

Ephesians 4:1-3, 31-32
Bear With One Another in Love
Rev. Jonathan P. Cornell
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This month, we are looking at what I believe to be our primary calling as a community: to share hope in Jesus Christ. I'm not necessarily talking about sharing your faith with strangers on the street, though if you feel led to do this, I commend you.

I am saying this: Our conviction at WPC is that we would be a community that is gathered and built up toward becoming more like Jesus. By doing this, I believe the natural result is that we become people who bear witness to the hope that fills our hearts. I'm not just talking about good feelings of optimism, but genuine love, grounded in faith, and steadied by Gospel hope—overflowing to those around us.

Last week, we looked at how a rooted hope in Jesus influences our speech. Stephen stood up in the face of bitter opposition, and instead of merely calling them names, though he did do this, he told the story of God's faithfulness. Faithfulness not just to them, but to Abraham and Joseph and Moses. And that story, through the cross and resurrection of Jesus, is now our story.

This morning, we are going to look at what it means to share hope in Jesus Christ by our actions. Now, how many of you here today who have experienced frustration and consternation in your life because of a difficult person? Maybe it's a family member or friend, a co-worker or employee. In every one of our lives, I know that there is someone who just makes your life difficult because they're such a wreck.

And if you're thinking to yourself, I don't know who that is, then you are probably that person.

Well, this morning, I want to look at the verses that were read for us, but really just six words: bear with one another in love. In the community that shares hope in Jesus Christ, we are growing ever stronger in our ability to "**bear with one another in love.**" In a hope-filled community, we put up with one another, we hang in there with each other, in all our many peccadillos, because we are characterized by love.

Now, if you are in a marriage, or you have children or grandchildren, there is no greater skill that you can learn than to hang in there with those who test your nerve. This skill comes, not by mustering up a bunch of nice thoughts and feelings, but by believing what God says about the other person is true and good.

This morning, I want to look at each of these six words individually.

With

Tiny little preposition that carries tremendous weight. In the New Testament, whenever ethical and moral instruction is given, it is always given to the community. Rarely does the Scripture talk about individual, because these communities that received the teachings and instruction had high levels of connection with one another. What this means is that if you think that the Bible is addressed to one

solitary person who is going to go off on their own and do what it says in isolation, you will not accurately understand what is written there.

The author who addressed the Ephesian Church, Paul, knew that these communities to whom he wrote were together a lot. They spent time with one another, they lived their lives together, they supported and encouraged and prayed for one another.

We start with this word “with,” because not having this togetherness, we will not be able to bear one another without being with them. In our context, I want to say this, and it may be a little challenging. If the only level of engagement you have with these texts is what is said on Sunday, and the only level of engagement you have with a community of believers is this hour on Sunday, you’re probably not going to get very much from it. The way in which we grow in faith, love, hope is by being with one another, and by being with God in his word to us.

Paul uses three images to describe this togetherness in Ephesians: body, building, and the bride. He compares the community to a bride in that a husband grows in his love for his bride that he thinks of her when he’s away from her, he imagines how he might grow in his love and affection for her, he cherishes her and bears with her in his interactions with her. Our life together is like a building in that, without the support beams and trusses fit together, leaning on each other, connected with just the right pieces of hardware, the house will not stand—it will collapse in on itself. And a body: in each body there are many different parts and each part is connected to the other and works together in order to help the body function. And one part cannot say to another *I don’t need you, or You’re not important*, because every member has a unique purpose in making the body function.

Do you see how these images are for us? If we are not thinking of one another and growing relationally like a bride and her groom, it will not last. If we are not leaning into one another and supporting one another, our life together will collapse. And if we do not recognize that every member is uniquely valuable and necessary in their own way for the health of the body, we will fall apart.

One Another

Let’s go on to the next one. Who does the Bible say we are to be with? One another.

Tell me if this is accurate: people can be difficult. People can be burdensome. People can be annoying. Would you say that those statements are true to a certain extent? Actually, how we interact with one another has a lot more to do with you than it does them. What I mean is this: how you treat someone will have more to do with how you view them, than with how they behave.

There are a few different ways we can choose to view those around us. You can choose to see them as if you are in the middle of everything, that everything revolves around you. This is the most natural way, and when we see ourselves this way, when people do things we don’t like, it bugs us. The more you put yourself in the center of everything, the more people have the potential to frustrate the living daylights out of you.

Can I tell you a story? In our first call, there was a man who used to play bass guitar for our worship team. His name was Gordy. Gordy was difficult to love. He could not hold down a job, he was constantly asking the church and me for assistance. When we would give him jobs to do around the

campus, it would take 10 times longer to complete than it should have. Physically, emotionally, and spiritually, Gordy was very needy.

After working long and hard to reinstate Gordy's driver's license and get him a reliable vehicle and a job, I didn't hear from Gordy for about 3 days. Which, most of the time, I heard from him about every three hours. Finally, I got a call from the jail. Turns out Gordy had become intoxicated and taken a bunch of drugs, ran his vehicle into a tree, got out and passed out on the front lawn of his neighbor.

Gordy was very difficult to love. But I found that he was particularly challenging when I focused on how Gordy inconvenienced my life. When I thought of him this way, he was incurably difficult. But when I read this passage, something changes in me. I began to see not myself at the middle, but Gordy.

This is the second way we can see others, with them at the center. Now this isn't specifically Christian, but it's a great choice. When we put someone else in the center, we're freed from the miserable thought that everyone is against me when things don't go my way. When we think to ourselves, "You know what? It's not about me." Now, instead of getting frustrated when someone does something that inconveniences you, you think, maybe there's a good reason why he did that thing, that I'm not aware of.

When we begin to put others in the center and be less concerned about getting our own way or our own comfort, the more we will grow in becoming the kind of community Jesus intends.

Here's the third option: it's not with you in the center and not others in the center, but with Jesus Christ at the center. This is the only option for us if we are followers of Jesus. In this, we see not ourselves and not the other person, but we see Jesus and we hear him say, "Do you realize how much I love that person? So much that I gave my life for them."

CS Lewis has this quip that if we were to see the other person the way Jesus sees them, meaning, with the kind of love and affection with which he loves them, they would shine with such radiance that we would be tempted to fall down and worship them.

That person who gets on your nerves, your Gordy, I know them so much more than you could ever and I love them with an everlasting love. I love them, I died for them.

You, person who follows Jesus, if you choose to see people other than with Jesus at the center, you will always get it wrong. You will constantly be at battle with the Lord of all, and you will lose that battle. If we choose to see others only as the sum of all their failures, we will be in a fight with the Lord of all, and guess what? We will lose that fight. Because Jesus loves them with an everlasting and beautiful love that is beyond comprehension—even the difficult people in our lives.

So we can either show them who they really are, by loving them like Jesus did, or we can push them away from his truth by treating them the way the world treats them.

Bear

We now go on to the third word, "bear". I love the Scriptures for this reason: they present a sober and realistic picture. The Bible doesn't idealize people, it doesn't sugar coat things; it acknowledges

that people are difficult, people are frustrating, people are cumbersome, and people are hard to love. It doesn't pretend like this is going to be easy to love the Gordys of your life. They are selfish, incurably jealous. They're rude, they're inconsiderate, because they're foolish and unwise. Demanding, bossy, a nag. God knows every detail of every person in the room who is difficult for you to love, and God loves them still. But there's one other difficult person in the room. It's the person you can't see. It's you. And God loves you still.

There are so many things that we do that drive our families and our spouses and our friends nuts, and no matter how much they tell us, we're blind to it, right? God sees it. God knows it. And God loves us still.

The only way we will make progress in bearing with those around us in hope-filled, loving, gracious actions is if you know this: God bears with you always. God loved you so much that he placed his life on the altar of the universe instead of yours. God bears with me, God knows what a burden I am and bears with me still.

Here are a few scriptures...

- You are merciful gracious slow to anger abounding in steadfast love. (Psalm 86)
- As the foremost sinner, Christ would display the foremost patience. (Paul)
- The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases. His mercies never come to an end they are new every morning, great is God's faithfulness. (Lamentations 3)

In Love

This is the manner in which we're called to bear with one another. We don't bear with one another with hard work, or grouchy spirit, or a begrudging actions.

1 Corinthians 13

Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

Love never ends. But as for prophecies, they will come to an end; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will come to an end. For we know only in part, and we prophesy only in part; but when the complete comes, the partial will come to an end. When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child; when I became an adult, I put an end to childish ways. For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known. And now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love.