

Life in 3D: In Ephesians 4:1-2

“Walking in Love” is at the heart of inward transformation in Christ. The love *with which* Christ loves us transforms us makes into people who love as Christ loves. You might even call this “walking *around* in love.” It is love in the relationships of everyday life. Love for our family, love for our children and grandchildren, love for coworkers, love for the person we sit next to in the bleachers, love for the person in the checkout line at the grocery store, love for waiter at the restaurant, love for the people in our neighborhood. When Paul says “walk worthy” he means... in your everyday, walking around, coming and going life – walk in love.

Sometimes when skeptics criticize Christianity as hypocritical it is because this kind of transformation is missing. They say, how can you go to church and sing songs to God and then berate the person at the grocery store or verbally assault your children on the way out? Or how can you care so much about people in a faraway place you’ve never met, give money to them and go on a trip to help them, but treat the poor in your own community with contempt? Skeptics look at this and say, something is really missing. And they are right. Inward transformation in Christ starts in our walking around life. Developing a love that infuses these relationships and interactions is at the heart of being transformed by Christ. So how does that happen?

Suppose someone says to you, “Playing the piano is a wonderful thing to do. It’s relaxing, keeps the mind sharp, and artistic. You should go play the piano.” If you’ve never played the piano, never learned how, then how could possibly go do it? If someone said to me, you should really take up painting. It’s a creative activity, focuses the mind and attention, and deepens perception of the world around you. You would love it!” I’d say, you really don’t know my gifts, do you? I can’t draw stick figures – I would have no idea how to begin!

Loving is like this. I can’t just say – go love others. After all, what does that mean? We bring so much baggage into love and into our loving, and it’s often unhealthy stuff. We model what we were shown, and we love the way we were loved. Sometimes they are healthy parts to it, but sometimes not. **If we’re going to love others as Christ loves, first we have to grasp--and be grasped by--the love with which Christ loves us.**

Two common distortions in love:

- 1) *Love means, “I’ll try to make you happy.”* People who love this way are constantly chasing the “happiness” of the people they are around. Trying to read their minds, anticipate their needs, and gauge their reactions. As a person on the receiving end, this kind of love is great: here is someone in my life who I trying desperately to make us happy, trying to meet my every need. But on the giving end of that relationship, it’s pretty distorted and exhausting.
- 2) The reverse side of this is, love means, *“You need to make me happy.”* People who love this way give off strong signals that I will love you if I approve of you. If you do the things I want you to do, think the way I want you to think, make decisions I agree with, live your life in a way I approve of – then I will love you. I will help you, I will be in your life, I will stay in touch with you, I’ll treat you with kindness -- as long as you make me happy. As the one who’s

giving this kind of love, it's great. It feels safe and comfortable – I only love the people I approve of, that don't offend me or bother me in any way. On the receiving end, though, this is very difficult love to live with. This is love held out like a carrot, a reward for making someone happy. And it's love, ultimately, that steals my soul – because as long as I am trying to get this love, I'll never become who I am created to be.

Now, you might notice something about these two kinds of love: they actually fit together in a very unhealthy way. One person says, "Baby, love means you need to make me happy." And the other person says, "Baby, love means I'll try to make you happy." So two people can end up in this distorted love relationship that works for a while but never works for long. Sometimes parenting relationships are this way, sometimes marriage relationships are this way, sometime friendships are this way, sometimes work relationship are this way. At some point, though, it always breaks down. The person trying to make the other one happy can never do enough; and the one looking for the other to make them happy is never happy.

So, we have to learn how to love. First we have to be grasped, be taken, and be captivated by the love with which Christ loves us. This is the "calling to which we have been called" that Paul is referring to. There is a voice calling you – a voice within, and a voice without. It is a voice that speaks through scripture, through writings, through prayer, through worship, through the created beauty of the earth, through your conscience, through wise friends, and sometimes through pastors preaching. It is the voice of God calling you to be loved and to live in love. The Bible speaks of Christ as the Word of God made flesh; the person and life of Jesus Christ is voice of God made flesh, in living color. God knew from the beginning that our efforts at love would be distorted and twisted. Call it the Fall, call it human nature – whatever you call it, *God knew that we could not grasp true love. We had to be grasped by it. So God himself came in the flesh to take hold of us in love and show us True Love, so that we could love truly.*

Christ came to meet our deepest need. Not just what we thought we needed or thought would make us happy – Christ came to meet our true need. When God looked at us, God saw painful separation – separation from God and separation from true self, and Christ came to heal this pain. Before we could do anything for him, he did everything for us. He asks nothing in return, no favor, no *quid pro quo*. He simply loves you completely as you are. Often we project our distorted view of love onto God and it goes like this: God loves me if I love God; or God loves me if I do the things that make God happy. But that could not be farther from the truth: God loves you whether you love God or not, whether you make God happy or not, whether you walk close to God or walk far away – God's love for you is the same. Christ gave himself up for you – he gave himself away, gave his life away, to meet your deepest need. And he does not take it back – his love is freely and permanently given.

Now when we are captivated by this love, it transforms us into people who love as Christ loves. When you have been grasped by this love, then I as a pastor can say, "Go out and love others." And you know what that means. And the more you love others, the more you understand how Christ loves you; and the more you are grasped by how Christ loves you, the better you love others.

Paul writes in Ephesians this very interesting phrase: "**bear with one another in love.**" In this little phrase, Paul unpacks a lot of what it means to transform our daily relationships with love. When someone says to you, "Bear with me," what does it mean? It means please be patient with me, be gentle. Please do not be short-tempered; please do not get frustrated; please do not give up on me; please do not tune out or walk away; please do not move on. Wait with me, wait for me, I am trying to

get there. **Bear with me.** So I have this sign here that says, "Please bear with me." I want you to imagine that every person you meet is wearing a sign like this, because we all are. We are all asking to be accepted as we are, to be given patience and kindness. Love in the real world is a daily decision to give patiently bear with others. The people that cross our path every day are not the easiest ones to love, they are often the hardest. More than anyone, the person in our path every day can cause us frustration, make us short-tempered, get under our skin. And more than anyone, the person we encounter every day is asking us to bear with them. Bearing with someone in love is to extend to them the sacrificial and healing love of Christ.

There's one other sense of "bearing with someone in love" that takes us deeper into the mystery of love – I want to share that and then close. If I bear something, I hold it up – I carry it. When we bear with someone in love, we help them to carry what they are carrying – help them to bear it. Have you ever wondered what the people we meet in every day life are carrying? Because we're all carrying something. I have a bag here, and this bag has lots of pockets and holds lots of stuff. Imagine that every person you meet is carrying a bag like this. It's the biggest bag I have, and there's a whole bunch of stuff in here. In this pocket is really good things, exciting transitions, new opportunities, hopes for the future. In this pocket over here are some really painful things, guilt from the past; marriage is having trouble; job is not going very well; don't know how we'll pay for college; I've got some medical tests coming. This pocket is pretty full. In this pocket up here I keep all the stuff that my friends and family have; it's not my stuff, but I care about them so I tuck it in my bag. And in this pocket here, well, I just have too much stuff in here; this is where I put my general feeling of being overwhelmed with the daily tasks of life. And I put this bag over my shoulder and carry it around every day. And everyone does.

Pick someone in this room right now, that's sitting in front of you. Someone you may not know that well. You know the back of their head. You see the back of their head every week – when you drift off, you stare at the back of their head. What do you think they're carrying? I promise you it's something. Transformation in the love of Christ is when you can see that person and say, "Whatever it is, I will help them carry it because Christ carries me. And because Christ carries me, I can help them to carry it." In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.