

Bold, Part 13: “Godly Grief”

2 Corinthians 7:2-16

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[SERMON MANUSCRIPT]

Introduction

Hello church family and friends! I'm so excited for today's time in God's Word.

We are resuming our sermon series in the book of 2 Corinthians. We started preaching through this book in 2018 and we got through chapters 1-6, the first major section of the book which was Paul's defense of his role as an apostle. The next few chapters (7-9) are Paul's appeal to the Corinthian church to follow through on their commitment to help believers in other regions that were experiencing a famine. This is where we're starting today- studying 2 Corinthians 7:2-16. The title of this sermon is “Godly Grief.”

Have you ever had to have a tough conversation with someone from home, work, or church? These conversations are “tough” usually because the topic is something very serious, personal, or sensitive. I don't know about you, but I really dread these kinds of tough conversations because of the risk involved: Will this person I'm talking with respond well? Will he misunderstand my intentions that I'm saying this out of love? It's always uncomfortable to bring up; I always feel nervous because I don't know how that person will respond and I dread the conflict that is bound to arise; I try to look calm and collected but inside I'm usually super nervous. Even though I've had a lot of tough conversations with people because I'm a pastor, it's never easy to have them!

The apostle Paul had a series of tough conversations with the church in Corinth during the AD50's. He had to take the risk of being misunderstood and even damaging his relationship with them. But he wanted to make sure that Christ was honored and that these believers that he loved stayed on the path of truth. It was risky because he didn't know how the church there would respond. Today's passage of Scripture is the part of Paul's letter when he expressed his relief upon hearing that the Corinthians had responded well to his rebuke to them.

Proposition

Here is the “one thing” from 2 Corinthians 7:2-16- this is the main biblical truth and encouragement for us when we both *initiate* tough conversations and *receive* tough conversations:

***Be assured that godly grief leads to
repentance that leads to shared joy.***

Organizational Statement

I'm just going to work through this passage in four points, following the “one thing” from this Scripture: First, “be assured”; second, “godly grief”; third, “repentance”; and fourth, “shared joy.” There will be a lesson in each of these four main points. Since the passage is pretty long, we'll read it as we go along through these four points.

1. Be Assured (2-4)
2. Godly Grief (5-9)
3. Repentance (10-13a)
4. Shared Joy (13b-16)

Prayer

Let's pray and ask for the Lord's help to listen and receive his Word today:

Heavenly Father, help us to experience this shared joy as a church family when we love one another enough to have tough conversations and point each other to Christ. May you be pleased and honored when we repent and turn to Christ in our lives. Speak to us and pour out your grace on us, despite the challenges of receiving this sermon via video. It's in Jesus' name we pray, Amen!

Transition: Alright, are you ready to go? First...

Sermon Outline

I. Let's Read vv. 2-4: Be Assured...

[This is God's Word...] 2 Corinthians 7:2-4 (ESV): *2 Make room in your hearts for us. We have wronged no one, we have corrupted no one, we have taken advantage of no one. 3 I do not say this to condemn you, for I said before that you are in our hearts, to die together and to live together. 4 I am acting with great boldness toward you; I have great pride in you; I am filled with comfort. In all our affliction, I am overflowing with joy. [Amen!]*

A. In verses 2-4, Paul wrote that he took a risk in correcting the Corinthian church, but was genuinely motivated out of love for them.

1. Lesson #1: We take risks in correcting our family in Christ because we love them.
 - a) To understand what Paul is talking about here, I have to explain the backstory behind this letter and these verses. *Show Paul-Corinthian-Timeline.jpg*. Acts 18 describes how Paul, along with his close friends Priscilla and Aquila, helped to start a church in the Greek city of Corinth around 50AD. He stayed one-and-a-half years there, preaching the Gospel in the synagogue to both Jews and Greeks there. But from here, things spiraled downward in the church in Corinth and in their relationship with Paul. While Paul was in Ephesus, he had to write to them to address the issue of rampant sexual immorality within the church (we know this from 1 Corinthians 5:9).
 - b) It got worse though. Paul received word from the household of Chloe in Corinth (1 Corinthians 1:11) about more problems in the church there: issues like divisions within the congregation, disorderly gatherings, lawsuits, and questioning Paul's apostolic authority; theological confusion about pagan practices, marriage and divorce, spiritual gifts, and the bodily resurrection. In response, Paul wrote 1 Corinthians sometime around 54-55AD and sent Timothy to visit Corinth. Timothy reported back to Paul that the mess in the church was even worse than before and Paul decided that he needed to visit Corinth in person.
 - c) This time when Paul visited again, his opponents were in full force and he left Corinth early without trying to defend himself- he called this his "painful visit" (2 Corinthians 2:1). I think we can relate to Paul here: sometimes there are people that we invested so much of ourselves into and it seems like they never listen or don't appreciate it at all. It's tempting at those points to be like, "Forget those people- let 'em burn!" Paul probably had similar feelings, but he wrote to them, rebuking them for rebelling from his teaching about Christ and warning them about God's judgment. Paul said that he wrote this rebuke "tearfully" and sent Titus to deliver the message. Titus returned to Paul and Paul wrote 2 Corinthians in response to describe how he felt when he received Titus' report of positive news from Corinth.

- d) So now in verses 2-4, Paul wanted to make sure that the Corinthian church knew that not only did he do the right thing in rebuking them, but that he did it because he sincerely loved them! So here he assured them that they were in his and his team's hearts; thus he asked them to open their hearts to him and his teaching. And now, he was *overflowing with joy* because of how they had responded finally after all these years of drama- he was so proud of them and was so comforted by them. Not only was Paul *assuring them* of his motives, it also seemed like he was *assuring himself* that this good had finally come out of all the loving tears and pain that he'd experienced trying to keep the church there living in a Christ-honoring way.
- e) Context: This brings us back to our first lesson from verses 2-4, which is that we take risks in correcting our family in Christ because we love them. As an idealistic person, sometimes I wish that we'd all love Jesus, obey God's Word, be close to God, and get along with each other perfectly. But the reality is that church is messy; in fact, it's supposed to be messy, difficult, and full of tensions. The truth is we need our brothers and sisters in Christ to love us enough to point out blind spots in our character, call out sin, expose idols we hold onto, and challenge unbiblical ways of thinking. But it's hard right? It's hard to do it without putting yourself in an awkward situation and potentially embarrassing the other person.
- f) Context: But let me give a real-life scenario to make my point. Let's say you have a close friend from church who shared about his recent poor performance evaluation. The couple times that he's brought it up with you he has really talked badly towards his co-workers- not just sharing or even complaining, but actually slandering them. Not only that, but you know your friend very well and you know that since "work-from-home" started, he spent a lot of time playing video games during work hours and lying to his boss and colleagues that he was working when he wasn't. It might be *easier* to just going with the flow when your friend goes on those rants or continues to procrastinate instead of work faithfully; but if you really care about this friend and about the honor of Christ, you would need to take the risk of telling him your concerns. It may be an awkward conversation; he may even argue with you or get mad at you.
- g) Context: Of course, whenever we bring things up with people, we need to pick our words wisely and double check that we're motivated out of love. But we also have to intervene! We take risks in correcting our family in Christ because we love them! In fact, this is what we promise to do with one another in our church covenant! We have the assurance that God wants to use us in our brother's or sister's life and God's grace is powerful enough to bring about redemption in their lives, as we'll talk about further in the next points.

Transition: So first, we can *be assured*. Second...

Sermon Outline (continued)

II. Let's read vv. 5-9: Godly Grief...

[This is God's Word...] 2 Corinthians 7:5-9 (ESV): *5 For even when we came into Macedonia, our bodies had no rest, but we were afflicted at every turn—fighting without and fear within. 6 But God, who comforts the downcast, comforted us by the coming of Titus, 7 and not only by his coming but also by the comfort with which he was comforted by you, as he told us of your longing, your mourning, your zeal for me, so that I rejoiced still more. 8 For even if I made you grieve with my letter, I do not regret it—though I did regret it, for I see that that letter grieved you, though only for a while. 9 As it is, I rejoice, not because you were grieved, but because you were grieved into repenting. For you felt a godly grief, so that you suffered no loss through us. [Amen!]*

A. In verses 5-9, Paul wrote that he was greatly comforted that his rebuke led the Corinthian church to respond in godly grief.

1. Lesson #2: We trust that God uses our grief to point us to our great need for Christ.

- a) Paul shared how difficult those days were. Not only was there all this drama that he experienced with the Corinthian church, but other circumstances that he and his team faced as they brought the Gospel of Jesus Christ to unreached people and places throughout that specific province of Macedonia (which is modern-day Eastern Europe). But despite all the *fighting without and fear within*- as Paul put it- he was elated at Titus' report of the Corinthian church's status. In fact, Paul said that it was God who *comforted* him and his team through Titus: that he rejoined them and shared how he was *comforted* by the way the Corinthian church had ended up responding after this series of discouraging reports, hurtful conflicts, painful visits, and tearful letters.
- b) From Paul's perspective, it was personally really difficult for him to process all that had happened and it was really difficult for him to end up writing that "tearful" letter to them. This is what he meant when he said he *did regret it*. At a human level, he didn't want to cause pain to his beloved fellow Christians in Corinth. But at a different level, Paul shared that he actually didn't regret it at all- because he loved them and did not want them to veer off the straight path of following Christ because of their confused theology or corrupted practices. He knew that the grief that he would inflict upon the Corinthian church was *only for a while* as it was the first step towards getting back on that straight path.
- c) Verse 9 is really the key (let me read it again): *As it is, I rejoice, not because you were grieved, but because you were grieved into repenting. For you felt a godly grief, so that you suffered no loss through us.* The "grief" that Paul caused through his previous letter was not just feeling deep sorrow for their hurtful actions or thoughts towards Paul. It was *godly grief*: this feeling of deep sorrow was properly centered on God himself. The Corinthians were led to see how their sinfulness and rebellion offended God who is infinitely righteous and just. Paul was able to explain his point and clarify the words of Christ regarding the issues at hand.
- d) Thankfully, the Gospel was at work in the Corinthians as Titus reported to Paul (as stated in verse 7) that the church came to agree with Paul and wanted to reunite and reconcile with him. This was the work of the Holy Spirit, as God used that grief that Paul had inflicted upon the Corinthian church to help them see their great need for Jesus Christ and to reignite in them the desire to live in obedience to the Lord's will. In other words, their godly grief led them to repentance- which we'll dive a bit deeper into in the next main point.
- e) Context: But before we do that, I want to reiterate the lesson to be taken from verses 5-9, which is we trust that God uses our grief to point us to our great need for Christ. First, I want to share some practical tips from the perspective of correcting fellow family in Christ out of love at the risk of causing grief in their lives. Well, let's make sure to listen carefully and empathically (trying to understand and putting yourself in their shoes). And as Jesus said in Matthew 7:3-4, let's make sure to be prayerful and humbly examine our own lives before we correct or rebuke others. The last practical tip would be to stay in line with the Gospel: focus on God and his holiness and love; the ways we fall short of his standards; and the grace that is given to us in Christ. Throughout this process, trust that God uses the grief that we inflict to point our beloved friends to our great need for Christ.
- f) Context: Second, I want to share some practical tips from the perspective of when we experience grief in our lives due to fellow family in Christ correcting us. Let's make sure we listen carefully and humbly, trying to understand and being open-minded to their input. Let's be thankful that this brother or sister in Christ loved us enough to

bring this up- even at the risk of our friendship- and resist the urge to question their motives or to remain at initial feelings of hurt, defensiveness, or distrust. In our grief, let's make sure to bring it up to the Lord in prayer and carefully process your thoughts and feelings in light of the Gospel: focus on God and his holiness and love; the ways we can see and understand our sinfulness; and the grace that is given to us in Christ. This is a gift that our true friends in Christ can give us- thank God for them!

Transition: So first, we can *be assured* and second, we experience *godly grief*. Now third...

Sermon Outline (continued)

III. Let's read vv. 10-13a: Repentance...

[This is God's Word...] 2 Corinthians 7:10-13a (ESV): *10 For godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret, whereas worldly grief produces death. 11 For see what earnestness this godly grief has produced in you, but also what eagerness to clear yourselves, what indignation, what fear, what longing, what zeal, what punishment! At every point you have proved yourselves innocent in the matter. 12 So although I wrote to you, it was not for the sake of the one who did the wrong, nor for the sake of the one who suffered the wrong, but in order that your earnestness for us might be revealed to you in the sight of God. 13a Therefore we are comforted. [Amen!]*

A. In verses 10-13a, Paul wrote that he observed how their "godly" grief produced an eagerness towards godliness in the Corinthian church.

1. Lesson #3: We understand that repentance from godly grief is an act of God's grace.
 - a) Now we get to the crux of this text of Scripture, where Paul points out the difference between what he calls "godly grief" and "worldly grief." "Godly grief" is what Paul was talking about in our previous point- this deep sorrow and pain that would point a person to their great need for Christ. This kind of "godly grief"- in Paul's exact words- *produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret*. And this is so important! God uses the deep sorrow and pain that a person feels in those times when the ugliness of our hearts and our sin are exposed, forcing us to see our folly and hopelessness apart from Jesus.
 - b) It's commonly said that repentance is the act of *changing directions*: once moving towards sin, but at the moment of repentance, turning away from sin and moving towards Christ. In this way, repentance is an act of faith, isn't it? It is trusting that Christ is more valuable than any idol, that he forgives our sins, that he accepts us with open arms, and that he makes us right with God through his cross. This is why Paul says that *godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret*. We experience how God "restores joy of our salvation" as David expressed in Psalm 53.
 - c) In contrast, what Paul called "worldly grief" here in verse 10 brings a person not to Christ but to himself. He is also confronted by the sorrow and pain of his own sin, but it leads to self-focused regret instead of towards Christ. In "worldly grief" the grieving process moves downward towards hopelessness and helplessness; in "godly grief" the grieving process moves upward towards Christ. Specifically for the Corinthian church, this "godly grief" led them to repentance and produced in them- according to verse 11- even greater earnestness to live in obedience to Christ; greater eagerness to walk with honesty and integrity; and greater indignation towards sin, healthy reverence of the Lord, and passion to please God. This is all the good fruit that comes out of repentance!
 - d) Illustration: When I think of the difference between "godly grief" and "worldly grief," I think of the different outcomes of two disciples, Peter and Judas. Let's look at Judas

first: For some time already he'd been stealing from the collections for Jesus' ministry; but he went one step further when he decided to hand Jesus over to the Jewish ruling council for the price of thirty pieces of silver. Jesus was arrested, falsely accused, sentenced to death, and died on a Roman cross. Matthew 27:1-10, records that Judas was overwhelmed with feelings of grief- "worldly grief"- so much so that he tried to return the silver he'd received! Judas could've repented and gone back to Jesus, but he didn't- he hung himself and sadly ended his own life.

- e) Illustration: Now let's look at Peter: During the trial of Jesus, he denied that he ever knew Jesus- not once but three times! Peter was heart-broken by his own cowardice to be loyal to Jesus. Even when Jesus had resurrected and appeared to the Twelve, Peter was uncomfortable around the Lord and unsure if he would be accepted back. But to his credit, Peter didn't stop hanging out with Jesus! After an awkward conversation after his resurrection, Jesus graciously reinstated Peter. This was a significant milestone in Peter's journey of following Jesus, as he experienced a huge dose of God's grace. If you think about it, Peter betrayed Jesus just as badly as Judas. But his "godly grief" led to repentance, salvation, and reconciliation with Jesus.
- f) Context: Friends, may we understand that repentance from godly grief is an act of God's grace, so may we run to the cross of Jesus Christ in those times! For those of us here who are not Christians, may you respond to Jesus' invitation to receive this gift of salvation: Jesus died on the cross to pay for those sins and to bring you back to be reconciled with God! Take the next steps from grieving over your sins to repentance- changing directions away from the life you were once living and now towards Christ and the salvation that is only in him.
- g) Context: For you Christians out there, this process is for you too! The first time we feel like a sinner and experience the grace of God, it is amazing- but what about when we keep on sinning? Initially we feel bad, more guilty, and think that we should know and do better. But after being in this cycle enough times, many people just stop repenting and grow numb when they feel grief. So let me say this truth to you: As Christians we will sin less, but we will also keep sinning. Sanctification in the Christian is also that we see a greater and greater need for Christ as we mature and grow. This is so crucial! We have to keep understanding that repentance from godly grief is an act of God's grace!

Transition: We started with *be assured*, then to *godly grief*, which led to *repentance*. Finally...

Sermon Outline (continued)

IV. Let's read vv. 13b-16: Shared Joy...

[This is God's Word...] 2 Corinthians 7:13b-16 (ESV): *13b And besides our own comfort, we rejoiced still more at the joy of Titus, because his spirit has been refreshed by you all. 14 For whatever boasts I made to him about you, I was not put to shame. But just as everything we said to you was true, so also our boasting before Titus has proved true. 15 And his affection for you is even greater, as he remembers the obedience of you all, how you received him with fear and trembling. 16 I rejoice, because I have complete confidence in you. [Amen!]*

- A. In verses 13b-16, Paul wrote that he rejoiced how Titus was ministered to so profoundly by the Corinthian church.
 - 1. Lesson #4: We look forward to joy of experiencing true change in the Gospel.
 - a) So, after the "tearful" letter that he sent through Titus to the Corinthian church, Titus returned with this report of the church's godly grief that led to repentance. Paul

wrote back to the Corinthian church about how *joyful* Titus was after he returned from visited them. He shared that Titus' *spirit has been refreshed by you all*. What happened there that refreshed Titus' spirit so much? Well, imagine how difficult and awkward it was for Titus to go to the city of Corinth with this letter- this tough conversation!

- b) If Titus was anything like me, he would have been anxious for most of the journey, imagining reading Paul's letter aloud to the church gathered, anticipating the potential outrage that would arise, rehearsing what he had to say in defense of Paul's points, wondering if he'd be thrown out of the room and left with no place to stay...he just had to prepare for the worst, given the history between Paul and the Corinthians. Paul had to tried to reassure Titus that the Corinthians were God-fearing and honorable people- verse 14 said that Paul "boasted" about them to Titus! But nonetheless, it's not a stretch to think that Titus was in an awkward, difficult position.
- c) But verse 15 says that Titus *remembers the obedience of you all, how you received him with fear and trembling*. Their response to Paul's letter went super well- we don't know if it was an immediate change of heart or if it took more discussing and wrestling through the issues. But we do have to remember that this was a five- to seven-year process of tough conversations that finally approached some resolution here- after maybe a lot of tears, hurt feelings, misunderstandings, arguments, and frustration. But at this point, they finally received Paul's apostolic influence in the church that reflected a healthy fear of the Lord that led to their obedience.
- d) Additionally, they also personally received Titus in a way that reflected a healthy fear of the Lord- the relationship between the church and Paul's team was restored. Now this is not a promise that things will always end with a "happily ever after" when there is conflict in the church. But this is reassurance that the Holy Spirit can be at work in a church and between Christians to produce further obedience to God and restoration of relationships. Christians can take risks that may cause grief in fellow brothers or sisters in Christ; and then the Spirit leads God's people to godly grief, which leads to repentance, which leads to obedience and restoration and joy in the hearts of everyone involved. This is what happened with Paul, as he wrote in verse 16: *I rejoice, because I have complete confidence in you*.
- e) Context: Let me share some examples. My wife and I have had conflicts related to my side of the family. They have led to a lot of grieving between the two of us, especially in me as I've had to deal with deep-rooted issues from my upbringing. But it has led to some significant discoveries about myself and by God's grace this "godly" grief has led to healthy seasons of repentance. This also led to some tough conversations with my side of the family- which I knew would be uncomfortable and would need time to work out. After several years of praying, we are seeing God at work now. *I rejoice* in the ways the Lord is working in my family and in my marriage. Were these interactions uncomfortable over the years? Definitely, yes. But in light of the joy of seeing the Gospel as a reality in our family, was it worth it? Definitely, yes! This helped me to see that I can look forward to the joy of experiencing true change in the Gospel!
- f) Context: As you all know, being the church is messy! There was a case when some small group leaders did not understand a decision that the elders of the church made. There were others (not leaders) who were wondering why that decision was made and rumors started going around. After some time, all the small group leaders initiated a face-to-face meeting with all the elders- to be honest, I was anxious about how this meeting would turn out: Would the conversation spiral downward into accusing and fighting? Would this divide the church? But by God's grace, the several hours together had a lot of sharing and listening, explaining and clarifying, apologizing and forgiving. This wasn't going to be the end of conflicts- but we could view future conflicts with faith that they would draw us closer together, as this one did. We were

joyful together that God worked this out among us. This led us as elders and leaders to see that we can look forward to the joy of experiencing true change in the Gospel!

Transition: We started with *be assured*, then to *godly grief*, which led to *repentance*, and finally ended with *shared joy*. Now let's talk about some next steps we can take with our...

Conclusion

V. Life Application

A. What steps of obedience in faith can we take from 2 Corinthians 7:2-16, as we can be reassured that godly grief leads to repentance that leads to shared joy?

1. First, engage in tough conversations with people because you love them and trust that God is at work.
 - a) Before you initiate these tough conversations, do your own personal inventory of your heart: Is your motivation loving this person and honoring God's name? What possible blind spots do you have in your own life regarding the issues I want to bring up? How can I bring this up in the wisest- yet honest- way possible?
 - b) Follow the principles in Matthew 18:15-20 when confronting sin in the church: talk to that person privately and directly (don't gossip about him/her to others); if he/she doesn't listen to you, bring one or two others along with you as witnesses when you try again; if the problem remains unresolved, bring it up to the elders of the church.
 - c) Remember, we can trust that God is at work! The results may not be what you expect, but God will be at work in that person and in others around the issue (including yourself). It may take a long time, but trust God through the process!
2. Second, go through the process of listening, reflecting, grieving, and repenting when confronted by others.
 - a) This one is for when we are on the receiving end of a tough conversation. No matter if it's a family member, brother or sister in Christ, work colleague, or anyone else- be slow in speaking (and trying to defend yourself) and thoughtful in listening (really listening to what they are saying).
 - b) Regardless of what you think their motives might be, reflect on what they told you and think about what is true as well as how God is addressing certain areas of your life. It is okay to grieve- in fact, when it comes to very personal or deep things that's normal.
 - c) But make sure it's not "worldly" grief but "godly" grief that makes you go to Jesus in repentance. Take your time and allow the Holy Spirit to guide you through the process of genuine repentance and restoration of your heart. This leads to great joy for everyone: for yourself, others, and the Lord Jesus himself!

Transition: May we *be reassured that godly grief leads to repentance that leads to shared joy!* We'll go back to our live Zoom service for a time to respond to God's Word together now. God bless you!

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