

When the Going Gets Tough: Transformed Community

(1 Pe. 1:22-2:10)

Good morning and it's great to see you joining us in-person and online! Today is a special Sunday because we are resuming our two worship services, after two months ago when the Omicron virus caused us to cancel our Christmas Eve services and shut down our then momentum building Sunday in-person worship.

I invite all of you all, in-person and online, to join me pray out loud this prayer, before we begin to look into God's word:

O Holy Spirit,

Open our minds so we can think after God's thought.

Open our eyes so we can see Jesus lifted high.

Open our ears so we can hear your voice.

Open our hearts so we can respond in obedience. Amen

We've learnt so far in this series on 1 Peter, "When the Going Gets Tough", that the early believers to whom Peter was writing were hurting believers who lived throughout five regions in Asia Minor (now modern day Turkey) - scattered, distressed, tested by various trials, persecuted, tempted to compromise their faith and conform to the surrounding pagan cultures. They were pilgrims on the way

home, called to live in hope, free and set apart as God's people reflecting His holiness in a hostile environment.

God's people are agents of hope!

Look at what the bible says in 1 Pe. 2: 9-10 [NIV]:

⁹But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you **out of darkness into his wonderful light**. ¹⁰Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

How the early Christ-followers lived and conducted amongst themselves in this purifying furnace was like an angelic orchestra performing symphony of praise in a dark and disheartened world.

Like the early Christ-followers we are just as stretched, living in the midst of uncertainty, apprehensive and anxious about what lies ahead, and our faith is being tested in every which way on a daily basis.

Our relationship with each other is the criterion the world uses to judge whether our message is truthful – Christian community is the final apologetic.

Francis Schaeffer

Let me share with you two practical lessons in being “the final apologetic” of the truth of the gospel message.

1. Extend extravagant goodwill to others and develop deep connection with one another.

^{1:22} Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that **you have sincere love for each other, love one another deeply, from the heart.** ²³ For you have been **born again,** not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, **through the living and enduring word of God.**

This word about brotherly love is most encouraging and challenging to those who are going through trying times – **love practiced in community is what most needed, for everyone longs for mutual support, acceptance and security.**

As Charles Swindoll says, “**Hurting people get thin on love.**”

If God sees each one of us who belong to Him as someone worth dying for and gives us a new life, then we are challenged to place an equally high premium on our relationship with each other – we must treasure, appreciate, honor and protect each other!

Love desires good and flourishing of the other and yearns for deep connection with the other.¹

¹ Cf. Todd W. Hall, *Relational Spirituality*. See esp. chs. 6-7.

We love because God first loved us (1 Jn. 4:11, 19): this love is a **deliberate act flows out of the centre of one’s new life** [i.e., the reborn/renovated heart], “**to unlock the floodgates, so that the full stream of love might gush forth**”²:

“Sincere” - properly, *not a phony* ("put on"), describing sincere behavior free from hidden agendas (selfish motives) – literally, "without *hypocrisy*" (unfeigned).

“Deeply/fervently” - properly, fully-stretched, i.e. describing the verbal idea as *extended out*, to its necessary (full) potential ("without slack"); *strenuously*, without undue let up (as "completely taut").

Loving the other from the heart is easy to say but most challenging to do, because we all have our **brokenness and baggage, personal quirks and shortcoming** – consciously or not, we have the tendency to make choices that hurt others.

BTW I want to encourage you to sign up for this excellent work-shop, “How To Fight Cleanly,” to learn how to resolve conflicts as a mature Christ follower – you can check out all

² D. Edmond Hiebert, *1 Peter*, p. 103.

the details on our webpage,
(<https://cornerstonechurch.ca/how-to-fight-cleanly/>)

But I really like what Benjamin Windle³ says in the most recent Barna idea publication:

“However, the potential pain of being in community is not simply an unwanted by-product; it is a key part of the purpose of community ... we get to **practice interpersonal gospel actions like forgiveness, graciousness and kindness** ... **Keeping our distance may be less risky, but it robs us of the richness of true community.**”

The new life in Christ – being born again – motivates and enables the believers **to love as Jesus loves**; Jesus shapes our lives and maximizes all our potentials to “**practice interpersonal gospel actions**”!

Peter gives a couple of actionable steps:

^{2:1} Therefore, **rid yourselves of all malice and all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander of every kind.** ² Like newborn babies, **crave pure spiritual milk**, so that by it you may **grow up** in your salvation, ³ now that you have tasted that the Lord is good.

³ Benjamin Windle, “Digital Church in a Lonely World: 7 Ingredients of Church Community,” p. 29, 31. [*Emphasis ours.*]

⁴ ἀποθέμενοι from ἀποτίθημι [put aside, renounce, stow away]

Negatively, **get rid of⁴ anti-social behaviours and “love-spoiling vices”⁵.**

malice [wicked conducts that hurt and injure others]

deceit [two-facedness, deception or trickery, “to bait & switch”, holding hidden agenda for selfish reasons],

hypocrisy [playacting, wearing a mask/masquerade, pretension] ,

envy [resentment over other’s success or advantage while wanting it for one’s self, a grudge or spite],

slander of every kind [evil speaking behind someone’s back, disparaging gossips and defaming talk].

The removal of love-spoiling vices must be coupled with deliberative and disciplined efforts to coming to God for spiritual sustenance and relationship building.

So positively, **make every effort⁶ to be spiritually nourished by every means of God’s grace, such as the Word of God and any other nurturing resources that can spur us on toward Christian maturity.**

⁵ I. Howard Marshall, *1 Peter*, p. 62.

⁶ ἐπιποθήσατε from ἐπιποθέω [long for, strain after, desire greatly]

The second practical lesson in being “the final apologetic” of the truth of the gospel message is this:

2. *Embody and mediate the loving presence of God to others.*

^{2:4} As you come to **him, the living Stone**—rejected by humans but chosen by God and precious to him— ⁵ **you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices** acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

The apostle Peter reminds us here in this passage that we are all in a process of spiritual formation – “as you continuously receiving spiritual nourishment and tasted that the Lord is good” – we are in a lifelong faith journey of knowing and serving God better together in His presence with other believers.

Just as the priests of the OT times mediating between the Israelites and God, we are a community of “priests” who **offer spiritual sacrifices given in gratitude and self-**

surrendering, serving God and representing Him to each other: **Every member has the responsibility to bring each other closer to God.**⁷

Because Jesus has given us the access to the Father, we don’t need any priest or “clergy” in order to relate to God.

We all are our **brother’s keepers**;

we must care for each other’s **faith-condition**;

we encourage each other to **serve better**;

we **pray** for each other;

we **watch out** for each other;

we bear each other’s **burdens**.

If that is indeed God’s intent for the church, every time when we attend ...

a small group,

a prayer gathering,

a semester bible class,

our weekly Sunday worship,

⁷ Spiritual sacrifices include offering of one’s self (Rom. 12:1; Eph. 5:1-2), praise, thanksgiving, material possessions and doing good (Heb. 13:15-16; Rom. 15:16; Phil. 2:17; 4:18).

when interacting with others during snack time or talking over the phone,

we are not simply performing a task,

fulfilling an obligation,

putting in our time to get brownie points,

meeting our social needs,

seeking personal strokes or craving for special attention –

we put God's loving presence on flesh and bones and we become grace-transmitters.

As priests **we also represent the King to the world and bring the world to God.** This is an awesome privilege and responsibility, because God does not just gather a community of inward-looking people, always focusing on themselves; the people of God are called to live out our identity as a **missionary community.**

We should care **when we care less about people around us;**

we should care about **racial and social injustice;**

we should care about **the poor and the powerless;**

we should care about **the marginalized and the weak;**

we should care about **people who have not heard of the good news.**

Why? Because **when even just one of us is not doing these, God's light is not as bright as it can be; the fire is not burning as strong as it can be!** Thus, as priests to one another, we must empower each other to fulfill this God-entrusted mission!

Look at what the bible says in 1 Pe. 2.9, "But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, **that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.**"

As theologian Emil Brunner says, "**The church exists by mission as fir exists by burning.**"

We must keep this fire burning, letting God's wonderful light be seen.

Yes, there's no doubt about what's in the heart of God, His purpose for reaching out to humankind - **He is into transforming and building people in a community where His love, grace, and righteousness is experienced in the otherwise cold, broken, and hostile world!**

As we celebrate the Lord's Supper today, the blood and broken body of Christ reminds us, on the one hand, that we receive spiritual nourishment and sustenance from Him; and on the other hand, that we are His body broken,

serving as a tangible expression of self-giving love to bring healing and flourishing, a conduit and conductor of the good news of God's restoring mission.