

The Love Factor

by Jim Cymbala

Jim Cymbala emphasizes the transformative power of love in the Christian faith and ministry as demonstrated by the early church in Thessalonica.

Duration: 30:33

Scripture: 1 Thessalonians 2:7

Topics: "Love"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker reflects on his experiences of preaching the word of God with passion and love. He describes the emotional energy and exhaustion that comes with preaching with all his heart. The speaker emphasizes the importance of genuine love and care for the congregation, comparing it to a mother gently feeding her newborn child. He also mentions the success of this kind of preaching, which goes beyond clever communication and focuses on the speaker's deep love for the people. The sermon concludes with the speaker sharing a personal anecdote about a busy Easter day, highlighting the emotional toll of preaching and the impact it has on the congregation.

Transcript

We've been doing a series in 1 Thessalonians. The interesting thing about 1 Thessalonians, this is the first time the gospel has ever been put in writing. In other words, he's writing to a church and now a leader is discussing with a church all about the Christian faith.

So this is fascinating if you are a serious Christian, like what did they believe, how did they carry on? In 1 Thessalonians, like the other epistles and the book of Acts, which Luke wrote, is so interesting because it teaches us how to do church, or at least what are the values, styles change, they didn't have microphones, they certainly didn't have anything like this. They didn't have sound systems and choirs like that. In fact, they didn't have public buildings for about 300 years.

But it does help us as we look at it, like anointed by the Holy Spirit, these writers talked about the church. What was the church to them? How should a church behave? Who's in a church? Can anyone just join a church? How often did they meet? We're not so sure about that. What were the important things that they did to them? It would seem that because God put it in the New Testament, we're to learn and emulate that, we're to copy that.

Because today, we're all captured by the traditions of our childhood. Whenever you became a Christian, whether you grew up in church or not, like the choir, we have members from Russia, Puerto Rico, Jamaica, Trinidad, they all grew up with a certain church culture around them. But when you're new in the Lord, or if you're a child, you just assume that's the way to do it.

How else would you do church? You don't know anything about church. You assume this is the way Christians should meet, this is what preachers should preach about, this is what's really important, this is how you spread the gospel. But then as you dig in the Bible, and you search the Bible, you try to shed off traditions and cultural elements, shed that, and say, what was really important that God said, I want you to know about this, remember this, as you spread my word around.

And Thessalonians has been great for us in this way. We're about to read a phrase about the church in Philippi, we're still in the first chapter, we can't seem to make much headway, but we're learning a lot of things. And I'm stopping with any word that is first used so that we don't assume everyone knows what it means.

Last week it was the gospel. Paul says, our gospel came to you not in word only, but in power, in the Holy Spirit, and with great conviction. So we stopped and said, all right, what does gospel mean? Can't assume that we know the biblical definition of gospel.

And then we learned about the Holy Spirit, it's the first time he mentioned the Holy Spirit, that the preachers then were not expected to do word only, preaching cleverly, communicating, organizing their thoughts, telling a joke, and being a clever communicator like you have in the world. Are you kidding? Wall Street and corporate America has some of the greatest communicators in the world. They hold people spellbound.

But that's not the way Christians are supposed to speak. They're supposed to speak not in word only, but with a demonstration of the power of the Holy Spirit. Somehow God attending their words, like I need him to do today, so it breaks into people's hearts, not just their minds.

Now in this passage, Paul's gonna say to this church that he started in Thessalonica in Greece, he's gonna say, you became emulators, or you copied us. You became followers of us and also of the Lord. In fact, that's a command he gave, follow me even as I follow the Lord.

And it talks about the great power there is in example, that many people learn more by watching than they do by hearing. They copy what you do in a good way more than they say, all right, tell me how that works again. And Paul's gonna refer to that.

I remember when I was a kid, I had an idol on Parkside Avenue. I was about 12 or 13, and all I did was play basketball. But back then, it was not so much basketball, which ended up being the reason I went to college and all of that, but it was stickball and punchball and every kind of baseball, softball, every kind of game, two-hand touch football, all in the park on Winthrop Street between Bedford and Rogers here in Brooklyn.

So there was the best athlete. His name was Gilly Furstman. He ended up being a great coach in high school here in New York City.

But then he was back, 17 years old, I was 12. Oh man, he threw right, but he batted left. That was unusual to see someone do that.

He threw with his right hand and he could fire a Spalding, a tennis ball, whatever, and he batted left and he could just out hit, out do anybody and he was my idol. I just watched him. I couldn't get into games, I was too young, but I would watch him, all in the street, hitting by yourself, hitting against the box, every kind of game that we played.

He was my idol. And he had a name bracelet. Back then, if you had a girlfriend or something, they would wear a bracelet and the girl would give you the bracelet if I remember or whatever.

You gave her a bracelet, whatever. He wore one and it was a little loose on him and whenever he would be playing ball and he would swing, then he would go like this because the chain would go up on his thing, so he'd be going like this all the time. He'd throw the ball, he'd catch it if he had a glove and then he'd go like this.

So one day, my mother saw me in the house and she said, what's wrong with you? I said, what do you mean, what's wrong with me? She said, all day long, you've been walking around, you have nothing on your wrist and you're going like this the whole time. And I said, what, what are you talking about? She said, stop it. You're going like this and you got nothing on there and then I realized, I was mimicking him unconsciously.

That's how much I admired him. So let's see what Paul is gonna tell us here about the Christian ministry. Let's look.

For we know, brothers and sisters, loved by God, that he has chosen you because our gospel came to you not simply with words but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and deep conviction. It's so sad that churches who grew up in traditions that downplay the Holy Spirit because of excesses by the charismatic movement or whatever and people hallucinating and emotionalism and fanaticism which goes beyond anything in scripture, they now throw out the Holy Spirit totally. So now they're left with just Bible studies and a guy's intelligence.

But that's not the way it should be. We don't want excesses but oh, do we need the Holy Spirit. Help me say amen.

So now you know how we lived among you for your sake. You became imitators. That word is in the Greek, the word we get mimic, mimic, a mimicker.

You became imitators of us and of the Lord for you welcomed the message in the midst of severe suffering. Notice they received it under persecution but instead of complaining and going in the tank and being depressed and being a victim and have that mentality, no. You received it in severe suffering with the joy given by the Holy Spirit and so you became a model to all the believers in Macedonia and Chaia, other areas of Greece.

So here's a church that was so special that they became a model for other churches. Only place I know where Paul uses a church as a model. In other words, people wanted to copy you, wanted to be like you because of your strong faith in the Lord.

He says this sentence, you know how we lived among you for your sake. That's my only thing I want to talk about today. You know how we lived among you for your sake.

Hey, we were tossed in jail in Philippi before we came to you and we got beaten. So we knew the gospel is not a popular message but we preached it anyway because we love you so much. We risked everything and he begins to talk in this letter about his relationship with the Christians that specially should speak to me and convict me but it's a lesson for all of us about the fact that they didn't just preach the gospel, they just didn't trust in the power of God but man, there was some love going on there.

But listen to these words. Look in other parts of the book. You know we never used flattery nor did we put on a mask to cover up greed.

God is our witness. This is another place. He's saying, I'm reminding you when I was with you, did I run a scam on you? Did I try to get your money? Is that what this was all about, Paul says? I never put a mask on and played poor or ran some gimmick like you see so much on TV, these con artists using the name of Jesus to get you separated from your money to give it to them.

He said, no, we never did that. We were not looking for praise from people. We didn't put on a show so you would applaud.

No, no, no, that has nothing to do with the ministry of Jesus. There are no superstars. Only Jesus is the superstar.

Any minister who wants the attention, he's a fraud. Jesus died on the cross but you want attention? Oh, stop it. Not from you or anyone else even though as apostles of Christ, we could have asserted our authority.

Instead, we were like, better yet, gentle, not young children. There's an alternate reading there and they're not sure. It's always been gentle.

Some say young children. Instead, we were like gentle among you just as a nursing mother caring for her children. So we cared for you because we loved you so much.

We were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well. Surely you remember, brothers and sisters, our toil and our hardship. We work night and day in order not to be a burden to anyone while we preach the gospel of God to you.

How far have we traveled from that? How many ministers wanna work and find other ways so they won't be a burden to the people? No, the people are to be fleeced. The people are to be run a scam on so they can get money. He says, no, no, you remember, I was like a mother.

Mother doesn't want anything from the baby. Mother wants to give to the baby. Mother doesn't wanna run a game on the baby.

What, are you kidding me? You wanna feed the baby. And the picture in the Greek language for when he says, we're gentle among you, as some of you know, is a woman pulling down the front of her dress, bringing the newborn infant to her breast and feeding the child. He said, that's how gentle I was when I was with you.

That's how much I loved you. I was not ready to give you the gospel. I was ready to go down for you and die for you.

No wonder that kind of preaching was so successful. It wasn't just a sermon, three points and a conclusion. It wasn't clever communication.

It was this passionate love that the speaker had for the people. And then he finally closes it out in the next chapter and says this, surely, but Timothy has just now come back to us from you and has brought good news about your faith and love. See, I can't live without knowing how you're doing.

He has told us that you always have pleasant memories of us and that you long to see us just as we long to see, what are they, dating? What is this, Valentine's Day? You long to see us like we long to see you? What is that about? I can't live without you. And now finally, therefore, brothers and sisters, in all our distress and persecution where he is, ah, we were encouraged about you because of your faith, but for now we really live since you are standing firm in the Lord. What in the world problems do we have? Nothing, because we just heard you're doing good and we love you so much it erases what we're going through.

Oh my goodness, what kind of baptism of love did Paul have? Now we understand better, for you know how we lived among you for your sake. We didn't live for ourselves, we lived for you. Shame on Pastor Cimbala and any other pastor who lives for himself and not for the people.

Most churches, it's about the superstar pastor. No, the church is supposed to be about the people. When we could stand it no longer, we sent Timothy to see how you're doing.

Now we really live. Yeah, we're in a tight spot, but we heard you're doing good. It's like the lady that I met who I hadn't seen for a long time in church many years ago, and she looked older to me when she approached me.

She looked older to me. She had really aged in our church. And then standing behind her, she pulled her, and when I shook her hand, I noticed it was really beat up.

And then she brought her son, who was standing behind her to meet me, and she says, I'm putting my son through college and law school. He's gonna be the first one in our family tree to ever get a college degree. So she had gotten a third or fourth job or whatever, working herself to the bone.

You think she was sad and a victim? No, she was happy. My son's gonna go to law school. What do I care that I'm killing myself? What do I care that my hands are all gnarly? What does it matter that I'm gonna die before my time? My son's gonna go to law school.

Now, we have that sometimes for family, although some parents don't even care about their own children. But Paul had this because of God's love working in him, and this is what made the church spread so fast, because you know what people are looking for? They're not looking for a message first. They're not looking to go to heaven first.

They're looking to be loved. God made us to hunger for him, and he is love. The Christian church is supposed to be like a palace of love.

The preachers are supposed to not be eloquent. They're supposed to be full of love as they present the gospel, and isn't it gonna be a turnoff for me if I try to preach the gospel for God so loved the world? How powerful will I be if I don't care about you while I'm telling you about God's love? Won't there be a disconnect? How would the Holy Spirit help me if I don't care about you or any audience, but I wanna tell

you, oh, God is love. Let me tell you what Jesus did.

I don't care about you, though, because I got my own problem. Of course, that's the disconnect. That's why Christianity is literally shrinking in America, because Jesus said in the last days, difficult times would come.

Things would get hard. People who live anti-Christ lifestyles, anti-biblical lifestyles will get bolder and be up in your grill, and he said the reaction will be that the love of most will grow cold, not their doctrinal purity. He didn't say that.

He didn't say they would throw the Bible away. Some do that. He said the love of most, most, not some, most.

More than 50% would be most. The love of most will grow cold, because it'll be like, hey, circle the wagons. I don't wanna hear about these people anymore, degenerate people, anti-God people, anti-biblical people.

I don't wanna hear about these Muslims. I don't wanna hear about these Hindus. I don't wanna hear about anybody blowing up things and doing all these kind of crazy things.

Get them out of here. Let them go to hell. That hasn't happened? Sure, so churches just circle the wagon, and they feel like Christianity is us against them, but that's not the Christianity of the Bible, because when Christ was on the cross, he was praying, Father, forgive who? Forgive them.

They don't know what they're doing. So now the gospel, we see the secret here in the early church. The choir's supposed to sing, not just on your note, not just anointed by the Holy Spirit.

If you don't care about the people, what are you up here for? They do care about the people. The musicians, Carol and I have talked about it, the musicians should have a connection with you that they're playing, yes, for God, but they're playing for you to help you worship. We have to love each other and encourage each other because that's what people are starving for.

They're starving for love. They want encouragement, and Paul says, I live selfless among you, not because I'm an ascetic, not because I'm a monk, because I love you, and whenever you love someone, you make sacrifices. You live for them.

There's love, God's love, agape love, will always work so that you'll say, it's more important how you are doing than how I'm doing. I would say that's the rarest flower in the Christian garden, wouldn't you say? Talent, yeah. The ability to speak and hold people, yeah, I've heard that since I was a kid.

But love? I heard, even as a kid, too many ministers talking in the back because my future father-in-law was a minister, and I heard how ministers can talk after the meeting is over. I got very cynical. So one day, a long time ago, God began to deal with me, and I wanna close by telling a story which had a momentous impact on my life.

And it reminded me, like I wanted to remind you, we gotta ask God to baptize us with love. What's the sense of talking Jesus if you don't love people? Or love people who are other? You know, like I love people who are like me. I love people who like me, like Jesus said.

What do you gain by loving people who love you? If you give to people who give to you, sinners do that. Am I correct? If you're from Trinidad and you love all the Trinnies, what is that? It's nothing. It's do you love them from Guyana? Do you love them, if you're black, do you love the Indian? The Indian love the black, the white, the whole thing.

But most of us, it's not agape love, it's cultural love. I associate with who I associate with. I thought I had learned this.

You know, you're in the ministry. My wife and I started out with 15 people in the church. So you're trying to learn, you're trying to learn how to preach better.

God multiplies the church and we end up being on a building on Flappish Avenue, 290 Flappish Avenue. So it's Easter time and Carol tells me, I've put together four or five songs, let's do like an Easter program. I've done some songs on the cross and then something about that he's alive.

So let's do it and we'll have a testimony. All I remember, it was a long day, it was Easter. This was a lot of years ago.

And even though I was younger and strong, I was tired. By the end of that third or fourth service, I can't remember, I was one tired little puppy. And the choir sang and I preached, but there were lines outside the building way before the last performance of the Easter show.

There were just regular Sunday services and praying with people. And you know, that takes an emotional toll. And then preaching, they say the same emotional energy used to dig ditches for two or three days is one person preaching with all their heart, the emotional thing, nerves, emotions.

So the day ends, the choir sings, I make the last invitation, ask people to come to Christ and they come. Man, I was tired. My wife's playing the keyboard.

People are still at the altar praying, it's thinning out a little bit. And at 295 Bishop Avenue, we had no steps. We just sat on, I could sit on the end of the platform and my legs could dangle over.

So I sat down, I remember pulling my tie down, white shirt, dark suit, Easter Sunday, tired, tired, tired, tired, tired. What a good day. All those people came to Christ and all of that.

And I'm just thinking, I gotta go home. We lived in Queens then, gotta face that drive. I'd be so tired sometimes I couldn't get out of the car at the end of the day when I got home.

So I'm just sitting there listening to the music, eyes half open, and I see this guy, African American guy, off the center aisle, three rows back, got some kind of hat in his hand. He's got his head half down, but he's trying to get my attention, I couldn't tell. And he's just looking at me, messed up, matted hair, filthy clothes.

Dude was messed up. So I looked at him and he kind of looked like, can I approach you? And I thought to myself, I'm gonna tell it straight. What a bummer to end the day like this.

After all these good things happened and some guy's panhandling in the church. We had a lot of that then, lot. We had people coming in, they had developed procedures.

You just can't be handing money to people because you could be helping them buy more alcohol or drugs or whatever, right? So we had a whole thing. You go, we'll take you for food. Oh, I don't want food.

No, no, no, we wanna give you food. We wanna help you. We don't wanna, we're not handing out money to you.

I'm sitting still on the edge. He walks up and he gets about five, six feet away from me. Overwhelming stench.

The worst smell I had ever smelled in my life. Urine, feces, sweat, alcohol. His eyes were slightly bleary and he walked forward.

But he smelled so bad, I couldn't face him and breathe in. So I would look to the side and take a breath in and I would go, what's your name? David. How long you been in the street? He told me.

Where'd you sleep last night? How come you're not in a shelter? Too dangerous. I said, too dangerous? He said, yeah, I almost got killed in the last shelter I was in. So now he's this close, but it's overwhelming.

It's overwhelming, the smell, right? I didn't know that he had been on the side of the building, on Park Place, in our previous facility, and that he had been literally laying in his own urine, I guess. And he had heard the music and he came in. I didn't know that then.

So I reached in my back pocket, which at that time, I think I had a money clip, not a wallet. And I said, I'm gonna give him some money. I don't care about procedures.

Let the guy go and let me get home. You know what I'm talking about? I'm tired. I took out the money clip, rolled off a few dollars, started to hand it to him.

He took his right hand and he put it on my two hands and he pressed my hands down. He said, I want your money. I want this Jesus you were just talking about.

So, the way it went down was like this. The minute he said that, I forgot about him. And I saw myself for the cheap two-bit preacher that I was.

Because God had sent somebody to me and I wanted to send them away. I didn't have Paul's love. I totally forgot about him as God is my witness.

I lifted both my hands and I started to repent. Forgive me, God. Please forgive me.

What have I become? Forgive me. I didn't care about him anymore for the second. I was the one in need.

You think he was in need? No, no, I realize I'm the one in need. He looked old. He was only 32 years old.

He was handsome, but he was, you couldn't tell then, missing two front teeth. God began to baptize me with love. It was as real as this carpet is.

I began to weep because God filled me with love and God spoke a couple things to me and said, you smell this? If you can't deal with this smell, then I can't use you. Because the whole world smells like that to me. The whole world with its sin, even with the cologne and the fancy perfume, the sins of the world come into my holy nostrils and the whole thing is a mess to me.

So if you can't deal with this, you're gonna be put on the side because I can only use you if you embrace this. My hands must have come down and I was just crying. Do you know that he knew that? He knew something happened.

He knew something happened because he came close to me and he put his arms around me and he started to cry. And now I was crying and he was crying and we both locked arms around each other and we started to just go like this slowly back and forth. What a sight.

End of an Easter day, two men hugging each other, both in need of God, both in need of God. I led him to Christ. He got into a hospital, detoxed a little bit for alcohol.

He almost died in an abandoned building because someone dropped a cigarette. I think a relative of his dropped a cigarette and a mattress went up in flames. So he then started coming to church.

I got him a job helping here. Amazing, he started growing the Lord, got in the prayer band. He started memorizing verses.

The guy could memorize verses better than me, could memorize verses better than me, could speak amazingly. That Thanksgiving, he spent it in my house of that year. He knocked over the glass that had my wife's apple cider in it and he got all nervous because he had, you know, accidentally knocked over.

He said, doesn't matter. He came to my house for Christmas. You know what he gave me for Christmas? He gave me a white handkerchief.

It meant more to me than all the other presents. Met a girl in the church, beautiful girl from Africa named Chirba, pharmacist. He married her.

Things were happening all good. He just became like a model Christian. We flew, first time he ever went on an airplane, I took him with me to Charlotte, North Carolina.

I was supposed to speak. He went into this plush hotel where the church put us up. He went into his room first.

I want to make sure he knew how to operate the key and all of that. He went in the room, saw all this paneling and gorgeous room and he turned to me and he said, could I live here? He didn't want to stay overnight, he wanted to live there. I said, yeah, that'd be nice, wouldn't it? I wonder if his children, no, he had two children.

I wonder if his children ever knew that they came to me because of the way he had abused his body and the doctors had said, you're probably never gonna have children. Came to me with Chirba and they said, would you pray for us that we could have a baby? And sure enough, within a year, she got pregnant. They had a baby.

Then she got pregnant again. Real soon after that, fairly soon. Then they came back and said, would you pray we will not have any more babies? I said, whatever.

He ended up being ordained in the ministry and working at a church in Elizabeth, New Jersey. I've told this story and some people say, nah, the love of Jesus can't change anybody like that. You're making up stories, you're exaggerating.

No one smelled like that. Nobody really happened. You're one of those ministers who just exaggerates and tells story.

Well, it's a strange thing because when I was in South America, one day, David Ruffin, who I hadn't seen for some years, he came to me, my consciousness while I was praying and I started to pray for him and his wife, knowing nothing. When I came back, I felt this impression. No, I gotta get to talk to him.

Something might be going on because we're like this, even though we don't see each other. And then I find out from my secretary, guess who called you while you were away? David Ruffin said he wanted to talk to you so I knew something's up. So we called on the phone and I knew I was gonna preach on this.

So you know what, I wanna tell you something. I want you to meet David Ruffin. David, come on.

Did I tell the story the right way? Did it happen just that way? Just like that. There's nothing too hard for God. We're gonna pray that God will baptize us with love.

See, him and me and that day, that was a life changer for me. It's a life changer for him. But I started to look at ministry different.

Without love, it ain't worth nothing. Nothing's worth anything without love because God is love. When God's on the scene truly, you love.

Let's close our eyes. Anybody here need a miracle in your life right now? I don't care if just one of you. You're not out in the street the way David was but you need a miracle in your life pronto, time sensitive.

You need for God to come through, come quickly to the front. Come on, come on up. That's it, just come.

I need a miracle. Spiritual, financial, physical. I need a David Ruffin kind of miracle where God changes things.

Every eye closed, maybe some of you say, you know what miracle I need? I'm full of prejudice. I'm full of bitterness. I'm full of hatred.

I got unforgiveness all over me. I need a miracle for that love that David exudes that you were preaching about today. Just come out of your seat.

Jesus, thank you for your word. Fill us with your love today. Make it different for all of us.

Baptize us not just with power and wisdom but fill us with your love so we see people the way you see them. We feel what you feel. We pray this in Jesus' name.

And everyone said. Amen. Turn around and hug a bunch of people.

Audio: <https://sermonindex1.b-cdn.net/27/SID27805.mp3>
Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/jim-cymbala/the-love-factor/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net