

Date: November 11-12, 2023
Title: Look Up - "Look Up for Affection"
Scripture: 2 Corinthians 6:1-13
Speaker: Kurt Bjorklund

Let's pray together. God, as we gather, we thank you for the ways you've worked in and through Orchard Hill over decades and the thousands of people who've been able to hear about your son, Jesus Christ, and God, we pray that that would continue. We pray even in this moment, that those of us who are gathered would be drawn to you and your heart. And we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

Do you consider yourself a loving person? My guess is most of us, if we think about that question say sure. We may carve out some exceptions for ourselves, meaning we say well, I'm loving, but there's that one neighbor who is kind of a pain, and so, I may not be loving towards them. Or, there's this person in my extended family that's a little difficult for me, but I'm loving on a whole. And the reason we give ourselves that kind of assessment is because every now and then we feel loving toward people in our lives. We have these warm emotions when we say I want to care for people. Sometimes we give ourselves credit because we act in loving ways, even when we don't feel very loving.

Let me just read what is a familiar passage. This is First Corinthians 13. It's often read at weddings. And let's just see how we're doing. First Corinthians 13:4-8. "Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away."

So, when I read that, how do you assess your love? It would be easy just to simply say well, on a balance, I'm kind, I'm patient, and I'm loving. And maybe you're here and you're saying well, not as much as I would like. But here's the real issue with even that list. And that is that list is about our reactions to situations. And that is a good way to gauge love.

I was talking some time ago with a woman who was going through a divorce, and as she was talking about her hopes for her future, she said, "If I ever remarry, my standard is really low. What I hope for is just that somebody will be kind to me." My heart broke inside because that's such a harsh statement about the reality of even people in a marriage where sometimes they can end up at a place where we can excuse not being reactively loving.

But we've been in a series in Second Corinthians, and Second Corinthians is a letter that the Apostle Paul wrote to the church at Corinth. The context of this is that at first, he wrote First Corinthians to write a word of correction. And now, he's in a sense, pleading with them about the way that they do life together as a community of faith in the city of Corinth.

Today in chapter six, he's going to talk about affection and how to love. He's talking about this by basically saying I've loved you, and I've had affection for you, but you, the Corinthian church, haven't had a lot of affection for me. We see this in verses 12 and 13. He says this.

"We are not withholding our affection from you, but you are withholding yours from us. As a fair exchange—I speak as to my children—open wide your hearts also."

You see, there were people who had come into the church in Corinth who were opposing Paul, his message, and Paul's argument. In Second Corinthians six, he says I am loving to you, I'm going to tell you how I love, and what the indicators are of my love. And yet it doesn't feel like you're returning love for me.

In a way, one of the truest ways that we know that we love is when we love somebody who doesn't always love us well. See, it's not easy to love when somebody loves us well, but it's easier when we feel like when we're loving, somebody loves us back. But genuine love sometimes is able to love because of how God has loved us. Not because of how well somebody else loves us. And so, looking up to be resourced with God's love is the way that we ultimately love.

Here in this section, I think we see three indicators of love. First, I'm just going to say is urgency. We see this in verses one and two. And here's what he says. He says, "As God's co-workers we urge you not to receive God's grace in vain." So, his concern initially is for the spiritual well-being of the people. He says here's my concern. There's a danger that some of you are going to receive God's grace in vain.

Now, that's a phrase that's maybe a little challenging because you say well, what does it mean to receive God's grace in vain? Either we receive God's grace, or we don't receive God's grace. But grace, when it's used, means that we come to understand that it isn't our effort, but it's what God has done that allows us in Jesus Christ to have a right standing with God.

So, how do we receive God's grace in vain or in an empty way? Well, his concern when he says, we urge you as God's fellow workers not to receive the grace in vain, he's saying it's possible that you have the outward appearance of spirituality, that you do spiritual things, and yet the grace of God doesn't actually impact your life.

It might be a little bit like this. If you are in a place where you have prepared a great meal, maybe Thanksgiving, you've prepared a meal for 15 people and you say hey, it's dinner time, come to the table. And your family says yeah, there's a game on. Now some of you are saying that has been my experience. And your family, instead of coming to the table, your friends, whoever you've invited, all say well, you know, we may, or we may not take the table. We may or may not show up. There's a little bit of that has been prepared in vain. That is not something that then has taken effect in our lives. And what Paul is doing, I believe, at least in part right here, is he's saying it is possible to believe without impact.

In fact, Jesus tells a story. Luke eight and other of the Synoptic Gospels, it's called the parable of the Soils. Or what he says is that there's a seed, and it falls on the ground and some of the seed falls on hard ground and it never takes root, some of the seed falls into the ground. And he later clarifies that it's the Word of God. He says some of the seed falls into the ground and it sprouts up a plant. But as soon as the sun comes up, it withers, it fades because it's shallow into the ground. And then he says there's some seed that goes into the ground but when it starts to grow, it's choked by the concerns of this world. And then there's some seed that falls to the ground in it. It sprouts big, fruitful plants.

Part of his point is that initially, it's hard to tell that there's the appearance of life and growth, but that there's a way in which the grace of God can feel like it's in vain. And again, Paul's concern here is to say I don't want you just to get the externals of faith and religion, but I want you to actually come into a relationship with Jesus Christ.

In verse two, he says, "In the time of my favor I heard you, and in the day of salvation I helped you," quoting Isaiah 49. And then he says, "I tell you, now is the time of God's favor, now is the day of salvation." In this section where he uses the word favor, he uses it in two different places. They're two different Greek words. The second word is a compound of the first word. And the reason I tell you this is when I was reading through this, I was asking myself, why are there two different words here? Because it seems like all he's saying is now is the acceptable time. Now is the day. But the second word, the compound is an intensifier. What he's doing is he's saying now is the time to turn toward Jesus, now, really now, like super now. Now is the time of God's favor. And when you take that with the parable of the soils, there is a chance that people in our lives, that those of us who gather here, gather in any church, could tip our hat, so to speak, to religion, to faith, and not be moved by the grace of God.

Paul says my real love is seen in my urgency, in a sense, for all of you. One of the ways that you know that your love isn't just a reaction, or a sentimental feeling is that you care about the spiritual plight of people in your life. Last weekend, I talked just about a stat that said that some 45% of churchgoers in one demographic think that it's morally wrong to try to convince other people of the rightness of their faith, of their view of God. I mean, think about that again. That means that there are a lot of people who have no urgency because they don't believe that God has a way that is good and right.

And it's true that it's just another pathway, another option that could work. But let me ask you this. If you were in a house that was on fire and you decided it was time to get out of the house and you were running by other rooms where other people were, would it be loving to say I don't want to try to convince them that the building's on fire and they should leave? Of course not. That would be cold and callous and nothing but self-preservation. The very action of saying this matters is part of what love is. And Paul's argument here is we've loved, but then to the people in Corinth, he says but you haven't opened wide your hearts in the same way.

Then there's the second indicator of love. I would say this is restraint. This is in verse three. He says, "We put no stumbling block in anyone's path, so that our ministry will not be discredited." Romans 14 has an extended section about stumbling blocks in the idea of saying when people allow stumbling blocks to be in the way of other people's faith journey, how it is fundamentally to misunderstand what it is to in a sense, love people.

Second Corinthians seven verses two through four puts it there too. It says it this way, "Make room for us in your hearts. We have wronged no one, we have corrupted no one, we have exploited no one. I do not say this to condemn you; I have said before that you have such a place in our hearts that we would live or die with you. I have spoken to you with great frankness; I take great pride in you. I am greatly encouraged; in all our troubles my joy knows no bounds." What is he doing here? He's saying, listen, we haven't allowed our preferences, our way of doing things to get in the way of the message of Jesus Christ.

Sometimes what a stumbling block is, is it's letting our urgency for secondary matters get in the way of other people's beliefs. You see, a lack of urgency is a problem where people say it doesn't matter. You do life the way you want to do it. But there can be another problem. Sometimes urgency turns into a bombastic caustic kind of faith that feels virtuous by turning people off with its words and its obtuse manner. And so to say, I'm going to live in such a way that I show restraint, what that means is I'm not going to put a stumbling block in front of somebody else.

One of the great spiritual writers of our era is a man named Dallas Willard. He's written extensively. A few years back when he was still alive, he was at a conference, and somebody asked him what is the biggest mark of spiritual maturity that you see. He paused and thought for a long moment, maybe he was doing it for dramatic effect, or maybe he was trying just in all of his thinking to say if I had to say one thing, what would it be? And his answer surprised me because I expected something different. But he said the greatest indicator of spiritual maturity is that you become almost impossible to offend.

The reason that struck me is we don't tend to think about spiritual maturity that way. In fact, we tend to think a lot of times that spiritual maturity is somebody who gets worked up and is offended about all kinds of things. But what he was saying is that spiritual maturity is when you come to the point where you say I am not going to allow my own way of thinking to become so identified with me that I'm offended by all kinds of things and all kinds of people.

Martin Luther put it like this at one point. He said, "A Christian man is the most free lord of all, and subject to none; a Christian man is the most dutiful servant of all, and subject to everyone." You see, what happens when you love is that not only do you have urgency for the spiritual well-being of people around you, but you will also have restraint where you say, I don't need to assert my rights because I realize sometimes that asserting my rights can be selfish and can often push people away. It means that as you think about the way that you interact with people, you're always thinking about what will allow the Ministry of Reconciliation, Second Corinthians five, what came right before, and my role as an ambassador to be effective, not just to say I said whatever I had to say, but I was pointing people to Jesus.

So, there's urgency. There is restraint. And then I would say there's sacrifice. We see this in verse four and following. Here's what he says. "Rather, as servants of God we commend ourselves in every way: in great endurance; in troubles, hardships and distresses; in beatings, imprisonments and riots; in hard work, sleepless nights and hunger; in purity, understanding, patience and kindness; in the Holy Spirit and in sincere love; in truthful speech and in the power of God; with weapons of righteousness in the right hand and in the left; through glory and dishonor, bad report and good report; genuine, yet regarded as impostors; known, yet regarded as unknown; dying, and yet we live on; beaten, and yet not killed; sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; poor, yet making many rich; having nothing, and yet possessing everything."

Do you hear the sacrifice? Now, I don't think that in our day and age, you need to go looking for sacrifice necessarily to be in the places where Paul was. But notice that this wasn't just part of his life experience. This was because of his faith and because of his commitment to the

gospel being made prevalent. And my point is just this, and that is sacrifice is not saying I took a turn in the nursery at church. It's putting ourselves in a place where our comfort and our life have fundamentally changed because of our love for people and saying we want other people to know who Jesus Christ is. And without that, what happens is we can say very simply, well, I do these things. But what sacrifice means is that we're willing to give up some things so that other people can know the greatest truth in the world.

I saw an article recently that talked about how many people have switched churches in recent years. It said that almost half of the people who attend an evangelical church like Orchard Hill have switched churches in the last five years. In other words, people would say, I'm moving. And COVID had a lot to do with that. Some of the stuff around politics. But here's what the stats under that said. About 10% of people change churches because they had a significant relational conflict in the church, which means one in ten people who leave basically said I couldn't get along with somebody. Now, sometimes that's probably legitimate. There are times when things blow up in such a way that it makes sense. But that's probably not often the ideal.

Listen to these other stats. 29% said that they moved on because the church wasn't fulfilling their needs or desires, and 27% became disenchanted with the pastor specifically. Now, here's what that means. 29%, 27%, like that's some 50% there, and 10%, almost 60% of the people who changed churches did not change because they moved and logistically needed a new place to be. They may have had some relational turmoil, but of that 60%, it wasn't doctrinal, and it wasn't logistic, but it was relational and dissatisfaction.

And almost one in four people who've moved on from Orchard Hill became disenfranchised with me. I know you find that hard to believe, but here's what I'm driving at. We change churches because of our preferences because we say the church isn't doing what we think the church should do. Or the pastor isn't making the statements we think the pastor should make, isn't teaching enough on end times, teaches too much on end times, didn't take enough of a stand on COVID, shut the church down too long on COVID, and we go down all of these lists and we say well, I'm not sure. That's not a Christian community. And what's happened is people have become consumers in their approach to the church rather than part of a community that says I'm part of something that loves. In the New Testament, the picture of the church is never people being consumers where they say I go over here as soon as that's not good for me.

Now, there is a time to make a change. I'm not suggesting that there's never a time, but what I'm saying is this. We shouldn't treat the Christian community like we treat our grocery stores. Do you know how you treat a grocery store? I go to a grocery store and as long as they have good produce, good food at a reasonable price and it's reasonably convenient, that's my grocery store. But as soon as another grocery store comes along that has better produce at better prices and is more convenient, I move from that grocery store to the next one and that's appropriate when it comes to a grocery store. But sometimes what we want to do is we want to treat the community and church in the same way.

And what I think Paul is arguing here is he's saying I have loved you and you haven't loved in the same way because what you've chosen to do instead is to say we're all about the super apostles. Now you can get disenfranchised, and if so, maybe moving on makes sense. But my

point, I think Paul's point, more importantly than mine, is saying affection sometimes means that you put other people's needs ahead of your own. And you say showing up and being part of the work of God in a local church is part of being a Christ follower. And it will involve urgency, it'll involve restraint, and it will involve some level of sacrifice.

And what that really just simply means is that there's a part of all of us that says, I'm willing not to make this all about me because this is what he says, open wide your hearts. Where do we get that strength - by saying we've been reconciled to God, and He has called the people who've known who Jesus is to be part of this Ministry of Reconciliation.

Now, some of us who are gathered here today might be saying, well, you know, you're talking about investing, and I'm not sure if I believe in Jesus or not. Can I just say to you that the hunger in your heart and soul for something bigger than just simply living and existing and acquiring and moving on is the hunger for God Himself? God calls His people to have a grander purpose than just simply living out our days saying I got a house, then I got a bigger house, I had enough to retire, and I found great soft-serve yogurt to eat at 2:00 in the afternoon, saying you're invited to this grand purpose to give your life to something more. And what some of us do is we say well, one day I'll give my life to something more. One day I'll be about more once I get everything lined up. But as you line your life up with the priorities of God, God often brings alignment in other areas of your life, although it doesn't always look the way we want it to look.

There's a book that came out years ago and is called *Borden of Yale '09*. It's about a man named William Borden, who graduated from Yale in 1909. The story in the book tells about his journey. He was an heir, grew up in Chicago to a large family fortune, went to Yale, and while at Yale as a student he became more and more convinced that his life should be about serving the purposes of God, not just his family business. And you can certainly serve the purposes of God in a family business while making a fortune. But for William Borden, it became a choice when he said, I want to give all of my days, all of my time to see people come to know Jesus.

And so, he wrote in his Bible as a freshman, the word no reserves. And in another point, he wrote the words say no to self every time and say yes to Jesus every time. He started a student movement at Yale that became a mission movement. Then he graduated from Yale, and he went to seminary at Princeton. Upon finishing seminary at Princeton, he decided that he was going to go be a missionary in China so that he could reach people that in his estimation weren't being reached. And he wrote again in his Bible the word no retreats. So, no reserves, no retreats. His family was a little dumbfounded that he would choose this course of action. But he chose it, and he went. In his initial journey to China, he contracted a disease that proved to be fatal and died at the age of 25. In some ways, it seems like a waste. But in his Bible, when it was found, right under the phrase no reserves, no retreats, was the phrase no regrets, where he said, I gave my life to something that I feel mattered.

Paul here is simply saying this, and that is, if you're going to have an open heart as he was saying he had, it will involve a bit of urgency. It will involve restraint, sacrifice, and a sense of saying no reserves, no retreats, no regrets. And when that becomes true in our lives, then our lives take on a greater purpose, greater significance than simply getting what we think we need and living out our days.

Now, that looks different for everybody. But to have that kind of heart, we can't look at how people treat us, or we'll always be disappointed. We must look at how Jesus has treated us. Being filled with his love allows us to say whether people love back and whether people participate well or not. And whatever it is that you're part of is secondary to saying I have loved the Lord and loved people through that.

And again, if you're here and you're saying, you know, I'm not sure about all of this. The clear message in scripture is that all of us need a savior because of our sins. But Jesus came to this earth to reconcile people to himself, and we can be reconciled by acknowledging our sins in Jesus' work. Then he says, and now I give you this purpose as well, to help others be reconciled. And that is the message Paul drives home in Second Corinthians 6:1-13.

God, help us today to be people who don't just love in thought and even reactively when it suits us and people have been good to us, the people who love in our whole orientation. God, fill each of us with your love, that is a default natural thing. And we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. Thanks for being here. Have a great day.