

Spiritual Affection

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[0:00] As you may remember from the previous times that I have had the opportunity to preach, I'd like to begin my sermons with a story that kind of gives you the context for what we're going to be looking at this morning.

! Something that helps create some interest and helps you to focus in on the topic that we are going to look at in Scripture. And so this morning, before we begin, would you imagine with me that I told you a very engaging story?

If the Holy Spirit's been talking to you about holiness, would you imagine that I shared a story that helped you consider the importance of pursuing holiness, some of the dangers of pursuing holiness, and how we can follow after Christ in holiness in a way that honors Him?

If the Holy Spirit's been dealing with you on the matter of love, which hopefully as you're going through our study guide on 1 Thessalonians that Pastor Andrew's prepared, that may be very likely. imagine that I shared with you a story that caught your attention about love, how it comes into our life, and how it flows out into our life. And the reason that I'm asking you to help me with this this morning is even though when you study preaching or teaching, they encourage you to focus on one main point that you want the congregation to remember and follow after this coming week, I'm completely ignoring that advice.

[2:12] And I'm going to try to cover all three of those topics, as you probably have noticed from your bulletin. So, if you would just help me with this introduction, and just trust that the Holy Spirit will lay on your heart what it is He has for you this morning, that would be of great help to me.

Let's open in prayer. Father, we come before you this morning, and Lord, we confess that we need you. We need your Spirit to work in our lives.

We ask that you would open our hearts and minds to your Word. You would help us to see truth. You would help our hearts to be receptive to that truth, and that through it, your Spirit would change us and make us more like Jesus.

Father, we thank you that you have not left us to ourselves, but that you've placed us in a body with our brothers and sisters in Christ, and that we can gather together this morning under the teaching of your Word.

And we ask that you would direct this time, that you would direct my words, that you would do as you see fit this morning to your Bride, to the body, to the church.

[3:31] And that through it all, you would be exalted and lifted up, that you would be glorified, and that we would be changed. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

This morning, we're going to be looking primarily at 1 Thessalonians 3, verses 11 through 13. And then, in some sense, we're going to look at how 1 Thessalonians 4, verses 9 through 12 connect to that.

And if you would follow along as I read those passages. 1 Thessalonians 3, verses 11 through 13. Now may our God and Father himself, and our Lord Jesus, direct our way to you. And may the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all, as we do for you.

So that he may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all the saints. 1 Thessalonians 4, 9 through 12.

[4:48] Now concerning brotherly love, you have no need for anyone to write to you, for you yourselves have been taught by God to love one

another.

For that indeed is what you are doing to all the brothers throughout Macedonia. But we urge you, brothers, to do this more and more, and to aspire to live quietly, and to mind your own affairs, and to work with your hands, as we instructed you, so that you may walk properly before outsiders and be dependent on no one.

I don't know if it's just me, but if you have been following along in the 1 Thessalonians study guide, Pastor Andrew has pointed out a few times the prayers of Paul.

And he's challenged us to consider the content of Paul's prayers in relation to how we normally pray. And the Holy Spirit has really been addressing this issue in my life from this study, and I've been trying to continually keep this in my mind over the last several weeks.

So when I began to study this passage in 1 Thessalonians 3, 11 through 13, the first thing that stood out to me is that it is a prayer.

[6:05] That we see God, and we see Paul speaking to God in asking for these things on behalf of the Thessalonians. And I don't know if you noticed, let me read again this passage to you.

1 Thessalonians 3, 11 through 13. And if you would, be attentive to what Paul is praying. He says, Isn't that amazing?

The depth of spiritual prayer in such a short passage. And I don't know if you can immediately appreciate it. Hopefully you've been considering it this week.

But as I have been meditating on it over the last several weeks, it continually surprises me at the depth we see there as Paul is praying for this church, as he's asking for God to cause their love to increase, to abound, as he's asking God to establish their hearts blameless in holiness.

And it causes me to stop and consider myself. The reality is, you might be tempted to say, well, he does pray here that he'll get to visit them.

[7:32] But even in that, if you were to back up just one verse into 1 Thessalonians 3, 10, we would see that he says, we pray most earnestly night and day that we may see you face to face and supply what is lacking in your faith.

So even in his prayer to visit them, Paul is asking to go and be a part of their fellowship, to share in strengthening them in their faith. And as you remember from our study so far, they're facing great persecution during this time.

And Paul is saying, Lord, let me enter into that persecution with them that we may walk and labor together. So even in that, we see a depth to Paul's prayers.

And that leads me to the first of seven diagnostic questions that I have for you this morning. The first is, how are your prayers? How are your prayers?

What are you praying for on a daily basis? For your physical needs, your health, your comfort, your financial needs? Maybe you're praying about these things for others as well.

[8:41] And it's not that those things are wrong. Of course, Scripture not only encourages us, but commands us to bring these things before God. But the thing that struck me again and again as I have been thinking about this is how often that is the extent of my prayers.

How often that is the extent of my prayers. And the question goes on. It says, how often are you intentionally praying for the spiritual growth of those God has put in your life?

Your brothers and sisters in Christ. Your co-workers. Your friends. Your parents. Your spouse. Your children. And praying the way we see Paul pray here.

With that depth. That wisdom. Let me challenge you. If you haven't picked up on it in the study guide so far, let me encourage you to go back and consider your prayer life.

Consider the prayer we find in Scripture. Begin to pray the way David prays in the Psalms. Begin to pray and align with how Jesus prays in the Gospels.

[9:52] How we see Paul praying in his letters. Don't be satisfied with a superficial prayer life. Don't be satisfied with stopping at just these physical needs.

This first layer of prayer. But let me encourage you and challenge you to pray deeper. To pray Scripture. And that's the main point of mini-sermon number one.

You can put that down if you're following along on your bulletin. The main point. Pray deeper. Pray Scripture. And so that's the first thing that stands out.

The second thing that I want us to look at, mini-sermon number two, is how we see in this prayer that love is not the end goal.

Okay? The second section that I want to look at is on the issue of holiness. And I think it's vitally important for us, before we get to the topic of love, which is our main topic, for us to realize even in Paul's prayer here that we have this sense that he is wanting not just a bunch of loving, nice people.

[11:04] You know? His prayer isn't that the people will just be pleasant to be around. He's not hoping that, you know, the church at Thessalonica will be the Chick-fil-A of their time.

You know? Where you just go and everybody's just nice. But Paul is pressing on further, deeper, and even in praying for their love to increase and abound.

His end goal is in verse 13 that the Lord would establish their hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of the Lord Jesus with all his saints.

And so I think it's important because we live in a time and a day where churches are often letting holiness slide and pursuing this sense of love that says, you know what?

Everything's really okay. We just, we need to be tolerant. We need to let people just think what they want. You know, there's no need to cause problems. If it's okay for you, then we just need to let it go.

[12:07] We need to show people that we love them. Okay? Now the problem is, and we've talked about this many times is just using the word love does not really, really communicate the biblical principle of love, right?

In our culture, we use the word love indiscriminately. And we've talked about that a lot. But one of the things I noticed as we look at this passage is that you can evaluate the authenticity of your love by determining whether or not it's moving you and others toward holiness or intimacy with Jesus.

Now think about that. As often as we use the word love in regards to your relationships or the things around you, here's a test that just stood out to me on how we can evaluate is it really love?

Right? So I'll just say it again. Hopefully it's up here. Oh good, it is. The authenticity of your love can be determined by whether or not it is moving you and others towards holiness or intimacy with Jesus.

So even though we see Paul praying for love it's not his end goal. The pursuit of holiness is. Now, there is a danger in our pursuing holiness.

[13:27] There is a danger in our pursuing holiness. And it's this. By nature we are inclined to evaluate our holiness and other people's holiness based on a set of rules.

You see, we see that very clearly in the Pharisees and Scripture, but you can also see it clearly if you look at every other religion. We begin to evaluate our holiness or other people's holiness on how well they keep a set of rules.

Now, that leads me to diagnostic question number two this morning. There's seven. Did I say that? Anyway, diagnostic question number two. What rules are you using to judge holiness?

And here's some options for you. Maybe you're using appearance rules. Maybe you're looking at people, how they dress, looking at their hair, their tattoos, their piercings.

You're asking yourself, do they look holy? Maybe you're looking at some educational rules. You're asking yourself, how's their vocabulary?

[14:37] What is their thinking like? What are their manners? What are the topics that they discuss openly and considering, do they sound holy? Or maybe, maybe you're more spiritual and you're using some spiritual activity rules.

Are they at church enough? Are they doing their devotions enough? Are they involved in the right ministries? Do they act holy? Now, please, let me be clear.

I'm not saying, I'm not saying that the way we look, the way we sound, and the things we do are unimportant. That they don't matter. I'm not saying that.

But, what I am saying is there's a danger here because if we begin to evaluate our holiness and other people's holiness on a list of rules, inevitably, we will then begin to pursue holiness by

following these rules.

Did you follow that? It's important. Let me say it again. If we begin to evaluate our holiness and other people's holiness based on a set of rules, we will inevitably begin to pursue holiness by keeping those rules.

[15:56] And the problem is, that's legalism. And we know, we know from looking at scripture, the Pharisees are not a good example given. We know legalism is a bad thing, but we have to be careful in our pursuit of holiness to not get caught up in rule keeping.

So, if holiness is important and we can't pursue it by following rules, what's the answer? Well, I think the prayer that Paul gives us right here. We pursue holiness through love.

And it's not just Paul. Here's some other passages to consider. Matthew chapter 22, verses 36 through 40. It says, Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law?

And Jesus said to him, You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment, and the second is like it.

You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the law and the prophets. Or Romans 13, 8 through 10.

[17:01] Paul says, Oh, no one anything except to love each other. For the one who loves another has fulfilled the law. For the commandments, you shall not commit adultery, you shall not murder, you shall not steal, you shall not covet, and any other commandment are summed up in this word.

You shall love your neighbor as yourself. Love does no wrong to a neighbor. Therefore, love is the fulfilling of the law.

And then 1 Peter 4, 8. Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins.

You see, if we pursue love, true love, godly love, Christ-centered love, it inevitably will move us towards holiness. And it will help us avoid the trap of legalism.

So, here's the main point for mini-sermon number two. If you're serious about holiness, pursue love, not law. Pursue love, not law.

[18:13] Well, that gets the introductory matter out of the way. Now, we can turn our attention to the main focus this morning, and that is spiritual affection.

Spiritual affection. Let me just read again 1 Thessalonians 3, 11 through 13. And we're going to look primarily at verse 12. Okay, so, pay very close attention in verse 12.

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

So, spiritual affection. The first thing I want us to look at in this is the source of love. The source of love. And we see that, again, in 1 Thessalonians 3, 12, as Paul is praying, May the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all.

The source of love. You see, Jesus is the source of real love. God-honoring love. Life-changing love. If you want to experience this kind of love in and through your life, it has to begin with a relationship with Jesus.

[19:42] He's the source. Now, that brings us to diagnostic question number three. How is your relationship with Jesus? How is your relationship with Jesus?

Now, let's be clear. I'm not asking you, are you attending church or are you reading your Bible or are you praying enough? The truth is, you could be doing all of those things and not have a relationship with Jesus.

Honestly, you could be doing those things your entire life and not have a relationship with Jesus.

So, how do we determine if we have a relationship with Jesus?

Well, here are some questions that you can consider. And interestingly enough, it's not really any different than any other relationship. Okay? Are you growing in your understanding of who Jesus is?

what he loves, what he hates? As you see him more clearly, is your affection for him growing? Do you desire greater intimacy with him?

[20:47] Do you love what he loves? Do you hate what he hates? Do you see his influence in your life affecting who you are, how you think, what you do?

Are you aware of the things that you think, say, or do that hurt your relationship with him or cause distance with him? Do you want to spend time with him?

When you neglect your time with him, do you see a hunger or a longing that's growing in your heart to be with him or more simply, do you miss him? You see, these are the kind of questions that we need to consider in evaluating our relationship with Jesus.

Now, maybe those questions cause you to realize you don't have a relationship with Jesus. Or, maybe it causes you to realize that you're pursuing activities related to Jesus but not pursuing a relationship with him.

The good news is, that can change right now, today. You can make a complete U-turn from whatever you've been doing and begin pursuing an intimate relationship with Jesus.

[21:58] If you're not sure how to start a relationship with Jesus or how to renew your relationship with Jesus, let me encourage you, don't leave today without talking to me or one of the leaders here at Maranatha.

We would really delight in helping you begin or restore an intimate relationship with Jesus. But the important thing for our sermon this morning is, this is the source of love.

If you want to experience life-changing love, love that not only impacts you but impacts others, it has to begin in your relationship with Jesus because he is the source.

The second thing that I want us to consider from this passage is the abundance of love. The abundance of love. And we see that also in chapter 3, verse 12, where he says, may the Lord make you increase and abound in love.

That word abound is the Greek word, I've been practicing this all week and I still know I'm going to get it wrong, parasuyo. If you're a Greek scholar, pretend I said it right.

[23:07] And sometimes that word is translated overflow, but here's a picture of overflow. But here's a picture, okay.

And as good as this concept is, I really like better how strong translates it as super abounding. Super abounding.

Super abounding. That's old faithful. Super abounding 30 to 40 gallons of water per second. And that's the concept here in this word that we translate abound.

And I've told you before, I am a little ADD when I'm studying. And this word really caught my attention and I like went off and began to study this word and where it's used in the New Testament. I made a list of 17 passages and it's just so interesting to see how this is used, whether it's from numbers of people to the glory of Christ to us having thanksgiving or experiencing grace, love, our ministry, hope, generosity, obedience, even suffering and comfort.

[24:16] Paul talks about us super abounding. As a matter of fact, we even see it in the passage that we're going to look at later, 1 Thessalonians 4.10, where Paul urges them to continue to do this more and more.

That's how it's translated in the ESV, but that first more is the same Greek word. So really he's saying that he's encouraging them to do this super aboundingly even more.

And so as we come to that list of passages, the one that I like best, just for the feeling of this idea of how our love should abound is found in 2 Corinthians 9.8.

2 Corinthians 9.8. And it says, And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work.

Isn't that a great verse? And you can stick super abound in there, it feels even better. And God is able to make all grace super abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may super abound in every good work.

[25:25] So diagnostic question number four. How is your abundance of love? This is a visual comparison, you'll have to look up here. So are you feeling kind of empty?

Are you feeling kind of midway, maybe mostly full? Or are you feeling like you're super abounding? Are you overflowing like old faithful?

First thing for you to consider, next thing for you to consider in this passage is the expression of our love, the expression of our love. 1 Thessalonians 3.12 again we see, he says, may the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all.

For one another and for all. You see, there's two dimensions to this abounding, super abounding love in our life. One is an internal expression in our sharing that love with our brothers and sisters in Christ.

And we've talked about this extensively in 1 John and now even into 1 Thessalonians. But there is also an external expression of this love where he talks about for all.

[26:39] You see, this is a love to those who are not Christians. This super abounding love isn't content just to gather us all together so we can stand inside the four walls of the church singing Kumbaya.

It overflows out into the world, into our neighborhoods. It gives us a love, a passionate love for those around us. And so, in that, we come to diagnostic question number five.

How is the expression of your love? How is the expression of your love? Internally. Are you loving your brothers and sisters here at Maranatha?

Are you willing to give sacrificially of your time, money, skills, and other resources to help meet their needs? Are you being faithful in attending Sunday school worship and small groups as an expression of your love for the brothers and sisters here?

Are you engaged in some ministry of the church in order to build each other up? Are you praying faithfully intentionally and deeply for the people at Maranatha?

[27:45] Are you nurturing unity or causing divisions? Are there any people that you're trying to avoid? Is there anyone that you're holding on to an offense or frustration, an anger, resentment, or some bitterness towards?

So stop and just consider that for a minute. How are you doing in your abundance of love internally to the body of Christ? Now consider externally.

Externally, are you concerned about those around you who don't know Jesus? Are you living with a missionary mindset right now? Are you willing to give sacrificially of your time, money, skills, and other resources to help those outside the church?

Are you praying for specific people and seeking ways to intentionally build relationships with them?

Are you seeking to connect more intimately with those at work or in your neighborhood?

Are you working to build teams that will care for those who don't know Jesus? Are there any types or kinds of people that you dislike, distrust, or avoid?

[28:58] Are there any people that you feel like you have hit your limit on forgiving, loving, and serving? Again, take a minute. Prayerfully consider the abundance of your love, both to your brothers and sisters in Christ and to the world, to those outside the church.

How are you doing? Is your love abounding? Is it super abounding? The last thing we're going to look at from this passage is the multiplication of love.

The multiplication of love. You see, this isn't just a love that we receive, but it's a love that multiplies out. And we see first and foremost that it multiplies out from God.

Remember, the first point is that Jesus is the source. Here's some verses that talk about how love multiplies out from God.

John 3.16 John 15.9 where Jesus says, As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you.

[30:16] Abide in my love. John 15.12 Jesus says, This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Romans 5.8 But God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

Ephesians 2.4 and 5 But God being rich in mercy because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ.

By grace you have been saved. 1 John 3.1 See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God, and so we are.

1 John 4.19 We love because he first loved us. Then into 1 Thessalonians 1.4 For we know, brothers, loved by God, that he has chosen you.

In the verse that we're going to look at momentarily, chapter 4, verse 9, Now concerning brotherly love, you have no need for anyone to write to you, for you yourselves have been taught by God to

love one another.

[31:37] You see, this super abounding love is a multiplying love that starts with God. He has poured it out into our lives.

We're the recipients of this super abounding love. love. We've received it. We've tasted it. We've experienced it. But it's not just for our pleasure.

We see Paul even here continuing to challenge the Thessalonians because it's a love that multiplies from believers as well. Notice in chapter 1 Thessalonians 3.12 He says, May the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all as we do for you.

Now, we've been looking at 1 Thessalonians so I'm sure you remember how Paul has described the love that he and his team have showed the people in Thessalonica.

He's talked about being like a nursing mother taking care of his own children, being affectionately desirous of them, being willing to share not only the gospel but their very lives with them, or talking about his love for them like a father, how he's worked and toiled to not be a burden to them, how he has been faithful to challenge them, to encourage them, to instruct them.

[32:53] And so we see this kind of love that's been multiplied out of Paul's life into the church at Thessalonica. But we see here in chapter 4, verses 9 and 10, he is calling them not to be content in receiving it, not even to be content with how they're expressing it presently, but challenging them to multiply it more and more.

1 Thessalonians 4, 9 and 10 says, Now concerning brotherly love, you have no need for anyone to write to you. You yourselves have been taught by God to love one another, for that indeed is what you're doing to all the brothers throughout Macedonia.

But we urge you brothers to do this super aboundingly even more. And then we see as he continues in chapter 4, verses 11 and 12, he paints this picture of this multiplying love as it is lived out in their lives.

As he says, And aspire to live quietly, to mind your own affairs, to work with your hands as we instructed you, so that you may walk properly before outsiders and be dependent on no one.

You see, he talks about how this multiplying love should affect how they're living in their community. And, you know, he talks about living quietly and minding your own affairs. Don't take that as isolationism.

[34:22] His point isn't, you know, just stay in your house and don't talk to anybody, you know, cocoon. That's what we tend to do. But that's not his point here. His point here is that you should be seeking to live in a way that builds peace and harmony in your community, not be in a busybody.

Don't be all up in everybody's business. right? And so, live in a way that's creating in your community something distinctive. He talks about working with your hands.

And it's obvious, if we were to look at 2 Thessalonians, that this is a challenge because the church at Thessalonica is so generous, so gracious, so giving, that there's some people that start to take advantage of that.

And in 2 Thessalonians 3, Paul says, for even when we were with you, we'd give you this command, if anyone's not willing to work, let him not eat. For we hear that there are some among you who are walking in idleness, not busy at work, but busy bodies.

Now such persons we command and encourage in the Lord Jesus Christ to do their work quietly and earn their own living. So, Paul calls them to live out this multiplying love in their community.

[35:37] And that brings us to diagnostic question number six. are you multiplying love? Are you multiplying love? So consider this. Who are you intentionally showing the love of Jesus to in your daily life?

Who are you actively seeking to multiply love into, both Christians and non-Christians? are you living in a way that promotes peace and unity in the church and promotes harmony and reconciliation outside of the church?

Are you doing all you can to work and take care of yourself, your family, and provide for those in need? Are you living in a way that even non-Christians would see as having an integrity of character so that this love that we've received from God can multiply out into the lives of others? So here's the main point for the main sermon. Super abound in love. Super abound in love.

Super abound in love. But there's one more diagnostic question. I told you there was seven. So in closing, consider this. What are your barriers to super abounding love?

[37:00] What are your barriers to super abounding love? Fear? Pride? Pain? Greed? Laziness?

Self-centeredness? Prejudice? Busyness? Bitterness? Anger? Apathy? Lack of faith? Lack of hope? Lack of confidence? Stubbornness?

Maybe there's something more. I can tell you that just studying this passage has really challenged me.

I, you know, I was kind of like at a full glass kind of guy when I was looking at the love in my life.

And as I dug into this passage, God just in his grace, his painful grace, has continued to show me again and again how unloving I really am.

So as we close today, I would just encourage you, be praying deeper. Be seeking to pursue love and asking that we would all, myself included, super abound in love.

[38:09] If you would, pray. Thank you.