God would never ask us to do something, he would certainly not instruct us to do something unless he stands ready to give us all the strength, all the grace necessary to do it his way which means, in part, you’re not a passive victim of your circumstances. Did you notice one of the controlling verbs that I tried to point out in verse 17, “conduct yourselves?” Not as soon as the other person disappoints you or treats you badly or caught up in this raging stream of preset sinful responses that are not under your control or responsibility. Nope. No, no, no. In a time of trial, just like any other moment, you’re not passive. Do you understand that? You are an active worshipper and what you think next and no one else can control your mind, what you choose to think next, what you choose to want next, what you choose to say next, what you choose to do next reveals the identity of your functional God, it’s an act of worship. So, Peter says, “choose to conduct yourselves.” You’re not a passive victim of what other people are doing to you.

Nor are you enslaved by your past. There is hope dripping all over this text from phrases like verse 18, “redeemed from your futile way of life inherited from your forefathers.” Or, in verse 14, we saw last week, “as obedient children don’t be conformed to the former lusts.” So, if you would say this morning, “Well, in the past, I’ve been anything but careful in the way I responded once somebody ticked me off,” fine. But what you have to understand is that in Christ you’ve been freed from that. How you may have failed in the past when somebody disappointed you or hurt you is not relevant, at least in the sense that it does not have to be enslaving.

Sometimes we’ll be sitting around the table telling funny stories generally about Andrew, our son, because he just keeps us cracked up all the time. And sometimes they involve something that he did when he was smaller in a mischievous fashion. Drew has this habit of saying this: “Dad, let it go. It’s in the past. Let’s just move on,” he likes to say. Well, theologically there is some accuracy in that, at least when it comes to, “Well, I can’t handle it any better because of what I did in the past.” No, we’re talking about redeemed from your futile way of life. You’ve been redeemed from that.

This text also tells us this: you’re not going to face this trial forever. That theme comes up again in these verses, “during the time of your stay on earth,” verse 17 says, “which compared to eternity is a little while.” Remember that from verse 6, “just a little while?” And that’s the point of this section if you’re trying to determine what does God want you to do during this time of trial: conduct yourself in fear during the time of your stay on earth. Focus on you and remember that you’re not enslaved to your past and remember that you’re not going to face this forever.

You may say, “Well, what about that phrase ‘in fear?’ Are Christians ever supposed to live in fear? What’s that all about?” Listen, let’s not sugar coat that. This is the Word of God, right? That would’ve been a good time for a “yes.” This is the Word of God, right? So, let’s just let it say what it says: conduct yourself in fear meaning the fear of God is

there to guide you. Every follower of Christ, there ought to be a healthy awe, a healthy reverence, a proper fear of our powerful God that would motivate us in part never to want to squander the potential growth and ministry opportunities that each trial sovereignly provides for us. In fact, think about and you wouldn't have to think hard probably, the last time somebody hurt you, the last time somebody disappointed you, the last time somebody honked you off and remember in this text we're talking about conducting yourself carefully. That's the key: being careful about all of that because of the fear of God in you. And, frankly, let's just face it: many times, that's exactly what is missing. When things aren't going our way, we're letting our minds rage carelessly. We're letting our desires rule carelessly. We're letting our mouths run carelessly. There's a lack of caution, right?

What we would say about that, if we're going to let the Word of God help direct us, is there was not the fear of God in that. Just think about the last time you responded to somebody who honked you off. Think about the words you said. Think about the tone you used. Think about the body language that you were exhibiting and if we were watching that, wouldn't it be great if we had that up on the screen right now? I'd like to see that video, wouldn't you? And then we would sit back and say, "Wow! The fear of God is in that person." Or, would we say, "God is nowhere in their thoughts," as the Psalm 10 man is described. That's what the text is saying, "let the fear of God guide you."

By the way, if you're wondering, "You know, why do we have a pastor?" You want one of the answers? You know where this is going, don't you? It is my job to put the fear of God in you. That's right. That's exactly right and since I get to hear this sermon not once but four times, apparently God thinks I need to have the fear of God in me too. Isn't that right? And for some of us, and I'm not talking about some cowering fear, but if we had an awe and reverence for who God is and the change that he wants to make in us, we'd be a whole lot more careful about what we think, say and do during a time of trial. By the way, this has emailular implications but that is true. Some people in the dark of night are flaming those emails. Where is the fear of God in that? In fact, you ought to put right next to your "send" button, "Don't send this until you've checked whether or not this would pass the test of 'does this please my God.'"

It's interesting, on the morning I was preparing this message some of my personal Bible reading was in the early chapters of the book of Proverbs where Wisdom is personified in that text and it is crying out, presenting an entirely different way of thinking about life. But every person has to decide: am I willing to repent of my careless approach to life especially during times of trouble and will I humbly seek the wisdom of my God? And if you want to live wisely, where does that wisdom begin according to the book of Proverbs? "In the fear of the Lord, is the beginning of knowledge. Fools despise wisdom and instruction."

By the way, all of this assumes you're a part of the family of God. Did you notice the bookends in this text? It starts with verse 7, "if you address as Father," and it ends in chapter 2:3, "if you have tasted the kindness of the Lord." You see, everything we're

talking about this morning is impossible unless there's been a definite time in your life where you've acknowledged your need and you've placed your faith and trust in Christ as Savior and Lord and that impacts you in literally hundreds of ways including the joyful declaration that you want to be an obedient child. You say, "Wait, I'm supposed to obey God even when somebody has disappointed me?" Exactly. "I'm supposed to obey God even when he allowed a person in my life to hurt me and therefore I'm supposed to evidence carefulness?" Exactly, you have to choose where you fit into this process. Just like a godly son has a vibrant love for his father and the kind of respect that motivates him to obey. Followers of Christ feel the same way: we want to learn to conduct ourselves in fear.

One of the reasons, and I say that somewhat tongue-in-cheek, but there is an element of truth in it, one of the reasons that I have the job of putting the fear of God in myself and others is because of what we also see in this text: God is the one who impartially judges. Do you believe that? As a follower of Jesus Christ, some day will you stand before him and give an account for how you responded to the trials he sovereignly allowed into your life? Is that a yes, yes, yes and yes? We don't, thank God, have to face the horrible great White Throne Judgment described in Revelation chapter 20. That's reserved for those who have rejected Christ, but for believers in Christ, places like 1 Corinthians 3 and 2 Corinthians 5 make it very clear that the day will come that we will stand before God and all of our works will be judged by fire. That's why Warren Wiersbe so famously said, "As a Christian I don't fear the fire of hell but I certainly fear the fire of heaven." In other words, he wants to give a good account at the Judgment Seat of Christ and part of my job is to help everybody in our church family be in the best possible position to give a good account at the Judgment Seat of Christ. "Conduct yourself in fear."

Remember, the text goes on to say, "the price of your redemption." Jesus shed his blood so this kind of carefulness was possible and marveling at the power, the Holy Spirit stands ready to give you power to evidence carefulness even when it's hard, therefore, fulfilling the purpose of your redemption so that your faith and hope are not in cocooning up and insulating yourself, not from the joy that comes from hurting that person back. Your faith and hope are in your God.

Now, I understand, that's been a lot of biblical content. Let's just push the pause button right there because there's a couple of evaluative questions that I think we ought to ask ourselves even now. One is: has there been a definite time in your life, friend, where you placed your faith and trust in Christ as Savior and Lord so that you are in a position where you can respond to trials as an obedient child who wants to live in proper fear of him? And if you've never trusted Christ, I would encourage you to do that today, otherwise, you're like the proverbial person ironing a shirt with the iron not being plugged in the wall. You're never going to get those wrinkles out of the shirt until you first establish a relationship with God.

Secondly, Christian friend, now think about this: does your typical response to difficult times line up with the principles of this text? Think about it. It probably wasn't very long ago when somebody honked you off in some fashion and would the principles of this text

be the ones that guided the way that you responded? In part by a lack of carefulness I'm not going to think that until I have evaluated that thought in light of biblical truth. I'm not going to say that until I'm sure that's going to honor the Lord. "Honey, why are you going around the house mmmmm?" Because everything I can think about right now that wants to come out of there, I know is going to displease God and I'm trying to be careful. "Honey, you look like you're head's about to explode." I know, but mmmmm. You see, that's the whole point because some folks who call themselves Christians they just let it fly. And if that's your situation, you would need to repent of that. You would need to ask God's forgiveness. You would need to ask forgiveness of the appropriate people and you would need to turn around.

The next logical question is: if I'm trying to be more careful in the way I respond when somebody hurts me or disappoints me then what's that going to look like? Great question. What will that result in? Conduct myself in fear to what end? This passage answers that question clearly: it's by learning the practice of fervent love. Think about the logic. You see, when you're not focusing on your hurt, you're not cocooning up to prevent it from happening again, you're not lashing out to make a person pay a price for what they did, what does that leave time and energy for? The answer: to fervently love one another from the heart. And don't take this verse, please, out of its context. We're talking about a context of trials. Christians are to be known by their love even when we're hurting, even when we're being mistreated, practice fervent love.

It's important to note that Peter is talking about love that sacrifices. This is the Greek word *agapao* that which is exercise by the will rather than emotion. Have we all got that? You're choosing to obey God in this matter regardless of how you feel, not determined by the beauty or desirability of the object so forget the "he doesn't deserve it." Do you want what you deserve? But by noble intention of the one who loves. So, when a friend or a co-worker or family member does something that's unkind, instead of cutting them off and wanting nothing to do with them anymore, giving them the slow freeze, the drama queen deal, paying back evil for evil, a follower of Jesus Christ who is obeying God is going to find concrete, specific, creative ways to love that person in that moment which means, I understand if you say, "I'm going to argue against this." I understand that means risking being hurt again. It does. Risking the distinct possibility that you may never be treated properly by that person in this life. That is what God calls you to and that's the kind of power he makes available to you if you want it.

Notice this also: it's a love that extends. He says we are to love fervently. It's the Greek word *ektenos*. I just love some words because they sound like what they mean. *Ektenos*, it's a physiological word. It's a word that would describe a muscle. The idea is stretching to the furthest limit of a muscle's capacity. That's the kind of love God wants us to show, stretching as far as you possibly can. Here's what that means: that means the church of Jesus Christ ought to be known as being filled with people who practice fervent love in fear of our God, in obedience to him. And Jesus said it this way, "By this all men will know that you're my disciples if," you're mad at the President about something? If you've got some smart alecky comment about the Purdue football team? If you blah, blah, blah, blah, blah? No, here it is: "By this all men will know that you're my disciples

if you have love one for another.” And if you have that, if you’re developing that for one another in a church family, it will impact the way you treat everybody in your life which is why Paul made this outrageous statement in Galatians 5:13, “For you are called the freedom brethren but don’t turn your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh but through love serve one another,” hear this, “for the whole law is fulfilled in one word in the statement you shall love your neighbor as yourself.”

It’s crucial for every person attending our church to understand that that is central to this church’s philosophy of ministry. We want to be known as a church that seeks to be a community of people who love one another and then who love our neighbors. That’s one of the ways that you can tell whether or not we’re getting the job done.

Some of you know my wife, Chris, broke her hip four weeks ago in a biking accident and so we’ve had the opportunity to be the recipients of church family love. We’ve had all sorts of calls and all sorts of visits and all sorts of cards and all sorts of meals, just the whole thing. I told Chris, “You know, if you have surgery about once a quarter, we’ll never have to go to the grocery store again.” Speaking of me the loving husband. It just gave us an opportunity, that’s one of the reasons I love being part of the family of God. This is a very loving group of people. A group of people who take what we’re talking about seriously in many ways.

We’ve tried to let that impact the way we do ministry and so, for those who are around our church, when this happened we were going to build a new auditorium here. We had the plans all laid out, blah, blah, blah. We were going to go from three services which was what we had at the time, to two. It was going to cost nine million dollars to get from three services to two and we said, “Seriously? We’re going to take church money to build a church building for church people and use it a half day a week. Is there a better way to use those funds?” And I can remember being in the meeting where somebody said, one of our deacons said, “Well, if we didn’t do that, how could we use those funds for more effective ministry?” And we started talking about ways we might be able to be a blessing to our neighbors and that’s when we asked our neighbors for some input on what are some of the needs that you see in this neighborhood that a church like us might be able to meet? And that’s how the community center and all those associated ministries was developed and we want to be in a position where our neighbors constantly have concrete reasons to ask the question: why did you do that for us? Because we love you. Why do you make that program available for us? Because we love you. Why do you do that for us? Because we love you. Because we love you. Because we love you.

We want our neighbors to be in a position where eventually, logically they would say, “Why do you love me?” Because I have the view that if you can get a person to that place logically, they’re half way to the Kingdom because then we can say, “Because,” and this is surprising news to some people, “because God loves you and we would be delighted to talk to you about how God demonstrated that love most supremely when he sent his Son Jesus Christ to die on the cross for you.” And so this is not the kind of church family, you will not be welcome here if you just want to sit around being mad all the time at everybody else. We believe that God has called us to a lifestyle of fervent love and I

realize you might push back and say, “Well, there’s certainly plenty of segments of this world who are not being very loving to us.” Exactly and isn’t that great? And how do we respond to the culture in which we live? By going through life mad at the world? By going through life wanting to distance ourselves from the world? How about going through life loving the world to gain a platform on which to share the redeeming love of Christ?

You’re going to be voting, those of you who are members, for our Strategic Ministry Plan tonight. It’s a plan that has come together through a lot of work on the part of this church family all year long. If you go back and tease through a whole lot of those initiatives that we’re going to be voting on tonight that we’ve developed together, a lot of them make absolutely no sense unless God has the power to help us be redeeming love kind of people. Because all sorts of needs that we’ve identified, all sorts of needs we’re trying to address, all sorts of people groups that we’re trying to love, that that makes no sense at all unless we’re trying to live differently than the world in which we live.

I’m excited about what our church family has said we want to do together in the next five years. Where it goes is just amazing. We had an opportunity just as one example, one of the initiatives that our church family has proposed is to start a community development corporation. That’s something that the city of Lafayette has asked us to start and so in anticipation of that initiative beginning to take place, a group of us met with several city officials at their invitation on Thursday and we went through, street by street, every neighborhood in this town and the reason is, they’re asking us to start this community development corporation in part to have a housing component where we would identify together houses that were in need of rehabilitation. There are funds available for a nonprofit organization to actually rehabilitate those houses and then train and place a low income person in that house in order to improve the condition of that street and eventually of that neighborhood and the government cannot do that themselves, they have to do it through a nonprofit organization and they’ve said we want to ask Faith to do that.

So, our government is asking us to begin that kind of an effort and they’re providing the funding in order to make it happen. Now, there’s a lot of questions about that but I’ll tell you, as you start driving north/south through these various neighborhoods in our town, you start looking at houses and saying, “We could make a difference there. We could make a difference on that street. We could make a difference in this neighborhood for the glory of God.” Frankly, it takes your breath away and when you have the government asking the church for help in order to revitalize neighborhoods and make them a better place for people to live, how hard would it be to see the hand of God in that? And it may not make any sense. You say, “Are we going to make any money?” Nope. “Is it going to be an opportunity to practice fervent love?” Absolutely and I know this church family well enough to know that we are on it big time.

Now, that places some additional evaluative questions on this pile, doesn’t it? Think of it seriously now: during a recent trial, instead of focusing on your hurt and your disappointment, can you give a concrete example where you chose instead to fervently love the other person in that situation even though they probably did not deserve it at the

time? That's why I wanted you to hear that letter from the Gannon's in Montana. Not that it was a context of trial, but I thought it was a great illustration of someone who is loving creatively, someone who is thinking hard about exactly what does love look like in that situation. And, friends, I believe there are people here who will hear this message today but the honest truth is, are not careful during a time of trial and whatever they say, whatever they do, is the polar opposite of practicing fervent love and if that's the case, I want to encourage you to repent today. Now. I want to encourage you to say to the Lord that you recognize that you are living in a way that is inconsistent with this text and you are asking him to forgive you and you are asking him to change you. And then I would encourage you around your dinner table today, because if that's the kind of person you are, your family knows, I would encourage you to ask their forgiveness and to tell them, "Listen, the days of my sinful anger and parading around this house as a drama queen or the drama king, are over. I want to ask you to forgive me for how careless I've been in my words and I'm with the help of God going to try to be the kind of person who is practicing fervent love even when I'm hurting." And I believe that can help us. I believe that can help you.

It's because of what Christ has done and continues to do. Your soul has been purified if you know Christ. Your love can be sincere and I realize this is counter-cultural, I realize it's counter-intuitive which is why the remaining part of this text fits in: cultivate a longing for the Word. You say, "What's required to live this way?" Massive doses of the Word. So, let the nature of Scripture motivate you to follow its path. This is eternal, enduring Word of God and "flesh is like grass and its glory like the flower of grass. The grass withers, the flower falls off, the Word of the Lord?" If you choose to follow its message and take its wisdom, "endures forever." Let the purifying effect of Scripture cleanse you of all these landmines, "putting aside malice and deceit and hypocrisy." That's the way we want to respond when we're hurt. "I'm going to put that way. I'm going to let the Word of God purify me from that."

And let the uniqueness of Scripture motivate you to hunger for its message like a newborn baby. And that's not the contrast between milk and meat and the Word, the idea here is, "I just have to have more of the Word because I recognize the depth of my own sinfulness and selfishness and my desire to cocoon up to get even. I need massive doses of the Word." Let the productive nature of Scripture cause you to grow.

Think about our annual theme and think about chapter 2, verse 2, "so that you may grow in respect to salvation." We're planning to grow and one of the best ways to do that is during a time of trial.

I understand we're living in a world that is becoming increasingly unfriendly to Bible believing Christians, right? What a great opportunity. What a great opportunity to let the powerful Word of God motivate us to find creative ways to practice fervent love and I want to encourage you to ask God to give you an opportunity to do that this week.