

A Better New Year

by Jim Cymbala

To make God happy in the new year, we must learn to think about and love other Christians, just like Paul did in his letter to the church in Philippi.

Duration: 31:27

Scripture: Philippians 1:1-2

Topics: "New Year"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker shares a personal experience of being tired and wanting to go home, but being approached by a disheveled man who wanted to talk. The speaker then transitions to discussing a letter from Paul to the church in Philippi, which reveals Paul's heart for the people and teaches us how to make God happy in the new year. The speaker emphasizes the importance of our relationships with other Christians and how Paul serves as a model for us in this regard. The sermon concludes with a story about the speaker's grandchildren, highlighting the love and protection between siblings as an example of how we should love and care for one another.

Transcript

Happy New Year. Last night I saw something that is a good introduction, segue into the little passage I want to read to you. Among my grandchildren, the two youngest, are Levi, who just turned seven years old.

He was adopted by my daughter and son-in-law from Ethiopia. And little Terror, named Charlotte, who's 18, 19 months old. And she just was in my office for three minutes, and there was hardly anything left in my office.

She just is, she's an unstoppable force. So Levi's seven, she's a year and a half, that's a big difference. And they bumped into each other as they were jumping around.

But Levi, he so loves and protects his little sister. So he said to her, and she's an ornery little thing, and he says, no, Charlotte, Charlotte, come on, give Levi a hug. And she stopped, and I hadn't really seen this.

She went to him and put her arms around him, and then he put his arms around her, and she kissed him. And that brought delight to my heart, because whenever you see your family and your offspring united and loving each other, it brings joy to your heart. Am I correct? And is there anything worse than fighting in a

family when a sister or a brother, a daughter and a son, or grandchildren are at it, just at it? That's just a heartbreak.

I've counseled people who actually, I think they almost tend to die early, and from part of the heartache that they succumb to is from their own family, people fussing and fighting. And as we begin the new year, if you have somebody in your family that you're on the outs with, I give you the word of the Lord today. Get on the phone and call them and say, how are you? And I'm sorry if I ever hurt you.

But Pastor Simbala, they're the one who hurt me. I know, be like God wants us to be. Be full of mercy.

Take one for the team and just say, I love you, I'm sorry if I ever hurt you, how are you? Now, if they hang up or they wanna act like that, the Bible says, as much as it's possible on your part, live at peace with everyone, amen? But notice it says, as much as it's possible. There's some people you can't live at peace with, but you should make the effort to try to live at peace with everybody. All in favor, say aye.

So don't, if you've got bitterness, rancor in your heart toward any family member or somebody who used to be close to you, try to mend that as we start the new year. But God, as he looks at us, he delights in things that I'm not sure we're so aware of and that we concentrate on. And we find that illustrated, especially in the writings of the Apostle Paul, who, for those of you who are visiting, was once an antagonist of Christianity, an enemy of the message of the gospel, and then he was converted miraculously and he became a great apostle, preacher, teacher, church founder, and wrote a good part of the New Testament under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

And so he begins the letter to the church in Philippi, where he had gone on his second missionary journey, ended up in a slammer in jail. God delivered him out of that, and he founded a church under great persecution and trouble. He's writing to them, and he's now in prison in Rome.

He's in prison, many years have gone by. He's in prison, and he's writing to his spiritual children, and he loves them so much, he cares about them, which is an example that all pastors ought to take note of. You're not supposed to just preach to the people, you're supposed to love the people.

We're supposed to pray for the people. That's what we wanna do this week. Your problems are our concern.

You're not here for us, we're here for you. So in the letter, he begins this way, in Philippians chapter one. Paul and Timothy, his younger assistant, servants of Christ Jesus to all God's holy people, that the word there is saints.

All Christians are saints. The teaching of certain people being saints is erroneous and not found in Scripture. Certainly praying to anyone else but God is not found in Scripture.

Holy people in Christ Jesus at Philippi, together with the overseers, or bishops, or pastors, and the deacons, those who help serve. He's writing to them, grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. I thank my God every time I remember you.

In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now. Being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus, when Christ returns. It is right for me to feel this way about all of you since I have you in my heart.

And whether I am in chains or defending and confirming the gospel, all of you share in God's grace with me. God can testify how I long for all of you with the affection of Christ Jesus. And this is my prayer for them which goes on, which I won't go into.

So this begins the letter of Paul. It's a very revealing letter, this letter. It reveals his heart about these people in Philippi, and it also shows us how we can make God happy in 2017.

How many wanna make God happy in 2017? You know, we say, happy new year. In other words, this new year, I want you to be happy, but how about God being happy in the new year? We can make God happy. We know we can make God sad.

Let's make God happy by learning these three little lessons. They're hidden there in the text. Maybe you saw some of them.

Paul has this relationship to the church there, and it's a model of how he wants us to relate to each other. God is pleased with the way Paul is a master, pastor, master, teacher, apostle, and that's why it's held up to our view in scripture. He models to us how you ought to relate to other Christians, and it's an example to us of what we can aspire to here in the new year.

First of all, when it comes to other Christians, he said, I thank God every time I remember you. We live right now in the most self-indulgent, self-focused, narcissistic, it's all about me world since the beginning of time. Everything is about me.

What brings me pleasure, what I like, what you like, the entertainment I like, the new phone I like, what I like, what I don't like, I go against, it's all about me. It's competitive in the business world, and when it comes to how people spend their spare time when they're not working, it's almost always focused on my entertainment. Hey, hey, listen up there.

It's what I wanna do. It's what's happening to me, and when you talk to people, I did this a few months ago, when you talk to most people, I noted this carefully for a couple days, when you talk to people, they will hardly ask how you're doing. They are just full of news about themselves.

Do I get an amen here? Anyone ever notice that? Just let them talk. It won't get to you. I find this even among pastors I talk to.

It'll be, hi, how are you, Jim? Listen, you can't believe what happened to me, this, that, and they'll go on for 20, 25 minutes, and I'll listen, and I'm interested, but very rare that they'll say, so how are you doing? What'd you preach on last Sunday? How do you feel? How does it go with you? Most of us are very self-centered. What's amazing about this little sentence, every time I remember you, is that Paul's in prison, in prison, in a dungeon that makes Rikers Island look like a holiday villa. He's in a dungeon, and he's saying, oh, how I thank God every time I remember you.

So what I wanna do is make a New Year's resolution with you, by God's grace, that God will help us to think about other Christians more this year. Anybody with me on it? Yes. You'll be happier, because the way God has made us as human beings, the more you think about yourself, and the more you pursue your own designs, the less happy you are destined to be by a law that God put in us.

The more you think about God and other people, the happier you will be. The more you block out God and other people and just indulge yourself, the more miserable you will be, even though that's what you're

pursuing, is your happiness, your fulfillment. It's just the way God made us.

He made us to interact and be concerned about others, like Levi and Charlotte hugging each other. I could take anybody here. You're a Christian, right? Stand up.

What's your name? Carol. I never met Carol, or if I have met Carol, I don't remember the specifics. Carol's a Christian.

Where were you born? Grenada. Good place. She's got problems in her life.

I've never been this close to her that I know, never held her hand like this, but she's got problems. Yes, she does. She faces things in life.

Did you know that she's involved in spiritual warfare, just like you and I are? Do you know that Satan, we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against what, principalities and powers. So that's going on in her life. I know that.

I don't have to be introduced to her or hold her hand here, I know that about her. Did you know that she's my sister? You're Christian, right? She might be a better Christian than me, don't be laughing. And we're gonna spend eternity together.

Did you know that? We're gonna spend eternity together, right? She looked at me like she's not sure I'm gonna make it. That's not good. Who's gonna think about her? I don't know if she's single or married.

I don't know if her family's here or still in Grenada. Who's gonna pray for her? Who's gonna think about her? You get it what I'm saying? If I just occupy with myself, I'll never be able to be directed by God to think about her, to talk to her, to be interested in her life. You have a job? You're working where you live, here in Brooklyn? What street? That's where I grew up.

No, for real. I grew up one block away. You see? I'm thinking about her, and now I got all of you thinking about her.

This is what makes God happy when we think about each other. I know you got problems. Hey, you got problems.

And I know you got your family, and I know you got your bills, and I know that. But don't you want God to broaden you a little bit this year so that you break out of the small box of me, myself, and I, and my family? Paul's in prison, but he's thinking about a church in Philippi, and rooting for them, and wondering how they're doing, and writing a letter to them, and sending it by a messenger. There was no UPS then, or mail service.

You had to get a messenger to deliver something. So he's thinking about someone else. What a liberation comes when you get free from the chains of preoccupation with yourself.

What a wonderful spiritual liberation that is. You know, Christ Jesus, he didn't think about himself. He put us first, or he would have never gone to the cross.

If he was thinking about himself, he would have never gone to that tree. He would have saved himself from it. Why did he die? Because he was thinking about us, you, and me.

There's a song the choir used to sing 25 years ago. When he was on the cross, I was on his mind. So now to make God happy, he's saying, now that I've saved you all.

Another thing about Carol that Paul mentions. The same grace that's working in me, the same born-again experience I've had, she's had. The same Holy Spirit that lives in me, it lives in her.

Now, I don't know what family she has, and she doesn't know a lot about my family, but maybe some of my family won't go to heaven, and some of her family might not go to heaven. But she's going to heaven, and I'm going to heaven. She's the family member I have that's gonna go on for all eternity.

Turn to the person next to you, and just turn either way and just say, I love you with the love of the Lord. Just turn right now. I love you with the love of the Lord.

You're my brother, you're my sister. Mike, look at me. If we don't stick together and think about each other and try to help each other, wouldn't that be shameful? Would Christ save us and put us in the body so that we would just be thinking about ourselves? Ah, but Pastor Cimbala, you don't know what I'm going through.

I got it. I know you're going through stuff. I go through stuff.

But I'm telling you, you are gonna have a happier life in 2017 if you stop thinking about all your problems, count your blessings, and start getting involved in other people's lives. Can we all put our hands together and say amen to that? This is where the pastor's role is overwhelmed. How could we all, all the pastors that work here, how could we possibly monitor and help everybody in the congregation? We're gonna do our best.

I'll stay here till 11 o'clock, 12 o'clock at night on these nights where we pray individually for people if that's what it takes. But how would we know what Carol's going through unless someone takes time with Carol? Why don't you ask God? You know, they have in our culture now, we have adopted a highway, and companies and people adopt a mile of a highway and invest money in it to keep it clean or to pave it. Why don't we adopt a person? Why don't we adopt a couple people that God might lay on our heart? But it wasn't just that he thought of them.

What he says, as I bring this to a close, is he says, it's only right that I think about you because God knows, I'm paraphrasing, how much I love you. Oh, do I love you. He's in prison, but he's affirming his love to the Christians in Philippi.

You know, it's a strange thing about love, isn't it? When you really love someone, you can't stop telling them that you love them. I don't know how many times I hugged Levi this last week. I was with him for a number of days and just hugged him and said, Levi, I love you.

And you know, he's at that age where that's a little awkward for him as Papa's always saying, I love you. Come here, I love you. And he goes, I love you, too.

And I said, Levi, I said to him one time, Levi, there's no feeling in that. He said, what do you mean, Papa? I said, I'm saying that I love you. And you just go, love you, too, because he wants to be polite.

So then he went, I love you, too, as if saying it slower would make it more heartfelt. But when you love someone, you think about them. Oh, that's natural.

You fall in love, you think about the person. You have children you love, you think about the children. You don't have to teach anybody.

When you fall in love, it's over. When God puts his love in you for another person, you start thinking about them. So now we're going deeper.

Not only did Paul remember and think about these people, now he's telling us why he thought about them. He says, I think about you because I love you so much. It wasn't that Paul was inspired to love with a human love.

It was Christ's love in him, the very same love of God that Christ had for that church, he now shared in that love, and he loved those people so much. Wouldn't it be wonderful if we started loving each other more and telling each other, I love you, I love you. I met someone the other day, I hugged him, and I said, I love you, and they seemed so awkward.

And I said, why are you awkward when I tell you that? And they said, listen, I grew up, I never had my mother or father in the entire time from I was zero up to 21 years old. They never once said they loved me. People grow up with no love, no love, no expression of love.

I know someone very close to me, their mother never hugged them once in their whole life that they can remember. So Paul says, no, God is my witness, and he uses a word in the Greek, it's in the King James, they do it literally. I love you with the bowels of Christ Jesus.

In other words, my innermost being, my deepest part of me, the deepest love that God has for you, I have it too. I long for you, I'm in love with you, I care about you. Oh, brothers and sisters, if we would just let the Spirit of God put that love in us for other people to a greater degree, do you know how your life will change? You'll start to get excited by every good report of that person, and instead of being stuck in the rut of how am I doing, how am I feeling, how's my life working out? You'll be free, you'll be loose, he's a chain breaker.

And now you'll be loving and rejoicing with others, and yes, crying with others. You know, our praise and worship leader here, Daniel, he just lost his mother this week. His mother went to be with the Lord, I think on Wednesday.

Sure, you cry with them, and then you rejoice with them. But oh, your life becomes so much richer when you're involved with other people. And New York City, I'm telling you, it's notorious.

Right here in this auditorium, some of you, the minute this thing ends, the service ends, you're going back to your life of isolation from others, maybe family, maybe somebody who has the same background as you, same color as you. But otherwise, you're just locked in, not open to all the people that God has put around you. All the people who are brothers and sisters in Christ, all the people that need your attention, need your love, need your affection.

You know what just putting a hand around somebody could mean to them? And Paul says, I love you. God knows I love you with the deepest bowels of affection. I mean, I really love you.

No one taught him to love them. He used to persecute them. When God gets ahold of you and fills you with his Holy Spirit, you begin to love in a way you've never loved before.

And let me tell you for one last time here as I close, anyone who says they love God but isn't involved with other people, they're deceived. One of the greatest spiritual deception is to think you love God and you're so close to him, but you have no use for the concerns of other people. That is a great deception.

When you love God, you love his people. Can we put our hands together? When you love God, you love his people. Who are the best Christians in our church? The ones who love the other people the most? Of course, they're the closest to God.

Why would they be loving unless God was working through them? Who are the more carnal and have to grow and beginning type Christians? The one who love Jesus, but still they're wrapped up with me, myself, and I, and they don't wanna get involved with anybody else. I have no time for that. I have no time.

And then of course, because he loved them, he not only thought of them, he prayed for them. What a revolutionary thing that would be for us if God's love broke out in our heart, we would be praying. You ask most people how they pray, who are parents or grandparents.

They pray for their children first. Why? Because they love them. You pray for the people you love.

So imagine Paul filled with this love. Every time he started praying, he was praying all over the place. Every time he thought of another person, he had to pray for that church and this church.

So I wanna love more. I wanna love more. I wanna be a better preacher.

I wanna be a better leader. You deserve that, but right now, I wanna love you more. I wanna love people more in 2017 than I ever have before.

Anybody here with me? How many wanna love more? Lift up your hand. Just, you know, now listen, we're not gonna make a resolution. I'm gonna start to love people.

No, it's God. Give me your love so I can think more about people like Carol and other people you run into in my life. So I thought I had learned this.

Forgive the repetition, but I feel I'm supposed to say this for the repetition for those who know me and are here regularly. I thought I had learned this, oh, so many times. And then I had a crisis event happen to me in our previous facility on an Easter Sunday when I preached for the third time that day, was bone tired, bone tired, poured out myself.

The choir had done a cantata and people had come to Christ and I prayed and I got through with the meeting. The other building had a platform with no steps. So it was my habit to just sit like this and let my feet dangle down on the edge of the platform.

And I was like, right, it was just about this same angle with the middle aisle. And I'm just saying, so tired. I remember taking my knot on my tie and loosening it and saying, you know what, I'm gonna, I'm just gonna chill.

And Carol was playing, people praying, workers, deacons helping. And I was tired and I wanted to go home. I hadn't eaten all day.

And then I look and around the one, two, three, four, fifth row, there's a guy in the aisle around level with the fifth row. He had a cap, filthy cap, but he had it in his hand and he was staring at me and looking at me

and I could tell by his eyes, like he wanted to know, could he come up here and talk to me? And I just looked at him a little closer. Man, the guy was disheveled, filthy looking, matted hair, a mess.

He looked in his 50s, he actually was 31. And I just looked at him and I thought, because Everton, Tulia, they remember back in that building with a lot of people panhandling in the church. They would come in and ask for money and we had procedures of what to do when people ask for money.

So we don't wanna build their habit and hand them money, they'll just go out and drink it. And I thought to myself, what a bummer, because I'm gonna have to give money. I'm not even gonna go through the procedures.

I'm gonna just give this guy some money. I had no wallet then, I had a money clip. So I waved him up and he came.

So I'm here, he got to about five, six feet away from me. Whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa. Smell? No, a smell? You think you've smelled something? I'll match that smell with anything you've ever smelled in your life.

A mixture of feces, urine, sweat, street, and alcohol. Stir gently and let it cook for a while. That's what I smell.

Nasty. I looked away to inhale and I started to question, what's your name, David? Okay, I'm a minister, let me go through at least the procedures here. Man, you look bad.

I didn't know he was laying in his own urine right outside the side door on Park Place in that building. And he heard the music and it drew him in. He was just sprawled laying out there.

So he's there. Oh Lord, where'd you sleep last night, deserted truck? How come you're not in a shelter? Too dangerous, almost got killed last one I was in. Okay, man, this guy smells bad.

Missing one or two teeth, at least one right in the front. Let me give him \$5 something. Not the way I wanted to end the day, but you know, what can you do? Took out the money.

I remember handing it. He pushed it down. He said, I don't want your money.

I want this Jesus you were talking about. And at that moment, I forgot all about David because I knew who was really in need of prayer. It was Jim Cimbala.

It wasn't David. So I forgot him. I lifted my hands and I just said, God, please forgive me.

What have I become? What kind of cheap two-bit preacher have I become? You sent somebody who's searching for you and I wanna give him a few dollars and get rid of him. Please help me. And God, that moment baptized me with a love, with something, with grace.

He saw how pitiful I was. And David knew it. And he drew close to me.

And I started to cry. And he started to cry. And then he fell against me and he put his head over here.

And I put my arms around him. And he put his arms around me. And for a while, we just rocked back and forth.

A preacher in need of God, a guy from the street in need of God. I'm not sure who was needier. Might've been me.

You know what God spoke to me that moment? And this is not trendy at all. Those of you who wanna go to like church growth institutes, this is not what this church is about. God spoke to me and said, you see that smell? If you don't love that smell, I can never use you.

Because the whole world smells that way to me. All the stinking, filthy sin of mankind. I sent my son to die for that smell.

So you're either gonna embrace it and love people in my name, or I can't use you. I'll put you on the shelf. And if God is my witness, you can believe it or not.

Suddenly that smell became like the most beautiful ladies perfume you ever smelled in your life. It was just overwhelming me. He was weeping, I was weeping, I led him to Christ.

We prayed, we detoxed him for four or five days. Hired him on church staff, housekeeping. He spent Thanksgiving and Christmas at my house that year.

My buddy got his teeth fixed, handsome guy. For that Christmas, all he had, he gave me a handkerchief. He wrapped it up in wrapping paper, gave me a white handkerchief.

I kept it for years. It meant more to me than anything anyone could give me. You could've bought me a car.

I would've said, keep your car, give me that handkerchief. And what broke him and what broke me is God's love. Brothers and sisters, let's walk in love this year.

Let's think about other people, let's love other people. If they're different than us, think different than us, look different than us, smell different than us. I didn't grow up around that smell.

I was blessed, fortunate, middle-class Polish, Ukrainian, middle-class home, that wasn't my world. But it's God's world and he wants to use all of us. Every eye closed, I wanna dismiss the meeting in a little daring way if I could.

And some might be visiting here, you don't feel comfortable with this. I don't enforce anything on you. But in a moment, I'm gonna ask you to stand.

I'd like every brother, every man in the building to find another man and just pray for one minute with each other. Join hands in front of you, look at each other. One of you will pray for 30, 40 seconds out loud for the other, then the other will pray back.

If you only wanna pray for 10 seconds, you pray for what you want. But I think it would make God really happy according to what the Spirit is saying to us, that we would love each other and pray for each other. Pray that God will give us the best year we've ever had.

That's what I want you to pray. God, ladies facing ladies, God, help my sister to have the best year she's ever had in you with your blessing and your grace following her. And then after you pray for a minute, you can be dismissed.

Everybody stand. Please do this. Up in the balcony, everybody find someone downstairs.

Everyone find someone. Just face them. Introduce yourself if you don't know them.

Lord, get everyone home safely who has to leave. Bless the next group coming in. Help us to love one another.

We pray in Jesus' name, amen. God bless you, happy new year.

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