

Introduction

I'm glad that you are here today. We're continuing our series, going through the Book of 1 Thessalonians. If you have your Bible, I want to invite you right now to go ahead and take it out. I hope that you do have it with you. If you don't, you can use your smart phone, your tablet... whatever. I hear a few of us in this room have one of those. Use your Bible app. 1 Thessalonians 2:19 is where we're going to start today, but we're going to focus the bulk of our attention on 1 Thessalonians chapter 3. We are talking about what it means to be a Church that makes disciples. That's what "Advance" is all about; it's about how the Kingdom of God moves forward in this place. We're looking at what God's Word has to say to us about that particular topic. We're going to jump in here, in 1 Thessalonians 2:19 and read this and see what the Lord might say to us about this. Let's just jump in there and we'll go from there.

"For what is our hope or joy or crown of boasting before our Lord Jesus at His coming? Is it not you? For you are our glory and joy.

"Therefore, when we could bear it no longer, we were willing to be left behind at Athens alone, and we sent Timothy, our brother and God's coworker in the Gospel of Christ, to establish and exhort you in your faith, that no one be moved by these afflictions. For you yourselves know that we are destined for this. For when we were with you, we kept telling you beforehand that we were to suffer affliction, just as it has come to pass, and just as you know. For this reason, when I could bear it no longer, I sent to learn about your faith, for fear that somehow the tempter had tempted you and our labor would be in vain.

"But now that Timothy has come to us from you, and has brought us the good news of your faith and love and reported that you always remember us kindly and long to see us, as we long to see you—for this reason, brothers, in all our distress and affliction we have been comforted about you through your faith. For now we live, if you are standing fast in the Lord. For what thanksgiving can we return to God for you, for all the joy that we feel for your sake before our God, as we pray most earnestly night and day that we may see you face to face and supply what is lacking your faith?"

"Now, may our God and Father Himself, and our Lord Jesus, direct our way to you, and may the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all, as we do for you, so that He may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus, with all His saints."

Let's pray together. "Lord, we come right now and we ask that Your Word would speak to us. God, I'm broken and needy and sinful; I need Your grace today. I need to hear from You. Father, I would imagine that there are others in this room who need to hear from You as well, so God I pray that You would speak to them. Lord, I don't imagine... I know we're all broken. We're all in a place of need, so Father we ask 'Move mightily in our lives today.' Lord, for those that are here today, for whatever reason... they're not even sure why they're here... they're just 'at church'... God, I pray that you would split apart their stone-cold heart and would rescue them. Father, for the people that are here today that are just doing their religious thing... their church thing... God, I pray that You would show them Your grace. Father, for the people that are here today and they're angry or they're bitter or they're hurting... Lord, I pray that Your Word and Your Holy Spirit would be a sweet salve for them today. God, wherever we are, meet us... but don't leave us there, Lord. Draw us to the place You want us. We pray this in the Name of Jesus. Amen."

Do you know when I was a young man, I had lots of dreams for my personal glory. I don't know if any of you ever had those moments where you were looking for your own name to one day be glorified. I had just

a few small plans that I wanted to see happen. First of all, I was going to be a quarterback in the NFL, so that was just step one. Then after that, I hoped to very neatly segue into a career on Broadway. (Laughter) I always had kind of seen myself... I don't know why that's funny. They laughed in the other service too. (Laughter) I mean, I have a better chance on Broadway than I do as an NFL quarterback... I saw myself on the stage singing, "Surrey With A Fringe On Top" ...or whatever. Then from that place I envisioned that I would then go to law school, obviously a law school of some repute, so that way I could go into my final career which was to be the governor of this great State of Texas. (Laughter) I know... looking back, it is sort of an odd succession of dreams, but those were the sorts of dreams that I had when I was a young guy. Really, if I'm honest, the dreams that I had were really just about me getting glory and everyone knowing my name. It's an interesting thing, I think, that all of us sort of secretly... you know, we have that moment where we think, "You know, I just wish that people could know me, and I'm going to aspire to these great things."

TRUE GLORY.....

1. Is Found In Who We Disciple. (2:19-20)

Listen... not that setting goals and not that aspiring to great things is bad... it's just that, ultimately, whenever we're aspiring to those particular things, what we're really doing is we're saying that we want our name to be lifted high... that we want glory for ourselves. Which is why 1 Thessalonians chapter 2, verses 19 and 20 are so baffling and so puzzling to me. Let's look at those real quick. 1 Thessalonians 2:19-20; this is what we read: *"For what is our hope or joy or crown of boasting..."* So what is it? What's our crown of boasting? *"...before our Lord Jesus at His coming?"* So, in other words, whenever Jesus Christ comes back, what are we going to brag about? And the answer is... *"Is it not you? For you are our glory and joy."* Whenever Jesus Christ returns one day and we all get to brag about whatever it is that we get to brag about in front of Jesus... I mean... do you brag in front of Jesus? I guess so... but whenever you brag in front of Jesus, you will not brag about your passing yards in the NFL... you'll not brag about the performance that you gave on Broadway, and you certainly will not brag about anything that happened in the political realm... Instead, you will brag about one thing... Paul says that *"...it's you."* Who's the "You" in this? Well, it's the Church at Thessalonica. Paul is saying that the only thing that I'll be able to brag about one day before the Lord are the disciples that I made... the people that I told about Jesus. That's the thing that I'm going to brag about one day. You see, the Scripture says that there will come a moment when everything that we've ever done with our time and with our efforts will be tested. In fact, Paul says in 1 Corinthians chapter 3 that "it will go through a fire." In other words, it will be revealed to see what was really worthwhile and what wasn't. This is the way that Paul describes it in 1 Corinthians chapter 3, starting in verse 13: *"...each one's work will become manifest, for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed by fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done. If the work that anyone has built on the foundation survives, he will receive a reward. If anyone's work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire."* Paul knows that much of the things that we're going to spend our time on are going to be burned up at the end of time because it is going to be revealed as having been worthless. I don't know about you, but I've spent a lot of my time on worthless things. That's what Paul says; he recognized it. Jesus said the same thing in John 9:3: *"Work as long as it is day; for the night cometh."* There comes a moment when there will be no more time to work. All things will be settled; all accounts will be settled, and everything will be tested and passed through the fire. You will find out, "Have you invested your time and your energies into things that are worthwhile or not?" And what is it that Paul says in 1 Thessalonians chapter 2, verses 19 and 20? *"...you get a crown of boasting..."* What is this crown of boasting?

A.T. Robertson, maybe the greatest Greek scholar ever produced by the Baptist denomination who taught for about 35 years at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky, had been describing this passage and says, "The crown of boasting is that crown that was given to a conquering king or a visiting diplomat or official whenever he would come into a city. He would come into that place, into the town square, and they would have a crown that they would place upon his head to demonstrate a crown of glorying... to say, 'You're worthwhile; we're glad that you are here.'" It's sort of like the mayor giving the key to the city... this crown of boasting in this place to say, "You're an important person and we're glad that you're here."

Whenever I was a kid and I went to church, whenever you would do something that was nice and people didn't see it... you did this nice service thing that was private... people would say, "Well, I guess you just got another jewel in your crown." Did you ever hear that before? Three of you have heard that... (Laughter) that's good. So the idea was that you would get this crown one day, whenever you got to heaven, and it would have jewels in it based on how many nice things you did that no one had ever seen. Actually, guess what? That's not in Scripture. (Laughter) But do you know what is in Scripture? The crown of glorying... What is the crown of glorying? There is this idea that one day you will get a crown, and the crown that you will receive will be the disciples that you made in Jesus Christ. That's the thing that Paul says. He says, "What is our crown, or boasting, or our joy? What are we going to be able to brag about and talk about whenever we're in front of Jesus Christ... whenever Jesus Christ is there, in all of His glory, and His Gospel is revealed?" And everything that matters has been passed through the fire and the only thing remains... that we'll be able to talk about in front of Christ... it's going to be the people that we told about and we disciples toward Him. That's the only thing that's going to last. That's the only thing that's going to matter. I don't know about you, but I want to work on things that are going to matter.

Whenever I was in college, I had this picture that by the time I was probably in my 60s or my 70s, I would obviously be a millionaire by that point, and I would be distributing millions upon millions of dollars to foundations and universities and hospitals and ministries and really out there supporting... Maybe you've had this sort of dream. I don't know, but I had this picture out there of my life... Now, I'm going to still leave the door open for the Lord to do that... (Laughter) ...I'm not closing that out on Him. I'm just saying that at this point in my life, barring a radical change in the trajectory that my life is currently at... I am probably not going to be the millionaire handing out cash at the door. But here's the funny thing. If you look at that 1 Corinthians passage and you finally begin to see that even the bequests and the hospitals... those things will also pass through the fire, and they will also go away. So what are the things that remain? The things that remain are the things that point people toward glory given to Jesus Christ.

Isaiah one day prophesied, about 3000 years ago when he said this, "There will come a moment when the glory of the Lord will fill the earth like the water fills the sea." What does that mean for the glory of the Lord to fill the earth? There's this passage in the Book of Ezekiel... I don't know if you've read Ezekiel lately, but there's an interesting passage in Ezekiel where Ezekiel sees God's glory moving in. Listen to this in Ezekiel 43: *"Behold, the glory of the God of Israel was coming from the East. And the sound of His coming was like the sound of many waters, and the earth shone with His glory. And the vision I saw was just like the vision I had seen when He came to destroy the city and just like the vision I had seen by the Chebar canal. And I fell on my face. As the glory of the Lord entered the temple by the gate facing east, the Spirit lifted me up and brought me into the inner court, and behold, the glory of the Lord filled the entire temple. While the man was standing beside me, I heard one speaking to me out of the temple and He said to me, 'Son of Man, this is the place of My throne and the place of the soles of My feet, where I will dwell in the midst of the people of Israel forever."* Ezekiel saw this vision of God's glory inhabiting the people of Israel and the

temple. In the New Testament, we know that now the temple has been expanded, and Israel has been expanded to in-graft another group of people known as "the Church." In other words, God's glory is filling up every person who is confessing with their mouth and turning in faith to Jesus Christ.

What's the point? If you want to experience the future that God has already ordained, guess what you do? You bring people who are not worshippers currently into the Kingdom of God through the Gospel and guess what? They begin to give God glory. As you do that, guess what? You are fulfilling Isaiah's prophecy; you are fulfilling Ezekiel's prophecy because you are helping the glory of the Lord fill the earth as the water fills the sea because you're making disciples. One day you will look back on your life and you will say, "What mattered in this life that I did?" And the answer will be, "Who is in heaven because of me? Who is it that follows Jesus Christ because of the words that I said? Who is it that knows God's Word more because of the things that I poured into?" Did you know that Jesus says that at the final day, marriage will not last? Did you know that? Yeah... marriage will not last: Matthew 22:30. Do you know one thing that will go on forever? ...The glory of the Lord. What pours into the glory of the Lord except for lives that are claiming to be worshippers of Him? The weight of this situation is, simply put, stunning. We are designed to bring glory to the Lord, and we cannot just pour our intention and our time into the temporary. But then Paul also says it's not just about glory but it's also about joy. He says this, back in 1 Thessalonians 2:19: *"It's you... you are our glory and our joy."* So it brings God glory whenever people come to know His Son Jesus Christ, but he also says that it brings him joy. Why? Why does it bring him joy to point other people toward Jesus Christ?

It's like that coach that's out there trying to train people to swing a golf club better or swing a baseball bat better. Finally it gets through the athlete's mind, and they understand precisely what they are supposed to do. They begin doing what the coach has intended for them to do all along, and the coach finally experiences that satisfaction of teaching the athlete to do the thing that all along he has been designed to do, to perform at the top level.

Whenever I was a kid, I had ingrown toenails. I know... it's kinda gross. I'm sorry to bring it up. They were bad; my toe would get red and infected. It was bad. I had these for years. My father would be on the side of our bathtub performing probably slightly illegal surgery on my toe... (Laughter) trying to help me in this situation, to alleviate this pain. People were like, "Oh, you need to cut a 'V' in the middle of your toenail." And I'd do all these kind of weird things. This was before the internet, so you just had to go ask your Uncle Bob or whatever. I was trying every kind of situation I could to fix this. Finally one day I break down and I go to a podiatrist. It was painful to walk. My foot was infected and my toe was red. The podiatrist says, "Steve... the reason you have ingrown toenails is that you have a wide foot." He says, "You're buying a normal-sized shoe. Your foot is too wide for the shoe that you are wearing." "Hmmm... so you mean my feet aren't supposed to hurt like this all of the time. I understand." Here's the thing. Whenever I bought the right-sized shoe, suddenly my toenail had room to grow, it stopped being infected, and I stopped having these ingrown toenails all the time. What's the point? I think that many of us struggle in our spiritual life; we're like, "I don't really have any joy in following the Lord." Can I tell you a great reason that a lot of people have no joy? It's because, much like my toe, your faith is ingrown. It's only about you. You don't really think about anybody else; you're not concerned about anybody else. In fact, you come to church today and you're saying, "I hope that God will help me; I hope He'll provide for me." You're not thinking about a single person outside of you. Let me tell you what. That kind of faith gets ingrown, infected, and eventually gets pretty painful. You see, you need the right size of faith, and the right size of faith is a faith that has room to expand and to grow into others. The way that you experience the joy of God... I want you to hear this... The way that you will experience joy in your life is by giving more glory to God. I'm going to

say that again. You will get more joy in your life when you give more glory to God. God gets more glory; you get more joy. "Well, how does that happen?" The more people that you turn toward Christ, the more people that you train in the Word of God, the more that you do that, you will begin to experience the joy of the Gospel in your own life because you will say, "Oh, you who've been trained in the Gospel, you're my glory and my joy." That's the glory; that's the joy... whenever we turn more people to bring glory to the name of the Father and the Name of Jesus Christ.

I want to exhort us, Church, to know this: The mark of this church is the sort of disciples that we make. It's not our children's ministry. It's not our student ministry. It's not the music, it's not the preacher, and it's not how much fun we have when we come in here on Sunday morning. Listen to me. God does not want another full room on Sunday morning. Listen... I want this room to be full on Sunday morning. That's not the goal. The goal is we make disciples of Jesus Christ. If the only thing that happens is we come in here and we fill up this room... you know what? We're an ingrown toenail, and it's painful and infected. We need to be the kind of people that want to bring glory to the Name of the Father, and the way that we do that is we expand our faith and bring joy by going out.

2. ...Will require sacrifice. (3:1)

How's that going to happen? Well, it's interesting because in chapter 3 Paul then says, *"...when we could bear it no longer, we were willing to be left behind at Athens alone, and we sent Timothy, our brother and God's coworker in the Gospel of Christ..."* What was happening? They were worried about the Church back at Thessalonica. They were going, "We told those guys about Jesus. Are they still standing firm in the faith? Had they given up on it? Are they still doing what they're supposed to be doing?" They were wondering about it, so Paul was willing to sacrifice. He said, "I could bear it no longer..." So what did he do? He said, "I was willing to be left behind, alone, and send Timothy." So he sends Timothy. Now, this is a big deal. Timothy is his scribe, his right-hand man... his helper. But he was willing to go through that because of the fact that he loved those people so much. The point of it is this: It's that being someone who is a disciple-maker will start because you understand that the glory, the thing that you'll only be able to boast about and find joy in one day, comes because you have made those disciples in the Name of Jesus Christ... that's the only thing that's going to last... it's eternal. That's beautiful. But listen to me. The next thing you have to understand is that in order to do that, it is always going to cause inconvenience and sacrifice.

Why don't we make more disciples? Let's just be honest. It's kind of a pain. I mean... I've got other stuff going on. I don't have time to make disciples; I'm a busy guy. But Paul says, *"...we were willing to be left alone..."* The thing is this: It's that any time you want to bring someone into a discipling relationship, begin to tell them about Jesus Christ, you're going to share your life with them, and that is going to be inconvenient.

This week I went to a conference in Nashville. It was put on by the Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention. It was entitled, "The Gospel and the Future of Marriage," but it was really about how to minister to people in the LGBTQ community more effectively. That's really what the scope of the conference was about. There was a woman who spoke at the conference a couple of different times. Her name is Rosaria Butterfield. Rosaria Butterfield was a professor at Syracuse University, and she was anti-Christian. In fact, she was very angry about Christians. The Promise Keeper movement was really big at the time that she was teaching feminist theory and queer theory at Syracuse University, so she was writing different articles about how Promise Keepers were a problem, how they were hurting men, and how

they were hurting women. She wrote this article and it was published in the local newspaper and she received a whole bunch of letters. Some of them were hate mail. She had those out and she would read them and laugh and throw them in the trash. She got some that were fan mail, and she would read those and she would keep those and file them away. She said one day she got this letter and it wasn't hate mail but it wasn't fan mail. It was just a person asking questions. "Why do you think this?" "Have you ever considered this?" "Would you be willing to talk about this?" That person, by the way, was a believer. She ended up taking a study leave to write a book about the Promise Keeper movement. Now she was in the midst of a lesbian relationship and was very antagonistic toward the faith. She was in the middle of writing this book, and she said, "You know, if I'm going to write about Christians and about Promise Keepers, I probably ought to read the Book that they read all the time." So this woman, who is lost, sits down on a study leave, and she said she spent about five hours a day reading the Bible. Yeah... you probably should not do that if you want to be mad. (Laughter) Her exact words were, "You should never give the Holy Spirit that much room to work in your life." (Laughter) She said, "You know, I got to the end of this and I saw cohesiveness in the story." She said she gave her life to Christ. When she gave her life to Christ, everything changed. By the way, now she's married to a pastor. She is just this incredible believer... this incredible woman of God. But I want you to hear this: As she was speaking to a group of Christian pastors at the beginning of this week, she said that when she came into the Church, one of the things that she noticed about Christians was this: It was that they were so protective of their families and of their schedule and of their marriages that they would not open their homes to practice hospitality. This is what she said. She said that she had a moment with her church and she said to her church, "Hey, I don't know how to tell you this, but the gay community is better at hospitality than you are." Then she looked at this group of Pastors and she said, "Stop taking the idea of Gospel marriage and family and pitting it against the idea of Gospel hospitality because people have got it into their minds, 'Well, I've got to protect my time.'" Find that in that Book. Do you know that verse off the top of your head? That's because it is not in there. Here's the thing: "Do you want to help your children grow in Christ? Do you want to help your marriage grow in Christ? Open up your home." Now, you say, "I don't have time to clean my house." Yeah... luckily for you, that verse ain't in there either. (Laughter) Right? Here's the thing: They come into your house and they go, "Oh, look... they have dirty laundry too." "Oh, look... they wash dishes as well." This is the thing: Rosaria Butterfield said that every night of the week, no matter what she was going through, she knew that whenever she was in the LGBTQ community, there was a place that she could go to and be received because there was a group of friends that were always willing to open their home, and she was willing to do the same thing.

3. ...Will require concern. (3:5)

Let me ask you a question, Church. "Are we willing to open our lives and our homes so that people can be an inconvenience to us so that they might see the Gospel happening in our lives and so that we might speak the truth of God's Word into their lives as well?" Let me put it to you another way. I'm not asking you to run a halfway house. I'm not asking you to set up some sort of elaborate ministry of hospitality, but I am telling you this: Xenophobia is the fear of strangers, and that's not what the Church is called to. We're called to be the friend of sinners; we're called to love our neighbor. Church, let me ask you. "Should we be the ones opening our doors and saying 'Hey look; my house is a wreck, but I welcome you into this place because I want to speak the words of truth into and over your life.'" That's what discipling will always require; it is an inconvenience. I want to exhort you... Think about the people in your life who you kind of think, "Man, it would be really tough to open up my home to them." Yes, you're right. Do it anyway...

because if you're too busy to make disciples, you're too busy. And if you say, "I won't do that," then you're too selfish. It's not an option. It's not just for the preacher. It's for the Church. Make disciples.

4. ...Will produce rejoicing. (3:8-9)

Now you may be saying, "But, I don't know that I want to do that. I mean, it seems like a great idea in theory, but I don't really see why it is that I would do that." Well, let me show you why you would. In 1 Thessalonians chapter 3, he says in verse 5, "*He could bear it no longer...*" Why do you think that Paul could no longer bear it? Interesting; let's think about that for a second. Let's go down to verse 7: "*...for this reason, brothers, in all our distress and affliction we have been comforted about you through your faith.*" Why was Paul comforted to hear about their faith? I mean, up above that in verse 6... "*But now that Timothy has come to us from you, and has brought us the good news of your faith and love and reported that you always remember us kindly...*" It was such an encouragement to him. Verse 9: "*...what thanksgiving can we return to God for you, for all the joy that we feel for your sake before our God, as we pray most earnestly night and day for you...*" Why in the world would Paul say that he could bear it no longer and he had concern and he was thankful and he was praying? Why would he do that? Let's infer a conclusion: "It's because he loved them." Do you want to know who you will be inconvenienced for? ...People that you love. So then let's take also the logical conclusion for us: Do you want to know why we will not open our homes and our lives to people to disciple them? We do not love them.

We talk in theory about love a lot, don't we? It's even better too whenever we say things like, "Love your neighbor," because it's sort of an ambiguous category. "Yeah, we ought to go out there and generally be good to people." Whenever Jesus Christ talked about loving your neighbor, what He really meant was that you would find the specific people in your specific context in your specific walk of life, and even though they drive you insane, you would love them with the love of God anyway. How does that happen? How do you get broken to the point that you will love people, even when it's not easy? I know what you're thinking; you're going, "Man... you don't know the people in my life; they are crazy. You could not love them." I think that the way that we reach a point where we can love people in the way that we're supposed to love people is that it starts with us finally understanding and recognizing the love of God that's been placed on us. You see, if you're not willing to love other people, you're probably don't love yourself, and the reason that you don't love yourself is you haven't received the love of God on you.

The thing about the Gospel of Jesus Christ is this: It took me, a broken sinner, messed up with struggles toward lust and dishonesty and struggles to sort of put on an impression for other people to try to impress other people and to try to find my identity in other people and to say that I would be always wounded because of wounds from my past... and all of those sorts of things. The Gospel says, "Hey, Steve... broken as you are, I want you to know this: Jesus Christ died for you. And because Jesus Christ died for you, all of your sin has been forgiven. But on top of that, because Jesus died for you, you've also been adopted into the family of God so all of those identity issues, all those problems that you have... guess what? They're healed in the Gospel because now you find your identity as a child of God." Think about this: Do you ever see those medieval kind of pictures where people are sitting around a banquet hall, and someone is always holding a drumstick in their hand? What bird is that that everybody is eating? I don't know if it's chicken... is it turkey? Turkey, chicken, duck, goose... I don't know what it is, but I want you to think about that. You're a child of the King sitting at the banquet table with a drumstick of inheritance in one hand and the wine of grace in the other, and you are chomping and gulping because you have received God's grace. It is on you. Now listen... Once you have finally understood that you have been completely received, completely loved... it is overwhelming. You don't have to control people anymore. It's freeing. You don't

have to try and manipulate God's blessing on your life. You say, "Well, I kept these ten rules this week, so now God's going to bless me." You don't have to try to hold other people to that standard either because you think, "Well, if other people would do the right thing, then maybe my life will go a little bit better." You can release all of your control issues and you can say, "Hey, you know what? My sexuality is not the ultimate definer of my personality because my ultimate definer is my identity as a child of God. No longer is my appearance the ultimate definer of who I am because I am defined by the fact that God has made me in His image and I am loved. I am no longer defined by the amount of performance or achievement in my own life, but I'm defined because I'm received as a child of God." This is the thing: Once you begin to get that through your heart and through your skull, do you know what happens? Suddenly you realize, "I am completely and totally received and loved because of what God did in Jesus." It overwhelms you. Do you know what happens? Finally, you go, "Oh... If I'm loved like that, I can love other people like that." We love because He first loved us. "I've been loved with a radical, unrelenting, pursuing love given to me by God in Jesus Christ, and because of that overwhelming, unrelenting, pursuing love, I can now be freed to stop trying to fix people and just love them." Now listen... whenever that happens and you stop seeing people as projects and obstacles and an inconvenience, but instead you just love them... Listen to me. It doesn't mean that you're not ever going to speak truth to them... It doesn't mean that you're not ever going to say, "Look, this is what the Gospel says... this is what Scripture says..." It means this: Whenever you speak truth to them, if they reject it, you don't reject them. You keep loving them anyway. Matthew 7:1: *"Do not judge lest you be judged."* Let me tell you what judgment is. Judgment is this: Judgment is not... a lot of people in our world, they're like... you go out on the street and you ask the average person in the world, "Name a verse in the Bible." One of the two they can name: "Do not judge." Why is that? ...Because they think it means you get licence to do whatever you want. No; that's not what it means. It means this: "Even though I will tell you to your face what you're doing is sinful and wrong, I will receive you anyway." You see, judgment is whenever I tell you that and then I kick you out. That's judgment. Love is when I speak the truth and I say, "You're still part of the family." That's the difference. That's the Gospel difference. The world is filled with organizations that tell people the truth and then kick them out. But do you know what's radically different? The Church. So we're not going to cast you off just because we speak the truth to you.

So why does that matter? It matters because of this: Paul is overwhelmed with this burden for these people, and he is speaking truth to them, and he wants them to know that he loves them. Church, if we're going to be the kind of family that is going to go out and make disciples, the first thing we have to do is stop being annoyed with people and start loving them. I want to exhort you: "Love your neighbor." Like, literally... your neighbor. Who lives next to you or across the street from you? Do you love them? Who's your cubicle neighbor? Do you love him or her? Who's the person that sleeps next to you at night? Do you love him or her? When you begin to finally love those people that are right next to you and stop trying to fix them but instead let God move through the Gospel... then you begin to see the things that God is wanting to do in their life.

5. ...And multiplication. (3:12)

Verse 12: *"...may our God and Father Himself, and our Lord Jesus, direct our way to you, and may the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all, as we do for you..."* What does he ask? *"May the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all..."* You see, Paul said, "Look, whenever this starts to happen, you're going to start to love the people in the Church. That's kind of the easy part." I don't know about you but I think that's actually kind of the hard part. I mean, you start to get to know people... up close... in community. Even in the Church, even though they love Jesus,

you go, "Wow... those people are weird." Right? If you guys hung out with me, you would be freaked out by the end of the week. You should feel sorry for my wife, but this is the kind of thing. She's stuck with me; she has to love me anyway. This is the way that it starts. So Paul says, "Don't just love one another, though; now I want your love to overflow and abound and be so radical that you love everybody."

So what does that mean? I want you to think about this. This is Paul and Paul says, "I'm speaking now to the Church. I want you to go and then I want you to go love others." It is this idea that the Gospel, when designed according to Scripture, will always multiply. It's the thing we've been talking about this entire series. It will start with you hearing the Gospel. But it doesn't stop with you, because if it stops with you it's dead. True disciples will then receive the Gospel of God, and they will turn around and they will go tell others who will then also go and tell others. 2 Timothy 2:2: *"And these things which you've heard me proclaim in the presence of many witnesses now entrust to faithful men who will also entrust it to others."* Scripture says, "Take the truth of the Gospel, give it to other people who will turn around and give it to other people." That's the way that it works. It moves, it multiplies, it keeps on growing... it keeps on moving... it keeps on pressing forward. The subtitle of this series is "Advance: The Kingdom On the Move." The way that the Kingdom moves is you tell somebody and train somebody in it.

You got a little tool in your worship guide this week. It looks like this. It's an insert. It says "Advance: How will I make disciples?" Maybe the most effective church in the United States in making and multiplying disciples right now is The Church of Brook Hills in Birmingham, Alabama. They made a tool that is actually several pages long. I didn't have the opportunity to give you this entire resource, but at the very conclusion, there's a section that's called this: "How will I make disciples?" I have copied that here, and I've put it in here for you. I want you to just look at this with you real quick... four questions:

1. "How will I bring them in?" Would you write down the names of a few people and say, "How could I have opportunity to have time with them?"... people that need to know Jesus Christ... people that need to be trained. Maybe they're already believers but they need someone to train them in the way.
2. "How will I teach them to obey?" How will I have conversations with them about things that God wants them to do and wants them to live differently?
3. "How will I model obedience?" (On the back) In other words, whenever you become a believer, guess what's going to happen? People are going to start watching you. Ooohh. That's scary, isn't it? They start watching you; and when they start watching you, you have to live in a way that is faithful and continue to be obedient.
4. "How will I send them out?" Remember now... this is me telling you, and you're going to tell somebody else, but guess what? It doesn't stop with them either. You're going to then turn around and send them out because it's disciples making disciples who make disciples. That is the way that the Kingdom of God grows.

Let me ask you a question, Church... "What if you wrote down the names of five people on this sheet or in the front of your Bible and every morning what you did was you prayed for them and you said, 'God, give me opportunity to share Your grace with these five people.'" Maybe it will happen today... maybe it will happen in a year... I don't know. But I know this: God is always creating opportunities for us to share His grace. I think that when you begin to pray that prayer and you begin to ask those sorts of things, He opens them up. Will it be inconvenient? Yes. Will it require you to love them? Yes. But will it bring God more glory

and will it bring you more joy? Absolutely. This is what we were created for; this is what we were designed for. May we not be people who one day pass through a fire and barely escape, but may we instead be a people who pass through the fire and have a crown of boasting that survives, made up of people whom we have guided and told about the faithfulness, the love, and the grace of Jesus Christ. Pray with me.

"Lord, we love You. We thank You for Your goodness, we thank You for Your Gospel, we thank You for the fact, God, that You want to save us, that You want to redeem us, and You want to change us. God, now we ask that we will be faithful to hear from You... in the Name of Your Son Jesus. Amen."

We've come to a time now where we're going to respond, and this is the way that it works to respond. There are three possible responses today. Let me tell you what they are:

1. You are just overwhelmed with the grace of a God that loves you this much, and you're just going to stand up and sing.
2. You need prayer. You say, "I have been cut by the Word of God today and I need to repent." You come forward and you pray. You can pray at the altar. These steps will be our altar, or you can find someone... People will be standing here in a moment and you just come and pray with them.
3. It is time for you to take the next spiritual step. Inside your worship guide, there's an info tab. Tear that off and on the back it says, "Respond." There are a lot of places where you can say, "This is the next spiritual step I need to take." You take this, you fill it out, and at the end of our service, you drop it into our offering basket. Whatever it is that God wants you to do, take the next spiritual step today.

Let's stand together, let's sing, and you respond as God has called you today.