



1 Peter 1:22-2:3
Love Others & Desire the Word

Summary: Peter encourages Christians living in difficult times to grow spiritually by emphasizing a community of love driven by the Word of God.

One of the things we often say about this area is that no one is from here. So I want to begin this morning by taking a little poll. If you are over the age of 18 and you were born within 25 miles of here, would you put your hand up?

Most of us are brought here by work or school or you came as part of the package when someone you love was brought here by work or school. And when work or school is over, most of us move on and move away. We say a lot of hellos and goodbyes here in Northern Virginia.

And there can be a bit of a thrill to it, uprooting and moving on, off to the next adventure. But there can be a real downside as well. Because, every move, every new person you meet, every old friend you say good bye to takes energy – whether you're the one staying or the one going. It's hard to keep making and losing connections.

And we are made for relationships, even us introverts. You are supposed to have friends and family. People you can turn to and people who can turn to you. As one of the men in the church has said – someone you can call at 2AM when your car breaks down, Roadside Assistance shouldn't be your only option.

Fortunately, we have the Church. Many of us may be separated from our biological families and our childhood or college friends, but we have the family of God. And that should be an important point of connection for us, a surrogate, or adopted family, and a source of deep, true, meaningful friendship anchored in the gospel and grace which we receive from God and reflect to each other.

This morning, as we look at Peter's words of guidance and direction to Christians going through hard times, notice how he encourages them to grow spiritually by emphasizing the durability of the gospel in a community of love powered by the Word of God. Read with me:

1 Peter 1:22 Since you have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit in sincere love of the brethren, love one another fervently with a pure heart, 23 having been born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the word of God which lives and abides forever, 24 because

*"All flesh is as grass,
And all the glory of man as the flower of the grass.
The grass withers,*

*And its flower falls away,
25 But the word of the LORD endures forever.”*

Now this is the word which by the gospel was preached to you.

2:1 Therefore, laying aside all malice, all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and all evil speaking, 2 as newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby, 3 if indeed you have tasted that the Lord *is* gracious.

Now, I hope you caught that reference to [sincere](#) and [fervent love](#) for others because we're going to come back to that, and we're going to talk about the way things like [malice](#), [deceit](#), [hypocrisy](#), and [envy](#) can get in the way of fellowship and friendship. But first, we need to understand that all of this is built on the durable foundation of the gospel – that what should happen now and next is anchored in what has happened already.

Notice, everything we just read is contingent. As we have said many times, this is written to Christians. It is written to people who have been born again. You can't jump into the behavioral transformation and relationships we're going to talk about later, mid-stream, you have to start with a gospel foundation. Verse 22 begins with [Since you have purified your souls by obeying the truth](#) – as a result of that, now this...

We are told to [fervently love one another](#), but it's because we've [born again, not of corruptible seed, but incorruptible](#). We're told to love others because we have received love ourselves. Remember what we saw last week, (vs 18) [you were not redeemed with perishable things like silver or gold...but with the precious blood of Christ](#). You receive God's love first and then you reflect it to others.

The order is important, because let's be honest, sometimes it's hard to love people. It's hard to be nice. It's hard to be kind. It can be really, really, hard to initiate, to do something for someone else before they do something for you, or after what they've already done or said to you. But you learn how to love this way *by remembering how you've been loved*. By reflecting on what God has done for you, all that He has given to you – God's grace becomes your fuel.

And, we are reminded that we receive God's grace under all conditions – that [the Word of the LORD endures forever](#). Peter quotes here from the prophet Isaiah reminding us that although we feel like the star of our own little show in life, we're actually like the daffodils that are poking up out of the ground right now getting ready to trumpet the arrival of Spring. They'll be a beautiful burst of white and yellow color and we'll all be excited to see them for a few weeks, and then they'll dry up, fade out, and die away as we all talk about the cherry blossoms. No flower lasts forever and neither do we.

But God does. He is author of life, the Creator of both mankind and the flowers and everything else that ever was, is, or will be.

And when you're going through difficult times, like Peter's original audience, when you're being [grieved by various trials](#), you need to be reminded that your faith is anchored in a God who transcends this world, a God who was here before all your problems began and will be here long after they're over. When things in life are hard, you need to be reminded that [the Word of the LORD endures forever](#).

You're not following some fad that just burst onto the scene, caught everyone's attention, and then burned out. People have been confessing Christ before you were born, before your parents were born, before your grandparents were born. People have been confessing Christ before this country was born, and before Europeans even arrived on this continent.

In 1492 Columbus sailed the ocean blue. That was 400 years *after* this church was built. Saint Mark's basilica in Italy was completed in 1092 – and there's nothing really significant about it, I just picked it at random, it's not the only one that old.



But another thousand years before that, in the year 92AD, people were confessing Christ in across North Africa, the Middle East, and Southern Europe. And for thousands of years before that, the Jews were looking forward to the coming of the Christ, they called Him the Messiah, because God told Adam, and Noah, and Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and Moses, that one day He would send a deliverer to rescue and redeem us. God gave His Word and people have trusted in it since the very beginning of mankind.

You need to know that. You need to be reminded of that, especially when you go through difficult times. You need to remember that, just like Peter's original audience, [the gospel was preached to you](#) (vs 25), it was shared with you, and through it God brought you into something larger than yourself, something durable, transcendent, and permanent.

[23 \[You have\] been born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the word of God which lives and abides forever, 24 because](#)

*"All flesh is as grass,
And all the glory of man as the flower of the grass.
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[Now this is the word which by the gospel was preached to you.](#)

You need to be reminded that God's plan includes you, but it isn't all about you. We saw last week that we are to [rest our hope fully on the grace of God](#). Especially in difficult and challenging times. We must remember how temporary we are and how enduring this faith is, anchored in the Word of God.

So that's the foundation, that's what everything is built on. That's the eternal perspective.

But here we are. Living in these difficult days. Facing the various trials in our lives. And our task is to integrate them both – to take this ancient faith and live out what has always been true here and now today, and to do it together.

So again, notice the logical flow of what Peter is saying in our text: **since you have** purified souls, **since you have** been born again, **since you have** received something incorruptible, which lives and abides forever – in all places, at all times, under all circumstances, even here and now – since the gospel was preached to you and transformed you, **since you have tasted and seen that the Lord is gracious – love one another fervently**... even in your most difficult days.

On the basis of everything you have experienced in Christ, press into relationships with other people and be transformed.

So now let's talk about this command to love each other. And right away we have to recognize, this is not a command to emote. Love is not just a gushy, sentimental feeling, nor is it a way of expressing something you really like. It's more than a heart emoji or a click on someone's Instagram feed. Real love is expressed in relationship and it's always prepared to give, to serve.

I want you to notice our passage speaks of **sincere love** in vs 22, genuine affection and fondness. In the original Greek text, the word for sincere is *anupocritos*. Can you hear the connection there to another word? *Anupocritos*. It's the opposite of a hypocrite – another Greek word that was used of actors who played a role on a stage.

Now the charge of hypocrisy – acting one way and being another, or saying one thing and doing another - tends to go well with religion, after all, we're advocating for a standard we often don't live up to. We saw last week, God tells us: **be holy for I am holy**. And we agree that's good, but we're not quite there yet personally.

We don't always love with a sincere love. But before we level the charge of hypocrisy, we need to consider motive and intent. If you're pretending to be righteous, pretending to be holy, pretending to live a better life than you actually are in the shadows and in the dark or the deep spaces of your life, then yes, you're a hypocrite and for your own good you should be exposed.

But if you're trying to be sincere, if you desire to grow, but you fail or discover blindspots along the way, that's not quite the same thing. We're all a work in progress, and you don't have to *be* perfect if you're *making* progress. Peter is writing here to Christians, encouraging people whose souls have been changed for eternity to continue to grow in love and action here and now.

So, **sincere**, pure, love should be our goal. And, we should pursue it **fervently** – as we have been pursued.

I can't say this often enough: we are only asked to reflect to others what we have received ourselves.

Do you know that *God loves you fervently*? Think of what He has done. He loved you so much that He sent His Son to you and for you. You will never be able to show anyone else the same kind of fervent and sincere love that God has shown to you, that He *is showing* to you right now.

But, with His help, you should try. Because, we have an infinite obligation to love each other as we have been loved.

Here is where the modern Western version of the Christian faith has gone so wrong over the years. We have focused so much on the personal side of the faith – you need a personal relationship with Jesus – which is true – that we have lost sight of the corporate aspect of the faith and we've created a climate of spiritual consumers both inside and outside of the church.

Today it's common for people to talk about where they are on their spiritual journey – as if it's a highly individual experience that you can tailor to your own desires and requirements. We like the idea of religious or spiritual things that give us something, that add to us, but we're not too big on a faith that might require something of us, might obligate us in anyway.

And yet, throughout history, and even now, in other cultures, God's people have seen themselves as members of a community of faith. Have you ever noticed that the Lord's Prayer says *give us this day our daily bread*, not give *me* this day *my* daily bread? God puts us in community for mutual encouragement, assistance, counsel, strength, and support. We may be on a "journey," but we travel together – caravan style, like the refugees we are.

Using another analogy, the apostle Paul says we are like different parts of a body with Christ as our head. We belong together - hands and feet need each other. In fact, God has designed it that way. He gives other people the gifts we need and gives us things that will help other people – sharing our gifts is an act of *sincere love*.

Jesus told His disciples:

John 13:35 *By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.*

Isn't that interesting – the evidence of your discipleship, the evidence of your faith, is your love, and Peter would say: *even in these difficult and challenging times, even when you're stressed out, even when you're busy, even when life is hard, because you're reflecting a love that you've received under all circumstances as well.*

God has designed the church so that grace is often conveyed to us horizontally, and not just vertically. Often, He works in our life, grows us, shapes us, provides for us, encourages us,

comforts and counsels us, by sending other people to us, and He does the same by sending us to them. So, when you are out of fellowship, you are cut off from the very system that God designed to bring you grace. You can get by with your podcasts and your books and your Christian radio, but you're missing something real and neglecting the command to receive from others and give to others with [sincere, fervent love, from a pure heart](#).

So, what does [sincere](#) and [fervent](#) love for one another look like? Let me give you some ideas.

Right now we have a family in the church going through a difficult season – the wife's mother is in the final stages of what appears to be a terminal bout of cancer. So dad is holding down the fort with all the kids while his wife has taken off to be with her mom, and we've had people pull together to make meals for the family which is encouraging to see.

But on Thursday the woman who was going to deliver some meals had a sick kid herself. So, they made an announcement at Bible Study – can anyone deliver some meal to this family since the person who wanted to isn't able?

And ladies were politely wrestling with one another to do it. Even though it came up last minute, even though they had to make changes to their calendars and plans, they were willing, more than that, they were [fervent](#) in their desire to step in and help out – to show love to a family in need, and it was encouraging to see.

I'll tell you another example of the other fervent love I see around here is our security team. They're small, but dedicated. They do their best to provide coverage at every worship service, every AWANA meeting, and most other large events we hold. They've lost several team members over the course of the pandemic to things like moves, and we've doubled our services, but they make personal sacrifices to provide coverage.

I think as well of the ladies that show up on Thursdays to provide childcare and supervision so that other moms can participate in the Bible Study. They're giving their time and energy to show love from a pure heart.

I think of people who give – who choose to write a check to the Lord instead of take a bigger or longer vacation or buy a nicer or newer car, because they want make it possible for others to have a place to come and worship and a place, that like St Mark's Basilica, will remind the coming the generations that they are being brought into something that was here before they came and will be here even after they're gone.

I think of fervent love when I see people reaching out and inviting people over. And I think of fervent love when I hear about people checking on those we haven't seen in a while, making sure people are still OK.

It's also encouraging to see people anticipating needs before they happen and stepping in to help out. You see or hear what's coming and you lean forward, before anyone even asks, and you offer to help out.

So fervent and sincere love is not just these monumental Medal of Honor style moments of sacrificial heroism laying down your life for your friends, it's all the smaller, quieter, acts of love done consistently and faithfully too.

Which is why Peter then points out some of the things that can destroy our relationships. Things like [malice](#), or wickedness, craftiness or [deceit, hypocrisy, envy](#), and slander or [evil speaking](#). Notice that all of these are social sins. They're reflections of toxicity in your heart, mind and mouth that can crush relationships and they need to be rooted out of us.

And remember, Peter is writing to people who were being shunned and oppressed, people who have been grieved by various trials, hard things that have happened in their lives. It's easy for us to be [malicious](#) toward people who have been malicious to us, isn't it? It's easy for us to speak evil of people who have spoken evil of us or to us. Isn't it?

But notice this, Peter says, lay aside [ALL malice, ALL evil speaking](#).

If Christ has redeemed our entire life, our entire life should reflect His character, in all times, in all places, with all people, under all circumstances. Remember, the charge is: [be holy for I am holy](#). God is in the process of transforming our hearts and Jesus said (Matt 12:34) [out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks](#). So, what comes out of you ought to be a reflection of what is in you.

Which means some of us need to think about what we're looking at and what we're saying and posting online and in real life. How much time do you spend [envying](#) people on YouTube or Instagram? How much time do you spend [envying](#) someone else's accomplishments or stuff? How much time do you spend [envying](#) someone else's body or sense of style? Let me ask you teens, how much time do you spend envying someone else's parents? "I wish my parents would let me..."

And for all of us, what do you post online? Do you speak evil of others in your posts or comments? Ever make a negative comment about Boomers or Millennials, or protestors from the other side of the issue than yours? Ever speak evil of another political party or its people? Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount that if you maliciously call someone a 'fool' you're in danger of hell's flames. I can't soften that for you, it's what He said.

And I'll tell you this, there is very little that is happening online or in the media right now that looks or sounds like Jesus, *even from people who claim His name*. It's sad, it's a terrible witness, it's unattractive to those outside the faith, and it brings the judgment of God who says: [lay aside ALL malice, ALL deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and ALL evil speaking. Be holy, for I am holy](#). My friends, we should lament our attitudes as well as our actions, we should regret not just what comes out of us, but the fact that it was ever in us, and we should repent, we should change.

And that change will happen as we spend time in God's Word which we should desire like a new born child desires it's mother's milk - with an intense craving, a 'feed me lest I die,' kind of craving.

But, you need to know that **the Word of God** is more than just Scripture though it includes Scripture. **The Word of God** is the revelation of God, it's His communication of Himself to us.

So, it can be His speech. According to **Psalm 33:6 "By the word of the LORD the heavens were made."** He spoke and it came to be.

And, the Word of God is also found in Scripture. When you read the prophets of the Old Testament it often says, the Word of the LORD came to so and so the prophet. And in the New Testament, you find places like the seven letters of Revelation encouraging those who have ears to hear, to listen to what to Spirit says to the churches. God spoke, He communicated to us, and the words of God were collected in Scripture which we call the Word of God.

But God's ultimate communication with us is through Jesus. John opens up his gospel with the famous words,

John 1:1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

Have you experienced His kindness and comfort? Have you confessed your sins and found forgiveness? If so, do you want more of that? Do you desire it like an infant desires milk? Give it to me or else I die?

Peter says you should, **if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is gracious**. Notice again: we are called to action, called to change, but only in response to what we have already received.

And, the longer you spend with Jesus, the more you will feel Him pulling you away from **all malice, all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and all evil speaking** - you'll desire to put them away, lay them aside, leave them behind because they have nothing to do with Him.

And the longer you spend with Jesus, the more you'll find Him drawing you into relationships with other Christians where you sincerely, fervently, demonstrate love by the things you do and say, and things you don't do or say, for or to each other.

Christian, this is God's plan for you, even in difficult times. He is calling you closer to Himself and closer to others into relationships defined by love and transformation that we both receive and reflect, forever.

Let's pray.