

Yellow has never been my favorite color. But now that I know more about the story of eccentric painter, Vincent van Gogh, I have come to appreciate the color yellow. Van Gogh was a famous 19th-century painter who was raised in a Christian home. But as a young man, he tossed aside the truths of Jesus Christ and the gospel.

His story is tragic. His addiction to drugs and alcohol and his self-harm are well known. He would sink into bouts of deep depression. In fact, it got so bad that van Gogh was checked into a mental asylum. He spent months in the hospital staring out the same window overlooking the city. He painted his most famous painting titled *Starry Night* from the window looking out of his room at the asylum.

When you look at the painting, you will see splashes of yellow all over the canvas. The presence of yellow represented sources of hope to van Gogh. You see a yellow sun, you see swirling yellow stars, and you get the sense that van Gogh was looking for truth in nature. The church, which stands tall in the painting, should be the house of truth and the most yellow. But the church is dark. It's the only object in the painting that has no yellow.

The Apostle Paul came to Corinth with the vision that the church he planted would bring the light of Christ into the dark culture of Corinth. He imagined a beacon of yellow piercing the darkness. As we read this letter, we learned that the church probably started great, but its yellow had faded into the darkness of the culture around it.

As hard as it was for Paul to see this happen, he never gave up hope. Why? Because Paul had experienced God's grace in his life. And he knew there are new beginnings; there is always the potential for new life. In a relationship with Christ, there is new hope.

The thing that strikes me most about our closing passage is that Paul reminds the Corinthians the color yellow is still within them. Because of the power of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, they can shine bright. They can be transformed. They can reflect the light of Christ into the dark places around them. And Paul wants to encourage them that they can do it. They have been given what it takes.

So this morning, we finish our series in 2 Corinthians called Beautifully Broken. This is our 24th message in this series. I picture a tired and weary warrior sitting down to pen the final words of his letter to the Church in Corinth. He must have

thought about the first time he arrived in the dark city. He must have thought about the 18 months he spent establishing the Church—the friendships, the victories, the fellowship, and the struggles. And it must have been very hard for him to hear that after he had departed Corinth to go plant more churches, sin and division had infected the church. They had lost their yellow. Then to hear that those he had loved and served were criticizing him, challenging his authority, and following false apostles who had entered their church.

Paul invested more than just his time in them; he had invested his life. He had given them everything they needed for life and godliness. And now, as he comes to the close of this letter to them, he gives them some final words—words they need to hear for the struggles ahead. The final words of great leaders are important. Paul's tone is positive! His words are hopeful! His belief in them is strong.

Finally, brothers and sisters, rejoice! Strive for full restoration, encourage one another, be of one mind, live in peace. And the God of love and peace will be with you. Greet one another with a holy kiss. All God's people here send their greetings. May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. 2 Corinthians 13:11-14

Paul doesn't waste words. The first thing he does is deliver six rapid-fire commands describing how all believers should conduct their lives for the church to reflect light.

But as is true to form for Paul, he always delivers his challenges along with promises. Promises that make all the difference between success and failure. Promises that remind us God is our strength. God's plan will not be derailed. God shows his strength in our weaknesses. Then the last thought he leaves us with is that God's grace, love, and power are promised to every believer who seeks to obey God.

Which command do you need to receive from Paul in these final verses that will make your light shine brighter and light up the darkness around you? And what promise of God can you confidently grab hold of to see these truths become a reality in your life?

In verse 11, Paul says, "*Finally, brothers and sisters, rejoice!*" The first command is be joyful. The word rejoice (*chairete*) was used all the time in the ancient world. The word meant hello or good-bye and was said as a way of expressing joy. Paul's command is

appropriate because, for Christians, joy should be a fact of everyday life.

The challenge for us is not to let our circumstances kill our internal joy. This is a hard one. Paul is telling us that people of faith can be joyful no matter their circumstances. We can be joyful because of the gospel. The gospel tells us that because of Jesus' Resurrection, Jesus is victorious over the power of sin and death. It tells us that our hope isn't found on earth; it's found in heaven. People who do not live their lives in light of the resurrection are pulled into seeking joy through their own efforts. Or they may look for joy by putting their faith in institutions like the government, science, or the innovations of technology. For others, they seek joy through communing with creation, not the creator. But the gospel tells us that it's only through a work of God, changing one heart at a time, that we will ever see the changes we hope for and the joy he promises.

Paul tells us that we can be joyful no matter how bad things get down here on earth. Life is a grind and painful, but the resurrection tells us that the greatest problems we face on earth will not last forever. The enemies of God will not win. That is a reason for each of us to be joyful no matter our current circumstances. Hang on to God's promises!

Then Paul cheers us on with his next command. "*Strive for full restoration*" is how our version translates it. The word in the original language is *katartizo* which means to "be made complete." The idea is not that there is some additional thing we need to be made complete. The idea is that God has already given us everything we need to be made complete. But there are things that need attention. Things in our lives are out of order, and they need to be put in order. Things that need to be diagnosed in our lives. Broken things that need to be fixed. Work that God is still doing to move us toward completion.

This "be made complete" is an imperative command for us to pursue completeness. This happens through surrender. Be made complete means for us to assume a posture of surrender and evaluate our priorities, so we are more aligned with what God wants from us.

Paul is saying that we can't be made complete unless we deal with our sins. God gives us grace by providing us the way of confession, repentance, reconciliation, and restoration. We can't move toward completeness unless we attack our laziness, indifference, and apathy. We can't move toward completeness unless we attack the moral and relational issues in our lives.

And to every one of us here, we can be joyful on this journey to completeness because of the gospel. When Christ died for our sins, he did it so we could be reconciled to him. By sacrificing his life, Jesus, who is fully complete, exchanged his righteousness for our sins. Jesus took our sins on Himself on the cross and, in turn, passed his righteousness on to us. The gospel shows us that God

pursued us to make us complete. The gospel shows us that God reconciled himself to us so we could have a relationship with him. The gospel shows us that transformed people who once hated each other can be reconciled and love each other and forgive each other.

And if there is anything the church needs to show right now is that we are being made complete and that we love one another. And if we commit to being made complete, we will learn how to love those who are different from us. It's the gospel and only the gospel that fixes the problems in our world.

So we might ask ourselves if I were to become one degree more yielded to be made complete, what difference might that make in my relationships with my family? If I love and respect my spouse one more degree. One more degree of showing patience to my kids. How would it show in my relationships with my neighbors? One more degree of deeper relationships with them. How would it show with those who come from a place I don't understand? One more degree of listening and learning. How would it show in my relationships with those who have hurt me? One more degree of forgiveness. How would it show with those who need a hand? One more degree of sacrifice to be present in someone's life to encourage or meet a tangible need. One more degree to deal with a character or moral issue in my life. One degree more so that you and I can be made more complete.

Paul's next command is to be encouragers. Paul loves to use the word we translate as encourage. He uses it 28 times in 2 Corinthians. The idea is that Paul comes alongside them to offer wise counsel and teaching so that they might be comforted and encouraged and also moved. Sometimes the best way to help someone shine more brightly is to come alongside and help a stuck person move to a different place. This is hard for many of us who think loving and encouraging is never having to do or say anything that might offend. But often, the best way to encourage is to apply pressure to bring needed change. That is exactly what Paul did at least 28 times in 2 Corinthians.

I remember two seminary professors who applied force to encourage me to move to where I needed to be so I could pass my Greek and Hebrew classes. They would do it with a smile on their face. And I would hear, "I am doing this because I love you, and you will thank me later." And I did thank them later.

"*Be of One Mind.*" This phrase means, "You Corinthian Brothers and sisters, think the same thing." Not in a shallow way like, "You Corinthians, should never have different opinions on things." What Paul means is that for the light to shine, we need to have unity in the essential stuff.

What is essential stuff? It's having unity around the pure gospel that is to be taught and believed. It's unity around the person and work of Jesus Christ. It's unity around the mission of His church.

It's unity around the belief that the inspired Word of God is essential to all faith and practice.

I think of a group on the Peninsula called Transforming the Bay with Christ. Transforming the Bay with Christ or TBC is made up of dozens of churches, who might look a bit different in how they do church, but we have one mind when it comes to how this Peninsula can be foundationally transformed. It's to help a person understand and then respond to the gospel and become deeply rooted in a relationship with Jesus Christ.

"Live in Peace." As the gospel shows us, Jesus was compelled to come to earth so that he could reconcile us with God. "True love seeks to reconcile with others." Jesus came to earth to turn us from enemies of God to friends of God. Whether God is leading us to reconcile with Himself or to reconcile a broken relationship, as God pours his love into us, his friends, we are to pour our love into others. We will not live in peace without being reconciled with God and, to the best of our efforts, be reconciled to one another.

Jesus is the only one who holds the title Prince of Peace. He said in his Sermon on the Mount. *"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God."* It's hard to find ancient churches or modern-day churches that model this well. Choosing humility over pride in the way of a peacemaker. Laying down one's rights is the way of a peacemaker. Seeking forgiveness is the way of a peacemaker. Building bridges of reconciliation is the way of a peacemaker, a child of God.

So after delivering these five commands, Paul gives a promise to those who seek to obey God's commands. *"And the God of love and peace will be with you"* (2 Corinthians 13:11b). The promise is that no matter what is going on out there, we have the promise of love and peace in here. It helps me to have the proper perspective and understand the history of the church to grasp this promise of love and peace to be in us.

I was pretty young in the year 1968. But if you read about 1968, you will see that there were a lot of discouraging things going on in our world. In fact, one might say that 1968 was a lot like 2020. There was a flu pandemic that killed up to one million people worldwide. There was a political divide; there were the assassinations of MLK and Bobby Kennedy, there was racial unrest. There was the Vietnam War. Television was bringing all of this into living rooms for the first time. Millions tuned in at night to watch Walter Cronkite deliver the news and tell it like it is. And there was the Hippie movement. Academics were asked the question, "Is God Dead?"

But understanding history can be a great comfort to us. The Hippie Movement in 1968 became the Jesus movement in the early 70s. My friends and I saw this first hand growing up in Southern California. Thousands came to faith in my region alone. We need to learn from history that the church goes

through seasons. When we have a historical perspective, we can grab hold of God's promises no matter what is going on out there. God was in control in 1968, and he is in control in 2021. The mission of His church remains the same. The promise that his love and peace will be with those who seek to obey rings as clear today as it did in the first century when Paul wrote about the joy of knowing God's peace and love from inside a jail cell in the town of Philippi.

Paul's final command of his letter: *"Greet one another with a holy kiss. All God's people here send their greetings"* (v. 12-13). Why would Paul tell us to greet one another with a holy kiss? A holy kiss was a custom in the middle east. In Christian churches, it was a tradition for men to greet men and women to greet women with holy kisses. Now, what in the world is a holy kiss because this verse makes me a little nervous? It's a quick peck on the cheek as a sign of affection. For Christians, it was often three pecks: right cheek left cheek, and then right cheek again. It's been said that the three kisses for the Christian symbolize Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—the holy trinity.

For this Northern European who grew up without a lot of physical affection in my home, this is an important verse. Paul wants us to understand that as Christians, we now embody the physical presence of Christ. Christ came to earth in flesh and blood, and he touched people, and he was affectionate with people. Physical touch was important to Jesus, so it is to be important to us.

When someone at CPC reaches out and embraces me, it's as if Christ is embracing me. When we don't share a hug or handshake, we are missing out on a special touch from God. This is a powerful point for us at CPC to continue to move toward being physically present together. Something is missing when believers are not together physically. I know it's comfortable to be at home. I get it. I wore my slippers to Sunday church for a whole year. But as comfortable and easy as it is to watch a live stream, there is a command here to show physical affection.

So let's be about moving toward more comforting hugs, more arms around another's shoulders, more pats on the back, more handshakes or high fives. I don't know about you, but I miss those touches. I walk around here on Sundays with my hands stuffed in my pockets in case I'm tempted to show affection. It's miserable. I hope after this thing blows over, we will not just get back to where we were but also raise our level of physical affection as Paul commands us. I think we are getting close.

And now we arrive at the last verse of the entire letter. We read his final words. *"May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all"* (v. 14).

These are often the last words Christians over the centuries hear at the end of a worship service. It's the perfect blessing with which he leaves us. Paul is saying, "After all the strong words I used to try to shape you so you can shine brightly, I want you to

know that the grace of Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father, and the Fellowship of the Holy Spirit is with you all."

It's the only place where Paul ends one of his letters with an affirmation of our essential doctrine called the trinity. There is one God who exists as three distinct persons in one Godhead: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit—The Trinity.

Paul is saying, Be Blessed! *"May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all"* (v. 14). Be blessed by the grace of Jesus Christ. It's the grace of Jesus Christ that sustains us. Everything Jesus did showed us favor we didn't deserve. It's grace that changes our hearts.

Look at this promise from God, *"And God is able to make all grace abound toward you, that you, always having all sufficiency in all things, may have an abundance for every good work"* (2 Cor. 9:8, NKJV). Be blessed by the love of God. God's love came looking for you. It's true. Paul says Romans 5:8, *"But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us."* Consider when you first knew you were loved by God: How did that reality make you feel? How did it change you? So once we receive that blessing of knowing we are loved, we can give that same love to someone else who desperately needs it.

Be blessed by the Fellowship of the Holy Spirit

The Holy Spirit is placed within us so we can have fellowship with God. The blessing means that God is in us. John writes: *"He will make my joy complete because I no longer live in darkness, but I now live in the truth and have fellowship with God"* (1 John 1:4). The blessing means that the Holy Spirit connects all of us, and we get to share the Holy Spirit together as we fellowship together. Wherever we go, whatever we do, whoever we talk to, the Spirit is right there with us.

This blessing also comes with a responsibility to remember who we serve. And the blessing becomes a reality as we seek to obey God. But if we are not seeking to obey God, then these are just nice words that we might say at the end of a church service.

Consider your own life according to this blessing. If you have placed your trust in Jesus Christ as your Savior who forgives your sins, be confident that you have the Spirit within you. Consider how the grace of Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit can light you up with hope today.

The best kept secret of van Gogh's life was that the truth he was after was being revealed to him. After he painted *Starry Night* and after he left the asylum, he painted another picture. It was a picture of Lazarus being raised from the dead titled, *The Raising*

of Lazarus. When you see the picture, you will notice the increase of yellow in his painting. Lazarus is yellow. Lazarus is reflecting the hope and warmth of the blessing of God's grace, love, and fellowship.

In fact, van Gogh put his face in yellow on Lazarus to express his life was on the mend. His life was on the path to be made complete. He still had struggle and tragedy ahead, but there was the light of hope in the resurrection.

A glimmer of yellow tells us the whole story. That life can begin all over again because of the truth of God's promises. Each of us can begin to paint our lives with the fresh hope of a new beginning. 2 Corinthians and Paul's final word tells us that what is broken can be made beautiful. May your life be filled with the color of light. And may you confidently grab hold of the promises of God for the journey.

This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.

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