

Ministering Deeply to One Another

Preached by Phillip Kayser at DCC on Sunday, June 19th 2022

There have been a lot of tears in this congregation over the death of the two Kull children - Richard (age 16) and Desmond (age 12). And even though most of you have only met them one time, there was an instant kinship that many felt, and these two deaths have hit many in this congregation very very hard. The Kulls were packing to come to the church plant in Iowa when the tragedy happened and it has brought a deep sadness on everyone. Added to this sadness is the death of Tricia's dad, the discipline of pastor Mark Robinette, and a few other sorrows and losses. So we changed the service and I worked on a new sermon yesterday that I hope will help all of us to minister to one another more effectively in these coming weeks.

Some people have a hard time knowing *how* to minister when tragedy hits. Do we give them space to grieve? That's the immediate impulse of some. Or do we offer to help? Or do we not offer and just pitch in and help? What do we say that won't bring worse pain? If we do help, how do we do so without overwhelming? Do we talk or just be present? Do we hug? What if we aren't huggers? So many questions swirl in people's minds during times of disaster and struggle. And I believe Romans 12:9-16 gives some very practical guidance on how to love *helpfully* during times of trouble. Some help can be very unhelpful.

I. Love is real and without pretense (v. 9a)

First, in verse 9 Paul says, "Let love be without hypocrisy." God-given agape love is real and without pretense. We can't fake our love for each other. Love is a transparent giving of ourselves as we are, not pretending to be someone else. But being ourselves doesn't mean that we love in our own strength. 1 Peter 1:22 says, "obeying the truth *through the Spirit* in sincere love of the brethren..." Each one of these points will require us to cry out to God for the supernatural strength to minister beyond our abilities. And if we do so, our church will grow as it has grown through past losses and pains.

II. Love hates what's wrong about this world (v. 9b)

Paul goes on to say, "Abhor what is evil." Biblical love hates what is wrong about this world. It abhors it. Love does not shut out reality in the hopes of being more spiritual. No, love is real, and it recognizes that death is an enemy. God calls it an enemy. Jesus not only wept with hurting Mary, but that weeping was accompanied with anger at all that was wrong - and there was much wrong in that situation, including the realization that Lazarus would be raised only to experience the hatred and attempted murder of the Pharisees. And He knew that they would use this resurrection as another reason to kill Jesus. When verse 38 says that Jesus groaned within Himself, the Greek word is ἐμβριμάομαι, which has connotations of anger, censure, and strong disagreement with something - it is a groaning about the fact that something is wrong, and we don't like that something. I believe He was

troubled at death and all that the Fall of Adam had introduced into the world. Love does not turn a blind eye to the reality of how terrible this tragedy really is. It is grievous, and it is important that we not give pat theological answers as a kind of bandaid and gloss over how grievous it is. Let people weep and even express frustration as David did in the Psalms. Love abhors what is evil. And death is an enemy. It's OK to be bothered greatly by death.

III. Love clings to what is good (v. 9c)

But at the same time, Paul admonishes us with the next words to balance that with something else: "Cling to what is good." There is much good in every tragic situation - including death. What are some of the good things we can cling to?

1. We know that those two boys are in heaven. That is a glorious good that we can cling to.
2. Second, we know Ecclesiastes 3:2 says that we can't die one second sooner or later than God has willed us to die. It says, there is "a time to die." Job 14:5 says, a man's "days are determined, the number of his months is with You..." (referring to God). It is good to know that accidents, though tragic, are planned by God for a good purpose and reason. Those boys could not have died one second later than God willed it. Though that may seem like a bad thing, God's sovereignty is a good that we can cling to. It means that accidents aren't ultimately accidents in God's plan. They have meaning; they have purpose. It doesn't mean that we don't abhor death as enemy, but it does mean that enemy can't go one step further than God allows it to go. That gives some sense of purpose and meaning. And it helps to deal to some degree with regrets - wit "if only" thoughts.
3. Third, it is good to know that no death is wasted - in the womb or outside of the womb. My niece Karen died in a car accident at the age of 14. And people wondered why? Here was an incredibly godly young lady who had so much potential. Why did God allow her to die? We may never know all of the reasons why, but do know one reason. Over 400 people came to Christ as a result of that death. Interestingly, she had just written in her diary that she was willing to die if her two friends could be saved. And they were. We don't always know the reasons for our tragedies, but we can cling to the good that God has in each tragedy.
4. Fourth, God is good; always good. And we need to cling to Him.
5. Another good we can cling to is that God loves to bring His saints home to glory. He says, "precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints" (Psalm 116:15). Richard and Desmond are certainly rejoicing with exceeding great joy in God's presence, and Jesus was rejoicing to receive two more of His saints into His glorious presence. There is a lot of good in the midst of the evil. So while we abhor the evil, we cling to the good. By clinging to it, we give ourselves perspective. It doesn't take away the pain, but it does bring comfort in the midst of the pain. A couple of you were shocked and even angry at God for allowing this, but I would encourage you to wrestle with these points and let these points win.

IV. Love is affectionate to the brethren (v. 10a)

Paul's next words are, "Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love..." The word for kindly affectionate (φιλόστοργος) refers to a deep affection that can involve touch (such as hugs), feelings, actions, relationship, and presence. And the word for brotherly love is just that - the love that brothers and sisters have for each other.

This is one of the things that blew away the pagans in the early centuries, one of whom was reported to have wistfully said, "See how they love each other." It seems that he wished he had that. That is a love we can develop more and more in this congregation - including with those who just left. It hurts when people leave *because* we have this love for them. But keep loving them. We are a kind of family. Right?

V. Love is discriminating (v. 10b)

Paul's next words are, "in honor giving preference to one another." Genuine love prefers some people over others. That's not wrong. Love prefers the victim over the rapist. It does not love everyone in exactly the same way. It discriminates between a Hitler and a covenant child. While we are called to love our enemies, the agape love we are called to must give preference to those in our own body, then moves to other believers we are connected with, and then to believers in general, and then to unbelieving neighbors, and then to enemies. Since we are limited in our abilities and strength and time, love is discriminating, and we should not feel guilty about that. We can't help everyone in the world. Instead this verse commands us to give preference to those we are most closely connected to. And that means that you saints need to be willing to receive the love and affection of others in this congregation. We are called to that. Some people like to be left alone, but we are called to this. And I think there is every reason to give preference to the Kull family since they are moving here next week.

VI. Love honors the brethren (v. 10b)

But don't overlook that word "honor." If you look up the word honor, you will be surprised to find that it is τιμή, a word that refers to giving money and tangible help in addition to giving respect and honor. We will be collecting an offering for the Kulls who will have enormous medical expenses for Mr. Kull's hand surgery. He didn't have insurance, and this will be a blow to them. One way we can show love is through a tangible gift.

VII. Love is diligent and enthusiastic in serving (v. 11)

Next, Paul says, "not lagging in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord." Every situation in life can be seen as an opportunity to serve the Lord. We give diligence in our *employment*, but there is also a certain diligence we are called to exercise in our mutual love within the body. True agape love takes work. Ray and Miriam are right now expending themselves for the Kull family in exactly this way. Pray for them.

VIII. Love is full of hope (v. 12a)

Next we see that love is full of hope. It is so full of hope that it amazingly brings joy in the midst of sadness. Verse 12 says, “Rejoicing in hope.” Where do we get hope? In the promises of God. 1 Thessalonians 4:13 says that there is no comfort in sorrow unless we have hope. The hope of heaven and the resurrection gives us an entirely different perspective on death than pagans have. It was one of the things that made funerals so impactful in Ethiopia. More people probably came to Christ through funerals than through any other outreach in Ethiopia. The pagan funerals were filled with despair. The Christian funerals were filled with hope. Give hope by giving well-applied promises of God. We don’t want to give pat theological answers, but there are promises that can be given in a well-timed way that can minister powerfully.

IX. Love perseveres under pressure (v. 12b)

Next, Paul says, “patient in tribulation.” With as many things as the Simmons, Goodemotes, and others have been having to juggle, it is sometimes hard to be patient. We can remind ourselves that love perseveres and is patient despite the pain and sorrow. And it sounds like Caleb himself is handling this graciously. I haven’t heard about the rest of the family. But all of us are called to a love that perseveres even when under pressure - time pressure, money pressure, or any kind of pressures. All of these points hang together and reinforce each other. They are a beautiful description of what love within the body should always look like.

X. Love is constant in prayer (v. 12c)

Next, Paul says, “continuing steadfastly in prayer.” How are we able to engage on any of these points? Through prayer that God would provide. Prayer is the means God has ordained to supply all of our needs according to His riches in Christ Jesus. James says that we have not because we ask not. When we blow it in ministering to a hurting person by saying something that wasn’t the greatest, don’t cringe. Pray that God would use your feebleness by His grace. When we succeed pray. When we fall into pride, anger, or other sins, pray. Prayer must be the air we breath, and praying on their faces before the Lord will relieve the hearts of the Kull family over and over again. And grief does keep coming in waves. It doesn’t quickly disappear. But (praise God!) God’s comfort *also* comes in waves as we go before His presence.

XI. Love shares with other Christians (v. 13a)

Next, Paul says, “distributing to the needs of the saints.” What was hinted at earlier is said explicitly here. Love shares with other Christians, not because they deserve it, not out of sentimentality, but because this is what Christians do; this is what genuine agape love does. When brothers and sisters have need, our hearts instantly jump at the opportunity to share

in that need. This doesn't mean that we will do everything that they *can* do and that they *should* do, but it does mean that we look to help with the needs that are *beyond their means*. If you want to help out financially today, designate your gift to the Kull family and put it into the offering box at the back. But be sure you put a designation on it.

XII. Love is given to hospitality (v. 13)

Next, Paul says, "given to hospitality." This is a much richer idea than giving money. This is sharing your life and home and food and other things with someone. Though Ray and Miriam are going to *Wyoming* to help, that too is a kind of hospitality where they are sharing their life, love, labor, and other things. It's bringing their hospitality to Wyoming. But most hospitality is inviting people into your home. As one of my favorite books words it, "Open Heart and Open Home." Hospitality was one of the dominant traits of the patriarchs in Genesis and of the saints down through history. It is a lost grace in some circles, but I am glad you have embraced it richly in this church. I think this is a church that is very given to hospitality. The Kulls will need such hospitality.

XIII. Love blesses its enemies (v. 14)

XIV. Love is deeply sympathetic (v. 15)

I'll skip over verses 14 and 16 and end with verse 15. It says, "Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep." Love is deeply sympathetic. That command to weep freaks some people out. They struggle because grief makes them uncomfortable. Or they feel that grieving might be inappropriate because God is sovereign and we need to submit to His providence. But submission to God's providence does not cancel the pain, and this verse not only gives permission to weep, but commands us to weep.

There are two common quotes that I think we all need. The first is, "people don't care how much you know till they know how much you care." The second is similar. It says, "build the bridge of relationship before you drive the truck of truth across it." In a sense it is a false dichotomy since both the caring and the truth are important biblical *truths* that we embrace, but I think you get the point. Caring in a very deep way makes the truth come packaged in flesh like Jesus packaged the truth.

How do we learn to enter people's lives in a way that shows real care? It will require some inconvenience and time, but consider five additional truths that may help.

First, consider the enormous inconvenience that Jesus went through in order to enter into our life and our sorrows. It is breathtaking what He endured to help us cast our cares on Him. If we remind ourselves of all that Jesus did to enter into our sorrows, it might motivate us to enter into the sorrows of others - however uncomfortable that might be.

Second, remind yourself that Jesus does not hold *you* at arm's length when you experience hurts, mistakes, sins, regrets, sorrows, and painful events. His compassion and affection and willingness to draw you in can help motivate you to imitate some of His specific actions of ministering. Jesus ministered even when there was raw emotional pain, despair, regrets, feelings of betrayal, and other fragile emotions. Knowing that Jesus ministered in uncomfortable places can help to motivate us to do so.

Third, try putting yourself in that person's shoes and ask what you would want. If you wouldn't want 100 people calling you in one day (talk about overwhelming), or 100 people dropping off meals in one day (also overwhelming), you might want to get someone at the core group to schedule these actions of love. It can be overwhelming when everyone wants to love on you at the same time.

But fourth, to balance that off, not all people are the same, so don't assume what they wouldn't want. Maybe you want to crawl into a hole and have everyone go away, but the other person may not be like that. So close friends of the person can give you advice on ways to help or if help right now is not needed.

Fifth, don't close off your emotions. Growing up with all kinds of abuse in boarding school I learned to close off my emotions. It seemed much safer to do so. But I eventually realized that this is not biblical - that even my emotions need to be sanctified to the Lord. So I sought to be more open. And I remember vividly the first time I wept as an adult - it was like a dam had broken and I couldn't stop sobbing. It totally surprised me. But that probably came from years of "being a man" holding the pressure inside. Anyway, over time I learned to open my heart and be willing to be rejected, misunderstood, and hurt again and again without closing off my heart or my emotions. It really takes God's grace to do that. We can unwittingly hurt each other. And love covers those kinds of things without getting hardened.

Look up the Greek word *splanchnon* (σπλάγχνον - which is the noun form) or *splanchnizomai** (σπλαγχνίζομαι - which is the verbal form) of emotion in the New Testament and you will see this. It literally refers to your intestines churning from emotion. Those emotions motivated Jesus to do ministry. Over and over it says, being moved by compassion (or *splanchnon*) He ministered to people. Give your emotions to the Holy Spirit and ask Him to enable you to rejoice with those who rejoice and to weep with those who weep. Ask Jesus to cause His compassion to flow through you and you will begin to be better and better at ministering to those who are hurting.

One of the very encouraging verses in the New Testament is John 11:35 - the shortest verse in the Bible. It says, "Jesus wept." It shows the degree to which Jesus entered into our pain and suffering. This means that when you obey this last command we have looked at in Romans 12:15, you are joining with Jesus in weeping. There is a sense in which He continues to grieve with us. Even God the Father grieves with us. In Hosea 11:8 God says, "My heart churns within Me; My sympathy is stirred." We know what heart churning is, and God uses that metaphor to describe the strong compassion that He has for people in pain. And the word for "sympathy" also deals with emotional pain. I think God has emotions. In any case, Jesus in His humanity wept with us. And Hebrews says that Jesus continues to be

moved by compassion - a different Greek word that also deals with feelings. He is a model for us in every way on how to help hurting people in a helpful way.

So let's move into these next few weeks sensitive to what the Holy Spirit would have us do in ministering to each other. And consider these fifteen points as you do so. Amen. Let's pray.

XV. Love produces oneness of heart & mind in Christians (v. 16)