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Christians Need Cleansing

June 16, 2024
Series: Grace & Grit
2 Corinthians 7

**BIG IDEA – CHRISTIANS NEED TO BE CONSTANTLY CLEANSED,
AND THAT HAPPENS THROUGH RELATIONSHIPS & REPENTANCE**

All right. If that video doesn't get you excited about Kids Week, I don't know what's going to. Guys, we love kids here at Two Cities Church. We live in a culture that doesn't know what to do with kids and is honestly kind of annoyed by them. Have you noticed that most major cities in America now have more dogs than they have kids? The average person doesn't know what to do with kids.

Here at Two Cities we love kids. Kids bring a sense of wonder and imagination into the otherwise boring world of adults. We are so excited about Kids Week. Listen up, especially if you have kids. This is going to be important. I want to tell you what Kids Week is. Kids Week is how we partner with parents to raise a generation in Christ. If you dropped your kids off through our kids' check-in...just to clarify...that is not childcare; that is kids' ministry.

Here's what we want to do. We want to partner with parents to raise a generation in Christ. We always say here we can't replace you; we want to resource you. We do that weekly through kids' ministry and other things, but every once in a while, we have a key, crucial, catalytic event. That's what Kids Week is, July 29 to August 2.

This is not VBS. We're not against VBS. We think there are a lot of great churches that do VBS. Kids Week is different. Kids Week is when, as families, we serve our city in Jesus' name. We love our city. We want to serve and bless and reach and pray for our city, and we want to help you, as a family, to serve our city.

This is how we're trying to help. The average family here... I mean, how would you decide to serve your city? You'd have to figure out a night. You'd have to partner with

an organization. You'd wonder if it was meaningful. You would wonder if it's a good organization. We've done all the heavy lifting for you. So, I hope you can make it to one of those nights...maybe every night, but certainly one of those nights...during that week. It's going to be an incredible time.

I can't talk about Kids Week without talking about dads. Can we get a round of applause? Happy Father's Day for dads. Listen. The answer to the problems in the world, the answer to the problems in America, is not more government but more dads. We love dads.

If you watch the average sitcom, the dad is the dumbest guy in the show. Right? He doesn't know what's going on. It's all goofy. It's silly. Every nonprofit in America was started because of the failure of dads. We wouldn't need nonprofits if every dad did his job.

Now, it's interesting. Let's talk about dads for a second on Father's Day. I can't prove this, but I think it might be one of God's favorite American holidays. Why do I say that? Because God is a dad. He has always been a dad. Isn't that interesting? He hasn't always been a creator, because he didn't create stuff for a while, and he hasn't always been a lawgiver, but he has always been a dad because he has always had a son.

Here's something interesting to know about you. Everybody views God, at least at first, as a reflection of their earthly father. People ask all the time, "Why are there more atheists? Why are there more agnostics?" I know the answer. Because more people grew up without a dad. They think, "I didn't have an earthly father. Maybe I don't have a heavenly Father."

We want to celebrate dads today. You knew this was coming. Dads, stand up. Stand up right now proudly and remain standing. Look at these. Keep standing. I have two things to say to you. Receive this word on Father's Day. Dads do two things. Let's simplify it: *provide* and *protect*.

Thank you, men, for providing not just financially and physically but spiritually. Being in church, having your wife and kids as part of a healthy, vibrant local church... It's like half the game plan. You're doing a great job. And thank you for protecting. Men, you are the last line of defense against our crazy and corrupt culture, and culture does not know what to do with a strong, masculine, male dad. So thank you. God bless you. Sit down.

I love it. I love how many men we have in this church. Let me say one last thing. I know it's a long intro, but this is my Father's Day gift to myself. Okay? Every light casts a shadow. We know Father's Day is hard on some people. Some of you weren't expecting this, but you're going to get it, and you need it today.

Some of you had a terrible dad, and Father's Day is hard because of that. Let me say a couple of things. First, no one got a perfect dad. No one. I love my dad. He's a great dad. No one got a perfect dad. All of our dads have their story, their baggage, and their struggles. Secondly, part of growing up (I'm speaking psychologically here, but this is true) is actually realizing your dad doesn't have all of the answers and is a broken, fallen, sinful person. You don't grow up, actually, until you realize that.

If you're still looking to your dad... "Does my dad think my job is good?" What? You're 30. You have to make decisions for yourself. So listen. No one had a perfect dad. Some of you, though (and this is what you were not expecting on Father's Day, but this will be so powerful), today, on Father's Day, right now...I'm going to give you a chance...you need to forgive your dad.

I know as soon as I say that some people go, "You don't know what he did!" When you forgive somebody, you just say, "I'm no longer going to be defined by what they did to me." When you forgive somebody, you don't say it was okay; you say, "It wasn't okay. That's why I need to forgive him."

Let me say this too. If you're young and don't have kids yet, you don't know this. I'll tell you a little secret about parenthood, fatherhood. Being a good dad will be part of your healing. Does that make sense? You didn't have a great dad? You need to forgive him, but part of your healing will be being to your kids the dad you didn't have. God will use that to heal you. So, with that said, let's pray, and then we have a lot to cover.

Lord, I want to give men an opportunity right now, whoever would... Maybe they need to open the palms of their hands and say, "Lord, I forgive my dad. I give him to you." I've met men who are so angry at their dads who are dead. Lord, I pray that men would forgive their dads.

I pray that this would be, as we saw last week with parent commissioning and this week with dads standing up and a couple of weeks ago with moms standing up... I thank you for the families in our church. I pray you would strengthen our families, Lord. I pray you would strengthen men and women. I pray you'd give them great and godly marriages. I pray all this for your glory and our good. In Jesus' name, amen.

All right. Have you ever done a food cleanse? I've done several of them. Have you ever done keto? There's no shame here. Just be honest. We're in church. So, keto... You've done it. Okay, I see that hand. Have you ever done carnivore? I like that one. That's where you just eat rib eye all the time. That's a great diet for me. Don't raise your hand if you did vegan. I don't want to see that hand.

Guys, there's something about these cleanses. I saw this documentary. You should watch it. It's called *Fat, Sick, and Nearly Dead*. It's on Netflix. It's about this guy, and

he just can't figure out what's wrong with him, so he goes on a 60-day juice fast. He buys a blender, a juicer, or whatever, and makes his own juice.

He loses, like, 60 pounds. He looks completely different. All his brain fog is gone. Then, to the confusion of his doctors, all of his autoimmune issues are gone. All of his health problems that they thought were incurable are gone, all because he did a cleanse.

Now, what is a cleanse? Usually you have to do a cleanse, if you've ever done one of these... They're basically elimination diets. You're like, "I'm eating something that's having a negative effect on me. It's getting inside me, and it's harming me." And no wonder. Have you ever turned a Cheez-It box over and read what's in those things? If you were a chemist, you could not pronounce the ingredients in those things.

Here's what happens in a cleanse. Basically, a cleanse is where you say, "There's something wrong with me, and I don't know what it is, and I need to do something extreme to figure it out." Well, that's the story of *Fat, Sick, and Nearly Dead*. That's the story of juicing and other things people have done.

If you'll type to 2 Corinthians 7, I want to talk to you about a spiritual cleanse. Paul doesn't write about physical cleanses and diets and all that kind of stuff. We care about that stuff a lot more than the first-century church did. He talks about a spiritual cleansing. I'll show you this.

Second Corinthians 7:1: ***"Since we have these promises..."*** What promises? Well, the whole Old Testament, but especially what he just said in chapter 6, that God will be our Father, that we will be his sons and daughters, that he will receive us and forgive us. He says, ***"Since we have these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves..."***

Do you see that Paul put himself in the category of those who need to be cleansed? Don't tell me you don't need to be cleansed. If the great apostle Paul, the writer of Scripture, the greatest church planter the church has ever seen says, "I need to be cleansed," I'm guessing today *you* might need to be cleansed of some things in *your* life.

"Since we have these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and spirit [soul], bringing holiness to completion in the fear of God." God tells us through the apostle Paul how to be cleansed, how to be transformed, how to be changed. We are cleansed through believing God's promises.

Now let me clarify something, because sometimes we Christians can think, "Okay. You know what we do? We live by faith in promises. That's what Christians do, but secular people don't do that." Actually, everybody lives by faith in a set of promises. The late,

great Tim Keller said there's actually no such thing as a secular person. I know what you mean when you say it. I've used that phrase.

I know what you mean when you say "secular." Like, someone who lives in Manhattan and doesn't care about God. I get all that. But the Bible doesn't call anyone *secular*. I don't mean this in a demeaning way if you're here today and you're not a Christian. The Bible says there are only two people. There is the Christian and there is the pagan. The pagan is believing in different promises and living by a different faith.

See, here's the thing about promises. You don't realize what promises you're believing until they don't come true. So many of us, maybe even in the church, are holding on... We don't really know a lot about God's promises. We know a lot about not the promises in Scripture but the promises in society.

Here are a couple of promises today: "All you need to do is find the one (the one, the one, the one)." As Jerry Maguire would say, the person who completes you. Anybody who's married is like, "It's not true. It's not true." How about the promise that your career will be satisfying, fulfilling, and meaningful and you'll have plenty of time off?

So many people spend so much education, so much time, so much of their youth, and so much of their strength believing the lie that their career is going to fulfill them. Guys, most people don't have careers; they have jobs. A job is something you wouldn't do if somebody wasn't paying you. Most people spend their lives doing *that*.

How about health? We believe these promises that we're going to be healthy and wealthy and life is going to get easier. Here's what I think happens. I've told you guys before (and I'll probably say it a couple more times) I'm turning 40 this year. It's a big year for me. One of my goals is to not have a midlife crisis. This is one of my stated goals. I'm saying it publicly in front of all of my friends. No promises.

I think a midlife crisis happens, in part, because you realize, "I was believing the wrong promises, and they haven't come true because they were lies." What Paul tells us is something really powerful. When we believe God's promises, if we truly believe them, and they're all promises about the future, it will change us in the present. Let me give you an example.

In my life, for years, probably since I was in college, I've held on to the promise, "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God." Do you know how powerful that promise is when you're facing some type of temptation? It can transform you. "No, God. I want to be pure in heart, because I really want to see you. If I engage in this sinful activity, I'm not going to be pure in heart, and my view of you is going to be fuzzy, and that's not going to be a good thing."

What he says is if we believe God's promises, we're cleansed, and he says at the end of the verse that brings our holiness into completion. Now, that's a word we don't talk about. When you think of holiness, what do you think about? Do you think of jean skirts and head coverings, the holiness movement?

It's interesting. Kevin DeYoung... He pastors a church in Charlotte, the largest PCA (Presbyterian Church in America) church that's in North Carolina. (I'm telling you this for a reason.) He speaks in a lot of conferences, and he writes a lot of books, and I heard him years ago. I was in college. I was on staff at the time at a college ministry.

He spoke to a bunch of college students at a conference, and he said, "Guys, I'm really excited about this next generation of Christians. I'm excited about your passion for church planting, your love for your city, your desire for the poor, your heart for personal discipleship, and your love for the nations and world missions."

He said, "Just one thing I never hear the younger generation talk about is personal holiness," that you are to be the godliest version of yourself and that our holiness is actually, in the Bible, connected to our overall happiness. Well, if you look at verse 2, Paul is going to have to defend (he does this a lot) his own holiness.

Look at verse 2. "***Make room in your hearts for us.***" Paul said that earlier. He just loves this church so much. He says, "Guys, I love you. Make room in your heart." Look at this. "***We have wronged no one, we have corrupted no one, we have taken advantage of no one.***" I love it.

Paul has an ability to do this. In one sentence, he summarizes the three temptations in ministry, maybe especially of a pastor or a church leader but of anybody. He says, "We've wronged no one, we've corrupted no one, and we've taken advantage of no one." He's talking about three areas of our lives that we can tend to mishandle. Let me give them to you, and then I'll explain it. *People*, the *Bible*, and *money*.

He said, "We have wronged no one." In other words, he said, "Guys, we've been great relationally, and we've handled people well." Ministry is about people. Pastor Jordan Taylor... He's a great guy. He was an engineer for years. He went to NC State to be an engineer. About 18 months ago, he joined our staff. I love it when people do that.

I was asking him and his wife earlier this month... I said, "What's the difference between your old job as an engineer and your new job as a pastor?" He said, "Well, my old job was all about projects. Everything was a project. It was like, 'I've got to get *this* project done in *this* timeline.'" He said, "Now that I'm in ministry, everything is about people." Exactly.

The problem is a lot of pastors love ministry; they just can't stand people. That's the only problem. When I'm in my study working, I'm not thinking, "I teach the Bible." I think, "I teach the Bible to people." Think about this with me. All ministry is people-oriented. We disciple people. We pray for people. We counsel people.

I'm not thinking of any one person when I say this, but let me just say this. Some of you guys are going to have to work on your personality. Some of your wives are elbowing you right now. "Happy Father's Day. He's talking about you." Guys, you're going to have to grow relationally. Christianity is not a solo sport.

It takes a church to raise a Christian, and we're going to have to learn how to get along and be... Whether you're an introvert or extrovert, I don't care. We don't define ourselves by that. We define ourselves by the fruit of the Spirit. You're going to have to be deeply relationally connected to people. That's what ministry is about.

Paul says, "We handled people well." Secondly, he says, "We corrupted no one. We handled the Bible well." The language there is speaking of teaching. I won't get into this a lot, because Paul has talked about this other places, but underneath bad living is usually, first, bad believing.

If you've ever had your son go off to college, and you were like, "How could he?" it's like, well, he started to believe different things. He started to be taught different things, so he started to live differently. That's how that works. Paul basically says, "We're God's messengers, not God's editors." He says, "We handled the Bible well."

Then this is interesting. He says, "We handled money well." He says, "I didn't want to take advantage of you." That's a financial expression. What do they call it, fleecing the flock? There are pastors who are very good...they're amazing...at separating people from their money.

Now, I just had to realize this. By God's grace, I have no problem talking about money, but I remember when I planted this church. We were moving here, and one of our sending churches... The senior pastor said to a group of us, "You're going to be a little afraid and timid at first, but when you get up there and plant your church and start preaching, you have to talk about money."

He said, "In fact, you can't disciple someone if you don't talk about money." He said, "You can't disciple someone if you don't talk about the sensitive issues of life. You couldn't disciple someone if you didn't talk about sex, and money has way more power on people's lives."

Paul got in trouble because he had to talk about money. He had to raise money. See, part of my background is I spent 10 years in college ministry, but for five years of

that I raised my own financial support monthly. Here's what I'm trying to say. For me right now (I'm not trying to make this about me; just to give you a background, though) to get up here and talk about money... There's a lot of you in here. It's kind of broad. It's easy to do.

What was really hard was calling the Joneses or the Smiths and saying, "Hey, did you get my letter? Did you hear about the ministry I'm going to be doing on the college campus?" This was always the phrase: "Would you be interested in prayerfully and financially supporting it?" That was scary. Then they'd invite me over. Then you get to their house, and you look at their house, and you think, "Based on the size of their house, how much will they give me monthly?"

Here's what I learned. I learned a lot of things. It's all of the things you've been told. You know, people will surprise you all the time. Who you think is going to give you a lot won't give you a lot. Who you think is going to give you a little gives you a lot. The reason I tell you this is I saw firsthand that when you talk to people about money, they tend to have a subpersonality. I mean, I can think of couples I met with and sat with.

You talk about their job, they're normal. You talk about their kids, they're normal. You talk about their hobbies, they're normal. You start talking about money, it's like a subpersonality arises. We'll talk about this more next week. Paul didn't even take a salary from the money he raised. All the money he raised he took from one church to a more needy church to expand the mission in a new area.

Look at what he says in verse 3. ***"I do not say this to condemn you, for I said before that you are in our hearts, to die together and to live together."*** You read that, and you go, "Paul, you got the order wrong." No, we get the order wrong. See, if we really love someone, we might say some version of this. A husband might say this to a wife or a wife to a husband. "We are going to live together for a long time, and we are going to die together."

Well, Paul says the opposite. Paul says, "We're going to die together and *then* live together." It's just another reminder that we have everything backward. Paul is basically saying, "Guys, I haven't seen you a lot. I've been MIA because I'm traveling around the world. We're going to die together, and then we're going to live together somewhere else for a long time."

Then look at what he says. Verse 4: ***"I am acting with great boldness toward you..."*** Paul is like, "I'm self-aware. I have a high EQ. I know what I'm doing." ***"...I have great pride in you; I am filled with comfort. In all our affliction, I am overflowing with joy."*** If you look at verse 4, Paul says, "I'm bold toward you because I believe in you."

We're trying to create a church where people are bold toward each other because we believe in each other. You know this. The opposite of love is not hate; the opposite of love is indifference. The marriage is really in a bad place when you're like, "I don't care what happens to him." That's not a good place.

Paul says, "I believe in you, so I'm bold toward you." Basically, at the end of the day, Paul is like, "Why am I having these hard conversations with you?" Here's how we would say it today: "I see so much gospel and godly and grace-filled potential in you that you're not manifesting in the world." You know this if you're a parent. Nothing will upset you more than your kids not living up to their potential. Nothing.

It's actually why you can't parent your kids the same. No one parents their kids the same. Are you kidding me? Every kid has a different personality. Every kid has different potential. So, you will be very upset at one kid for not doing something, because you know they could, and very upset at a different kid for not doing something that you know *they* could. That's what Paul is saying.

By the way, Dave Ferguson, who's a pastor in Chicago, said (and I think he's right) the four most powerful words anyone could say to somebody are "I see in you..." What if we did that? What if we started to say that to people in our church? A lot of times, somebody else can see something in someone even before they do.

"I see in you the gift of counseling. I see in you a heart for hospitality. I see in you a love for kids. I see in you the gift of evangelism." On Father's Day, what would be more powerful than a father (Paul is playing the fatherly role) speaking something he sees in his sons or daughters into being?

Do you notice what Paul says at the end of that verse? "I'm overflowing with joy." In other words, Paul is like, "Guys, I want you to know my current emotional state based on everything that has happened. I'm still super joyful." Do you know that the greatest thing you can give to another person is your joy in God?

I know a guy who said he would... He had a busy job. He'd drive home from work, and he was maybe 20 minutes from work. When he'd get about 3 to 5 minutes away from his house, he'd pull off to the side, because he was like, "Man, I've just worked eight or nine hours. I'm going home to two or three or four crazy kids, and my wife has been home all day."

He said, "Sometimes I would drink a 5-hour Energy drink in preparation, but I would basically be like, 'Okay. I'm going into kind of a whole second night, and what I want to give my family is the most joyful version of myself.'" How about those of us who are welcoming people home? What would it look like to give people the most submitted-to-the-Lord, joyful version of ourselves?

By the way, that's the point of whatever you do for your quiet time. The point is not Bible Recap. The point is not to check it off your list. The point is not Bible in a Year. The point is "How do I get my heart happy in God in such a way that it could overflow to others?" Well, Paul says that's what happened.

01 PAUL WAS ENCOURAGED BY TITUS

Then in verse 5, he switches things. He says, "***For even when we came into Macedonia...***" See, Paul is all over the place. He's going back to Macedonia now. What's going on here? I'll explain it in a second. "***...our bodies had no rest, but we were afflicted at every turn—fighting without and fear within.***"

Basically, Paul goes back to something he talked about in chapter 2. In chapter 2, Paul said he was in Troas, and he had this opportunity for the gospel, an open door. He said, "But I left because I couldn't find Titus," and he went to Macedonia. Now, five chapters later... Paul went on all of these spiritual tangents, but tangents, nonetheless.

So, he comes back, and he's telling us about when he went to Macedonia to go look for Titus. Now, we can't understand losing people in the same way today because we have texting. Paul wouldn't need to write this if he had the "Find My Friends" app. Could you imagine? "Oh, there he is. Titus is over in Macedonia. He's fine." He doesn't have that.

Oh, another thing about parenting. Every parent, at some point, at least for a little bit, has lost one of their kids. I mean, no question. When you lose your kids, it's scary. Don't tell me I'm the only one. It has happened to you guys. Or have you ever been to lunch...? You were like, "Oh, yeah, let's meet at this restaurant at 12:00." Then you get there and they're not there.

You start thinking, "Did we say Wednesday?" You're looking through your texts. You're looking through your calendar invite. Then you're like, "When do I text to see if she's coming?" Then you wait five minutes. "I'm in the back booth." That's just your way to say, "I'm here."

Well, Paul had lost Titus, and now, in verse 6, he's going to be reunited with him. We don't get the whole story, but look here. Verse 6: "***But God...***" There are some good "But Gods" in the Bible and some bad "But Gods," because it's always about something changing. This is a good "But God..." "***But God, who comforts the downcast, comforted us by the coming of Titus...***"

I want to talk about something. I want to name something for a second that I've not talked a lot about. Notice he says he was comforted or encouraged (it's the same word in the Greek) by one thing: the coming of Titus. Now, what did Titus do? Well, he's going to tell him a couple of things, but Titus didn't bring him some big gifts or something. He was comforted simply by the presence of Titus.

This is what theologians and Christians, for a long time, have called the *ministry of presence*. I want to talk about this, because as our church gets bigger, one of the ways it will continue to feel smaller is by each of us practicing the ministry of presence. The ministry of presence is "I show up in person when you need me. Whether you're struggling with a sin, whether you're struggling with some just struggle, whether you are suffering, I will show up."

See, we live in a time right now where everybody is relationally connected, but we're isolated. The relationships are superficial. Let me give you some examples from Scripture about this ministry of presence. We see it with Job's friends. Do you remember this? Job is suffering, and his friends get word, and it says his three friends go and sit with him for seven days and say nothing.

They get in trouble when they open their mouths. Up until then they were good. The other great example in the New Testament is John's ministry of presence with Mary, the only disciple who didn't scatter when they struck the shepherd, as Jesus said would happen, but stayed with Mary and stands beside Mary as she watches her son die on the cross.

I know what happens. When somebody gets the diagnosis or their kid runs away or their marriage falls apart, we tend to think (I've been here with you guys), "Well, what am I going to say?" You know, you start thinking, "Do I need to bring my Bible? Is there a verse? Do I go to a certain psalm? What do I do?" The answer is you just need to be present. They just need a hug. They need a handshake.

We saw this recently. This has happened so many times, but I'll tell you a story that just happened. This lady in our church... This was just a couple of months ago. I won't go into great detail, but basically, her husband was having some problems and then realized, "I don't have a little problem; I have a big problem."

He was a healthy guy, but he went in to the doctor... This is one of those times where they say, "You're not going home. You're staying the night, and then we're going to get you ready for a 7:00 a.m. four-hour surgery." He was like, "Oh my!" So, they're texting their friends, "Pray for this," or whatever. They get ready. The next morning, they show up at 6:30 to get ready because he's about to go into the OR.

They walk into the waiting room at the hospital, and their entire Community Group is there. She said, "We just had church at the hospital. They prayed for us, and then when we got the good news, they celebrated with us." That's the ministry of presence, and we're losing it in our society today. By the way, this is why we don't believe in online church. There's no presence. We believe in online content and online ministry.

This is why it's so important to be here on the weekends. Your presence matters to people. There are so many little things... What happens when you come here on Sunday? We have no idea. Thousands of things, as you interact with people, as you talk with people, as you pray with people, as you encourage people, as you drop your kids off in the Kids ministry.

He says, "I was encouraged by the coming of Titus." Then look at what he says. Verse 7: **"...and not only by his coming but also by the comfort with which he was comforted by you, as he told us of your longing, your mourning, your zeal for me, so that I rejoiced still more."** Let me sum it up. Paul is like, "We were comforted by Titus, but before *we* were comforted, *he* was comforted by *you*."

By the way, it's very hard to teach people how to comfort one another. You know, how would I teach it if I had to teach a class on "Here's how you encourage people"? "You notice something nice about them and you say..." No. There are a lot of things like this. They can't be explained; they have to be experienced.

He's like, "You encouraged Titus, so it was supernatural for him to come back and encourage us." By the way, this is... I want you to see these things we do in our church in the Bible. This is a short-term mission trip. Paul sends Titus on a short-term mission trip, and Titus comes back from that short-term mission trip to Paul.

I know some of you. You think, "Two Cities Church... These fancy ideas about these short-term mission trips. You always have these new ideas." This is an ancient idea, the short-term mission trip. Yesterday, we sent 145 students and student leaders on two different student mission trips for a total of 145 people. Incredible. The middle schoolers went to Virginia, and the high schoolers went down to Mississippi.

There are two purposes of a short-term mission trip that we see here. The first purpose is to serve and encourage the people who are there serving full time. The purpose of a mission trip is not to see the world. Make that the fifth or sixth purpose. I know how some of you are. "It's February. Let's go on a mission trip to the Dominican Republic." That's fine, but make it, like, your fifth reason.

The purpose is we want to serve them. I learned this in a big way when I went on my first kind of "encourage" missionary trip. One of my old pastors at my old church said, "Come on. We're going to go encourage four different missionaries." I was like, "This

is going to be awesome. We're just going to encourage them. We're going to teach them God's Word."

So, we took planes, trains, and automobiles. I was so out of it traveling that I started to feel like I was on a boat. Have you ever done that before? If you've ever traveled internationally like that... I started to feel like I was on a boat. Anyway, we finally got to where they were. We were like, "We're here to serve." You know, we were so tired.

They were like, "Great. Thanks for serving us. We haven't had a date night in a long time. We have these three young kids. Will you watch our three young kids? We're going to go away to a hotel for the night." I was like, "Sure." And that's what we did. That's what we did our first night in China. We watched kids we'd never met before, and they were crazy. But you serve the people there. That's what Titus does. He goes to serve.

The second thing you do... This is why I don't give people a hard time who go on mission trips and come back and talk about it. That's what you're supposed to do. That's literally what you're supposed to do. You're supposed to go on a mission trip, you're supposed to come back, and you're supposed to tell all of us everything you experienced and encourage us. "God is at work. God is at work in Mumbai. I saw this baptism. We started a church in a home in Mumbai." It's like, "Oh man. Thank you. I needed to hear all that."

02 PAUL TALKS ABOUT REPENTANCE

So, he sends Titus, and Titus is encouraged. Look at verse 8. He transitions, and this is where we'll spend the rest of our time. ***"For even if I made you grieve with my letter, I do not regret it—though I did regret it, for I see that that letter grieved you, though only for a while."***

Okay. We have to do one more thing. There's a lot of background here. Hold on. I told you this the first week, but I don't expect you to remember this. Paul wrote four letters to the Corinthians. We only have two of them. We're missing two of the letters. In God's sovereignty, he allowed that to happen. We have 1 Corinthians and 2 Corinthians, but 2 Corinthians is really "4 Corinthians."

Here's what you need to know. Paul wrote what's called a *severe letter*. If you read 2 Corinthians, you're like, "Whoa, Paul! You're being hard." If you read 1 Corinthians, you're like, "Whoa, Paul!" You ain't seen nothing, because supposedly, this severe letter was so hard Paul basically says, "I wrote it, I dropped it in the mail, and then I regretted it."

Have you ever done that before? Come on. Have you ever sent an email and were like, "Oh!" People have ruined their lives with a tweet. Did you ever send that text message and were like, "Why didn't Apple create the delete button earlier on these text messages?" We've all kind of had that moment. What Paul is saying is, "I really went back and forth about how hard I was on you in this letter."

Let me just say this. Every person who has ever had a hard conversation with someone feels that way...unless they're a sociopath. Right? You go have lunch with someone, and you have to confront them on a couple of things. If you're a normal person, you get in your car and go, "I don't know. Was I too intense? Should I have shared more grace about the good things they've done? Did I draw too hard of a line?"

By the way, this is what every parent does. Kids, if you don't know this, Mom and Dad are all the time talking, like, "Are we being too hard on Junior or are we being too soft on Junior? Did we ground him for too long? Does he need to be grounded longer? Are we being too ridiculous about who his friends can be?" I mean, you ask that question all the time. You're trying to figure it out.

So, Paul is like, "I was regretting this letter," but then look at what he says here. Verse 9: **"As it is, I rejoice..."** Paul is like, "I'm relieved, actually. I regretted writing it, but I rejoice." **"...not because you were grieved..."** The letter made them sad. He goes, "I'm not happy that you're sad." That would be weird. **"...but because you were grieved into repenting. For you felt a godly grief, so that you suffered no loss through us."**

For the rest of our time, I want to talk to you about repentance. What we have with the rest of this passage is the most comprehensive passage, I believe in the Bible, certainly in the New Testament, on the subject of repentance. I want you to see that repentance is different than grief. We would say *grief* or *sadness* or *sorrow*. They're different. You can be sad over your sin and still not repent. *Grief* is a feeling; *repentance* is an action.

Paul says something interesting. He basically says, "I'm glad you were sad." That sounds strange. I mean, you have to be kind of a strange person if you're glad when other people are sad. We want people to be happy. Well, Paul says, "I'm glad you were sad because that led to your repentance."

Sometimes I think we're so afraid for someone to feel sorrow... *We* don't like to feel sad. Right? As quickly as possible, we want to not think about the sinful things we did. We don't want to talk about them. Sometimes we need to sit in our sadness and genuinely think about our sin.

I bet there are a few of you in here... There's some sin in your life, and you need to take some time and journal about it. I've done this in seasons of my life. You need to

think about, "What is this sin taking from me? How is it slowly destroying my life?" You need to learn to hate the sin you're currently loving. You may need to go, "You know what? Because I'm engaging in this sin, I can't talk to my son about it."

By the way, this is how things become generational. Things become generational because somebody doesn't deal with it, and if you don't deal with it, you can't talk about it, and if you can't talk about it, you can't help the next generation. So, Paul says, "I'm encouraged that you were grieved because..." Verse 9. Let's look at it one more time. ***"As it is, I rejoice, not because you were grieved, but because you were grieved into repenting."***

Now, we have to talk about repentance. *Repentance* is a change of mind, a change of heart. The word in the Greek is *metanoia*. Here's the modern word for repentance: *paradigm shift*. I see God differently, I see sin differently, I see myself differently, and I see the world differently; therefore, I change how I live. That's what repentance is.

Here's the problem. We don't talk about repentance anymore. No one ever talks about repentance. When was the last time you got on TV and someone was talking about repentance? No one talks about repentance because you have to talk about something else before you can talk about repentance. You know what that is, right? You only repent of one thing: sin.

Guys, it's amazing. Nobody sins anymore. Have you noticed this? Nobody sins. We've evolved. We just make mistakes. We just have indiscretions. We just have (here's a famous statement when political people fall) lapses in moral judgment. We're not sinful; we're sick. We don't need theology; we need therapy. Obviously, I'm not against people going to counseling and therapy, but you know what I'm saying.

The question I've been wrestling with this week is, "Well, then, what do people do instead of repent?" Because we're still sinning. I don't think we'd say we're sinning less today than they were back then. So, what do we do instead of repent? Well, I'll tell you what the world does, and then I'll tell you what the church does. And there's some mixture.

The world boasts in their sin instead of repenting of it. It's this kind of idea that "If we can celebrate it as loudly as possible, maybe we can even get louder than our own consciences, which are condemning us." It is pride month. I mean, it's hard to overstate this. Pride is the cardinal sin. You could not think of a worse sin than pride. Pride is the stubborn unwillingness to change in spite of clear evidence. That's what pride is, and we've named a month that. That's bold.

People brag about cheating on their taxes. People brag about cheating on tests. I mean, think about the average college campus. What are people bragging about? How

much they can drink and how many people they've slept with. These are things that most people, for all of human history, felt shame about.

There is the "Shout Your Abortion" movement, which is a movement now where they're saying, "It's not just that abortion is okay; just don't talk about it, and get it done." It's now "We want you to go on social media and celebrate your abortion and be proud of it." It's divorce parties. Have you heard of these? It's "Don't feel sad. Don't feel sorrowful that your union is broken and you're becoming separate. Instead, throw a party." It's so backward.

If we don't boast... Here's another thing. Christians and the world do this. We know sin is wrong. We don't normally boast in it, but both groups of people tend to blame. What you have to do when you repent... You have to do this. You *have* to. This is the beginning of being a Christian. "My sin is my responsibility, and I need to take full responsibility for my sin."

Today, people blame their parents. Here's a big one: they blame their genetics. They blame their boss. They blame the government. What do Christians do? We tend to bury it. So, there's boasting, blaming, and burying. We bury our sin. This is why... You know the sin. If you could just ask, "What is the number-one sin in all churches across all human history?" it's hypocrisy.

It was Jesus' greatest challenge with the Pharisees. It's to act like everything is okay on the outside when it's not okay on the inside. We learn how to trade big sins for little sins that are easier to hide. We learn how to use all of the euphemisms. "We're struggling with sin." It's like, "Hold on. Let's play the video. Oh! No, he wasn't struggling. He dove right in." We're not struggling with sin. We're giving into it and enjoying it.

Paul gives us two categories. Here's what he says. They're the clearest categories you get in verse 10. ***"For godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret, whereas worldly grief produces death."*** I want you to listen to this. Get this right. Worldly grief leads to regret; godly grief leads to repentance. They're completely different.

The clearest picture we have in the Bible is Judas and Peter. Judas and Peter both sin grievously against the Lord Jesus at the same time. They both feel bad afterward, bad and sad and sorrowful. Remember? Judas tries to give the money back. It literally leads Judas to death. Peter denies Jesus but goes to Jesus and repents and is restored.

We have to talk just for a second about the difference between worldly grief, worldly sorrow, and godly grief, because not everybody who feels bad about their sins is repenting. Do not believe that. I mean, everybody feels bad about their sin at some

point. By the way, this is why when people get caught it's very hard to know if it's worldly grief or godly grief. Very hard. It takes usually at least a month to even see.

By the way, if somebody confesses something to you, it's probably godly grief. Just know, whenever someone confesses something to you, they were thinking about telling you months ago. It's always hard to confess to the people who are closest to you because you feel like you let them down the most.

When someone gets caught, it's like, "Dude, are you just embarrassed because you lost your job? Are you just mad because your wife has been giving you the cold shoulder for the last three months now? Are you sad because your kids don't respect you?" That's not godly grief.

By the way, to be completely honest, you have to go through worldly grief to get to godly grief sometimes. You get overwhelmed. You go, "Oh my gosh. I lost my job. *This* happened." It's when you get caught. Then usually, over time, you have to go, "Well, actually, the bigger deal is what I've done against God."

Let me tell you what worldly grief is. Worldly grief has two components to it. It's only sad for the consequences of our sin, not the sin itself. The second is it only sees the horizontal nature of sin, not the vertical nature of sin. It doesn't look up is what I'm trying to say. It doesn't say what R.C. Sproul said, which is all sin is cosmic treason. Yikes! When we sin, we're saying, "God, I think, all things considered, I could run the universe better than you."

One guy said (it's a little blunt) sinning is the same thing as giving God the middle finger. When you start to realize, "Oh, *that's* what my sin is," that's what leads to godly sorrow. Look here. I don't have time to get into great detail. You should look at this with your Community Group. He gives, like, 10 different words to describe godly grief, because it's complex. Not that it always has all of these, but these are elements of true grief that leads to repentance. Let's just read them.

"For see what earnestness..." *Earnestness* is a seriousness. The first thing you do when you repent, by the way, if you're stuck in some sin... It's called *extreme measures*. This is what he's talking about...*earnestness*. Have you ever talked to someone...? It's like, "Okay. You struggle with alcohol? You don't have alcohol in the house anymore." "I don't have alcohol in the house? That sounds a little extreme." It *is* extreme.

You're struggling with looking at things you shouldn't look at on the Internet. Okay. No iPhone for you, no smartphone for you, and no Internet at your house. "It's 2024! That's ridiculous!" I know it's ridiculous. It's extreme. It's one of the ways you say to yourself, "Dude, I'm serious about this. I need to create some space."

He says, ***"For see what earnestness this godly grief has produced in you, but also what eagerness to clear yourselves..."*** Translation: to talk about it. What in your life can you not talk about? As soon as you can talk about it, it's like, "Dude, this person is on the path of healing. They've been able to bring it into the light."

"...what indignation [anger], what fear..." He's saying, "I don't want to fall back into this again and what it would do to my life." ***"...what longing, what zeal..."*** Zeal is "Do something now." ***"...what punishment! At every point you have proved yourselves innocent in the matter."*** Look at verse 12.

"So although I wrote to you, it was not for the sake of the one who did the wrong, nor for the sake of the one who suffered the wrong, but in order that your earnestness for us might be revealed to you in the sight of God. Therefore we are comforted." Paul summarizes it all and says, "Hey, we're comforted."

In other words, Paul goes, "Guys, I'm not going to keep bringing this up. You've repented. Titus told me. I've seen it. I'm not going to bring it up in six weeks when we get in a fight and I'm mad at you." Some of you need to hear that. "You repented. I'm moving on." Praise God.

"And besides our own comfort, we rejoiced still more at the joy of Titus, because his spirit has been refreshed by you all." In verses 14 and 15, Paul says, "I'm boasting about you guys. You guys are the greatest church ever." Then verse 16: ***"I rejoice, because I have complete confidence in you."***

Some commentators go, "Really, Paul? You've had a lot of concern about this church. Now you can say, 'I have complete confidence in you?'" Here's what I want to close with. Paul basically says, "I can trust you because I've seen you repent." What you want to build in your life, what you want to build in your family, what you want to build in your marriage is not perfection. There's no such thing. It's a direction of your life.

It's like, "Man, we are going to be a family that repents." What do you look for in a spouse? You know, there are a lot of things. We all change, and life changes. What do you look for in a spouse? You look for a man or a woman who repents. Guys, that's what it means to be spiritually mature.

Someone told me one time, and I've always loved this definition of spiritual maturity... A spiritually mature person is somebody who repents quickly. In other words, the more spiritually mature you are, the quicker you are to not make excuses, not blame others, not bury it, not hide it, but confess it and forsake it.

Guys, what if everybody in here said, "You know what? Here it is. It's Father's Day. It's the summer. It's June. What a great time to repent. There's no better time to repent." I want you to start hearing the word *repent* as positive. The word *repent* is called the *first word of the gospel*.

When the Lord Jesus Christ showed up, he said, "The time is fulfilled. The kingdom of heaven is at hand. Repent and believe the gospel." John the Baptist, who prepared the way for the Lord Jesus... It says he preached repentance for the forgiveness of sins. When Peter stood up at Pentecost, he preached repentance.

I want you to hear the word *repentance* means you don't have to stay how you are. The word *repentance* means Jesus Christ died so you could not just be forgiven but you could be set free. *Repentance* means your life could be different, your marriage could be different, and your family could be different.

With that said, if you'll bow your heads and close your eyes, I'm going to take us into a song that's going to take us into Communion. In a moment, we're going to take Communion. I want you to prepare your heart. Donovan will help you as well. Jesus gave the church a corporate regular reminder to repent.

One of the warnings that comes with Communion is that we should not eat it in an unworthy manner and that we should eat it only after we examine ourselves. The beautiful thing about repentance is you don't have to go anywhere to do it. You can do it right here. If you haven't forgiven your father yet, now is the time to do it. If there's an area of your life you need to bring into the light and talk about, now is the time to commit.

Lord, I pray you would give our church a godly grief. I pray that our church would know how to be so full of joy, but also so full of sorrow, Lord, that you would give us the spectrum of emotion as we follow you. Lord, I pray against worldly grief. Worldly grief leads to self-pity.

Worldly grief leads to living in the past. Worldly grief leads to hopelessness. If there's anybody in here who is experiencing worldly grief, Lord, I pray you would transform their heart by the power of the Holy Spirit to have godly grief, which only lasts for the moment because there's repentance. We pray all this in Jesus' name, amen.