

# Agonizing Expectations

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[ 0 : 00 ] Well, if you could choose a life that was completely free from suffering, if you could eliminate every source of suffering in your life, every disease you're experiencing, every physical ailment you're experiencing, every deep relational problem you're experiencing, every hardship you've suffered that haunts you to this day, if you could take all of those out of your life and experience an absolutely suffering-free life, would you do that?

If you were given that choice, would you choose that? Now, depending on who you are, you might say, no, I wouldn't choose that, or yes, I would.

And it is a deeper, more difficult question than it first appears, because we all recognize that even as good as that would be, to have all those sufferings taken away, we know this, that in order to be freed from suffering, in order to be freed from sadness, in order to be freed from fear, in order to be freed from agony, you and I would first need, we would need to be detached.

We would need to detach ourselves from all the relationships in our lives. Because a lot of that suffering, a lot of that suffering comes from the people that are close to us.

To love other people is to suffer. And if we were to detach ourselves from all the people in our lives, many of us would say, you know, that's a price that's not worth paying.

[ 1 : 40 ] That's something that, even in our culture, we often point out from here, from the pulpit, ways in which God's word does not align with our culture, ways in which God's word critiques and corrects our culture.

But here's one I think that we at least get right, at least in Hollywood movies. In Hollywood movies and TV shows that I've seen, I've seen several examples where, you know, it's a movie or TV show that's heavily influenced by Eastern religious thought.

I think, for example, just to name one, a movie like *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*. And in a movie like this, the hero is sometimes forced to decide between either, on the one hand, achieving eternal bliss by detaching himself from his earthly relationships.

So on the one hand, you achieve eternal bliss by detaching yourself from your earthly relationships, or on the other hand, you remain attached on earth with the one you love. You remain attached on earth with the one you love.

And invariably, this is one thing that I've noticed, that at least Hollywood gets right, at least the TV studios get right, is invariably the hero chooses the attachment. The hero chooses the entanglement.

[ 2 : 51 ] The hero chooses the relationship, even if it means being entangled and suffering as well. Now, the problem is that even though our culture does claim to value these close bonds with one another, this value, unfortunately, runs into conflicts.

It runs into conflicts with other things that we value more. And you see this play out all the time in your life. You see this play out all the time in the life of the people that you love. This value that we place on relationships, conflicts with our independence, conflicts with our self-determination, and it conflicts with our desire for a pleasant and carefree life.

So how do we as Christians navigate this question? How do we approach our relationships in a wise way, in a way that the people of God are meant to?

Well, we've been studying the Apostle Paul's letter to the first century church that he had founded in the Macedonian city of Thessalonica. And so this letter, 1 Thessalonians, as we've been studying it, we're learning about the great expectations that God has given to those who believe in Jesus Christ.

And we've learned that these great expectations, they are the means that God uses to transform us into a vibrant people. We've learned that God implants these great expectations in us through the nurturing work of the family of Christ.

[ 4 : 25 ] And we've talked about how these great expectations give you, they give me an unshakable, solid joy that can never be taken away from us.

Because God has called us into his own kingdom and glory. Because God has a great future in store for us when Jesus Christ returns to fully and finally establish God's kingdom on earth.

Where we will be freed from all suffering. Where we will be freed from all injustice. Where everything will be made right. So now that our great expectations have been implanted, now that they are transforming us, this brings us to this question.

Does this mean that now that we have this hope, now that we have these great expectations, that now we exist in sort of a perpetually joyful state, that we exist in a state of idyllic bliss, you know, we're just completely unfazed by any of the problems in our lives and the lives of the people around us.

You know, we go through hardships, bad things happen, and we're just like just absolute pie in the sky, hovering above it all on our, you know, chariots in the clouds. Is this something that is meant to be the Christian experience?

[ 5 : 42 ] Are we detached from the family and friends who used to hold a great influence on our emotional state? Are we so heavenly minded that we're no earthly good, as the saying goes?

And far from it. Far from it. What we're going to find is this, that even though you and I, we do on the one hand have a deep underlying joy and peace that is unshakable, that cannot be taken away from you, because of these great expectations of being with Jesus Christ forever and ever, of a resurrection life with Jesus.

Although we have that, we are not freed from the daily joys and agonies that are so characteristic of life in this present age. We are not freed from those.

Our great expectations do not detach us and free us from suffering. We rejoice and agonize over one another because of our great expectations of life together in Christ.

We rejoice and agonize over one another because of our great expectations of life together in Christ. Not in spite of our great expectations, but in fact because of them.

[ 6 : 54 ] And you can see this in 1 Thessalonians as we reach chapter 2, verse 17. So we've gone through nearly two chapters of 1 Thessalonians so far.

We arrive at chapter 2, verse 17 this week, and I'm going to read for us chapter 2, verse 17, through chapter 3, verse 5. So follow along with me in your own Bible.

If you are using one of the blue Bibles that our ushers handed to you, you'll find the reading on page 986. But since we were torn away from you, brothers, for a short time in person, not in heart, we endeavored the more eagerly and with great desire to see you face to face because we wanted to come to you, I, Paul, again and again.

But Satan hindered us. For what is our hope or joy or crown of boasting before our Lord Jesus Christ at his coming?

Is it not you? For you are our glory and joy. Therefore, when we could bear it no longer, we were willing to be left behind at Athens alone.

[ 8 : 06 ] And we sent Timothy, our brother and God's co-worker in the gospel of Christ, to establish and exhort you in your faith that no one be moved by these afflictions.

For you yourselves know that we are destined for this. For when we were with you, we kept telling you beforehand that we were to suffer affliction just as it has come to pass and just as you know.

For this reason, when I could bear it no longer, I sent to learn about your faith for fear that somehow the tempter had tempted you and our labor would be in vain.

This is the word of the Lord. We rejoice and agonize over one another because of our great expectations of life together in Christ.

And that is precisely Paul's experience in his relationship with the Thessalonians. These verses, if you just look at these verses, they are saturated with the language of affection, aren't they?

[ 9 : 09 ] They're saturated with this language. We were torn away. We endeavored more eagerly with great desire. You are our hope, our joy, our crown, our glory, our joy.

We could bear it no longer. There's a deep heartfelt affection. These are deeply emotional words. We see this right from the beginning in verses 17 and 18.

Paul writes there, Since we were torn away from you, brothers, for a short time, in person, not in heart, we endeavored them more eagerly and with great desire to see you face to face because we wanted to come to you.

I, Paul, again and again, but Satan hindered us. Now instead of that phrase, we were torn away, I like the way that the New International Version translates it because it brings out something, it brings out something that some of the other translations miss.

And this is the new, this is that the New International Version translates verse 17 with the phrase, instead of we were torn away, it says we are, we were orphaned. We were orphaned. And that captures very well the meaning that Paul is trying to convey because he and his apostolic band, he and Silas and Timothy, they were forced out of Thessalonica by an angry mob before they wanted to leave.

[ 10 : 37 ] And they're devastated by their separation from this little Thessalonian church. They are orphaned. They are bereaved. They have been torn away from their family.

And Paul, when he says that, he is not speaking metaphorically. He's not speaking metaphorically as though his relationship with them is, you know, it's like a family relationship.

He's speaking in an even more literal sense because they are a family in the very truest sense of the word. In fact, they are more of a family than Paul's own biological family.

And that is because everyone who believes in Jesus Christ, everyone who believes that Jesus is the Son of God, everyone who trusts that Jesus died and rose again from the dead in order to reconcile us to God, everyone who believes this is welcomed into the family of God, our Father.

Why? Because we are identified with Jesus Christ and we are united with Jesus Christ by faith. We are in Christ.

[ 11 : 49 ] And so, we are brothers and sisters in the truest possible sense of the word. If anything, our biological ties, our biological kinships that we have, they are the metaphor for this truer brotherhood, this truer family relationship that supersedes even our bloodlines and our birth records.

Blood runs thicker than water and Christ's blood runs thicker than both. And so, Paul is not exaggerating or speaking symbolically in any way when he says that he is orphaned, that he is bereaved by being torn away from the Thessalonians.

He knows that it's true. He feels the intense pain, the heartache, the longing of an orphan. He is torn away in person, not in heart.

And he longs for their reunion. He wants to be present with them. He makes every effort to reunite with them. He literally says in verse 18, only the devil himself could keep them apart.

In a few minutes, we'll see how this agony is connected, how it is strengthened by our great expectations. But for now, we can learn this.

[ 13 : 14 ] Here is how this is significant to you and me. You and I respond to the agony of great expectations by being present. By being present with one another.

Our presence is a response to our agony. So here is what Christians, here is how, what people with great expectations do. Here is how people in God's family live.

They are present. They show up. And they show up consistently, faithfully, regularly. This means that people in God's family are not inconsistent.

They are not hit or miss with their attendance on Sunday mornings. They don't come, you know, just when the mood strikes or when things are the most convenient or when there's nothing better to do.

They don't disappear for entire seasons because there's better recreation to be found on the bike trails of Squamish or the ski slopes of Whistler. If you belong to the family of God, you show up at our weekly family reunions.

[ 14 : 20 ] I'd also add that simply showing up on Sunday mornings and then immediately afterwards peeling out of the parking lot as fast as you can as soon as the service is over. That isn't enough. If you had a weekly family dinner and that's the way that one of your family members treated you, as soon as dinner was over, they rush out the door and get out of there as fast as possible.

What would that say about your family relationship? That isn't enough. That is not how we live in God's family. We welcome one another. We knit our lives together.

We grow together. We are entwined with one another. That, for example, that's why our church promotes growth groups. A growth group is not the only way.

It isn't the only way to be present with your family in a more intimate way. The reason we promote it is because, honestly, it's one of the best ways there is. It's one of the best ways we know of. It gives you the opportunity to take what we're learning this morning and to put it into practice in your particular life situation, strengthened and encouraged by your brothers and sisters in Christ.

It gives you the opportunity to encourage one another and pray for one another as brothers and sisters in God's family. So being present, it isn't about checking off a minimum requirement on an attendance sheet.

[ 15 : 36 ] It's not like I'm going to go and look around at each of you and think, oh, they're only here 35 Sundays out of 52. You know, that's not what it's about. It is about your answer to the question, do you ache to be present here with your family?

Do you ache to be present here with your family? Does it feel wrong on those Sundays when you're not here? Do you want to be back with your family?

For some of us, for some of us, the answer is, yes, that's exactly how I feel, but there is an obstacle that prevents me from coming.

Paul can absolutely sympathize with you if that's the case because that was Paul's situation. He tells the Thessalonians in verse 18, we wanted to come to you.

I, Paul, again and again, but Satan hindered us. And he doesn't identify exactly what Satan is doing to hinder their family reunion.

[ 16 : 43 ] Some commentators speculate, maybe this is some sort of disease. Maybe this is some sort of physical ailment. Paul mentions something that seems to be fairly similar, fairly reminiscent to this in some of his other letters.

Some commentators speculate, maybe this is opposition. He's referring to the opposition to their work in Thessalonica from both Jews and Gentiles who are hostile to the gospel message.

church. Maybe it's simply the heavy demands of their work in Berea and in Athens. In the same way, there are some of us who aren't always able to be present, who aren't always able to show up due to illness, due to infirmity, due to family dynamics.

Look, that's understandable. And if that's your situation, if Satan has hindered you from being present with God's family whom you love, let me urge you, speak to your growth group, speak to the elders of our church, ask us to pray what Paul prays in chapter 3, verse 11.

Now may our God and Father himself and our Lord Jesus direct our way to you. I invite you to pray with us so that whatever hinders you from being present may be removed so that we can be present together as a family.

[ 18 : 13 ] We rejoice and agonize over one another because of our great expectations of life together in Christ. Our presence is a response to our agony.

And then it is our great expectations that are a basis for our agony. Our great expectations are the basis for our agony. Paul writes in verses 19 and 20, chapter 2, verses 19 and 20, for what is our hope or joy or crown of boasting before our Lord Jesus at his coming?

Is it not you? For you are our glory and joy. And so here we see Paul visualizing his future.

He is visualizing his great expectations. He is thinking forward, imagining the future time when the Lord Jesus returns to earth to claim the whole world as his kingdom, to reign forever and ever.

And Paul is eager to stand before Jesus, to be welcomed into his presence, to appear with him. And Paul is excited that he will not be alone.

[ 19 : 21 ] He will appear in triumph before Jesus with his hope, his joy, his crown of boasting with the little church in Thessalonica together with him. Paul's triumphant appearance, it depends on the presence, it depends on the progress of his children, the Thessalonian believers that he proclaimed the good news to, that he instructed, that he encouraged and strengthened with a motherly nurturing care, with a father's instruction and guidance.

These believers, they are his pride and joy. He cannot help but talk about them. He says the same thing about the church in Corinth. 2 Corinthians 1, he says, on the day of our Lord Jesus, you will boast of us as we will boast of you.

That's the way Christians brag. We brag about one another. That is something that every good parent understands, right? If you're a mom, if you're a dad, don't you triumph as your children triumph if you're a good parent.

Their first steps, riding a bike for the first time without training wheels, getting A's on their report card, performing in their first school play, winning an athletic competition, graduating from school.

Don't you celebrate? Don't you talk endlessly about your kid to anyone who will put up with it? Don't you post like 500 photos to Instagram?

[ 20 : 57 ] You love your children. You identify with your children. Their triumph is your triumph. And so it is with Paul. His passion, his pride in the church, they are so intense.

They're so intense, most of our English translations have to smooth out his grammar because it gets really awful here. In verses 19 through 20, here's what Paul is trying to write. He's trying to write this.

What is our hope or joy or crown of boasting before our Lord Jesus at his coming? And here's how it comes out as. What is our hope or crown of boasting? Is it not you before our Lord Jesus at his coming?

He can't even finish his sentence without saying, it's you. You are our hope. You are our joy. You are our crown of boasting. And then he says it again in verse 20.

You are our glory and joy. His joy depends on whether the Thessalonians are remaining faithful to Jesus Christ. This does not mean that Paul is robbed of all joy if they fall away from Christ.

[ 22 : 06 ] Rather, his joy is made complete by his great expectations of appearing before Jesus Christ together with his family from Thessalonica.

And that is the way that Christians are meant to think. That is the way that we think in the family of God. Our great expectations are not merely, you know, me and Jesus together forever.

Our great expectations are the ultimate family reunion. All of us together with Jesus Christ never to be separated again. This is our joy, our glory, and hope.

And let me just say as one of the elders, I think I speak for all of us as elders, it would break our hearts to appear before Jesus Christ in glory and to be missing some of you. But break our hearts if you are not there with us.

You are our glory. You are our joy. You are. if your desires are set passionately on this hope, then you might find that the present world is holding great agony in store for you.

[ 23 : 23 ] Because along with this joy comes the agony. In 2 Corinthians chapter 11, Paul runs through this huge list of all the awful things that he has had to suffer, that he has had to endure as an apostle of Jesus Christ.

And at the end of the list, Paul adds this. And apart from other things, there is the daily pressure on me of my anxiety for all the churches.

Who is weak and I am not weak? Who is made to fall and I am not indignant? This relationship of joy and agony, that is Paul's relationship with his family.

This relationship of joy and agony was Christ's relationship with his disciples. And it is your relationship and it is my relationship together.

If we are following in the footsteps of Jesus Christ, if we are living as Jesus Christ did and valuing what he values, we rejoice and agonize over one another because of our great expectations of life together in Christ.

[ 24 : 35 ] Our presence is a response to our agony and our great expectations are the basis for our agony. And then Paul explains how his agony for the Thessalonians played out in chapter 3 verses 1-4.

When we could bear it no longer, we were willing to be left behind at Athens alone and we sent Timothy, our brother and God's co-worker in the gospel of Christ to establish and exhort you in your faith that no one be moved by these afflictions.

For you yourselves know that we are destined for this. For when we were with you, we kept telling you beforehand that we were to suffer affliction just as it has come to pass and just as you know.

So how agonized, how agitated were Paul and his companions? Well, you can see here they were agonizing so much that they sent Timothy back to Thessalonica and that left them in Athens less effective in proclaiming the gospel, less able to financially support themselves, less able to protect themselves from bandits and violent mobs.

Sending Timothy was a risk but the alternative was unbearable. And Paul says they sent Timothy for this purpose, to establish and exhort you in your faith that no one be moved by these afflictions.

[ 25 : 59 ] So he sent Timothy with encouraging and strengthening words, words to remind them of the apostles' message, words to remind them of the truth, words to remind them of their great expectations in Jesus Christ.

So our presence is a first response to our agony. Our great expectations are the basis for our agony and it's our words that are a second response to our agony.

Are there words of encouragement that you have meant to say to someone here who is suffering? Have you allowed those words to go unsaid?

those words of encouragement and especially words that remind your brother and sister of their great expectations, those words are desperately, desperately needed.

say them as soon as you can. If you don't have words of encouragement that you've been meaning to give, if saying that doesn't really bring anything immediately to mind, well, perhaps it's time to ask this question.

[ 27 : 05 ] Who has God sent you? Who has God sent you to exhort and encourage? Who has God put in your path? In other words, who has God sent you to be made a disciple of Jesus Christ?

Now notice that I didn't phrase it this way. Has God sent you to make a disciple? Absolutely he has. Absolutely he has. Because this is what human beings are meant to do.

This is the whole reason why we were created. To multiply the image of God on earth by making disciples of all nations. That is what we were meant to do. So who has God given you?

Who has God put in your life to encourage and to disciple? I don't care if you're 90 or 19 years old. Who has God put in your life to encourage and disciple?

Have you been eager to speak words to God too? Have you been eager to pray to intercede for your brothers and sisters in Christ? Have you been eager to pray with them as well? I could go on a little while about this but I'll just say that prayer the North American church we are terrible at this.

[ 28 : 19 ] We are so autonomous so independent so self-sufficient so self-determining that prayer is just not something that we like to do and especially not prayer with other believers.

The worst attended church events in nearly any church I've ever been at and that includes this one the worst attended events on the church calendar are always the prayer events. In fact if you want people to pray together you usually have to put something else along with the prayer.

We have to be studying the Bible together or meeting together for something else and then we can also pray as well. We don't like to pray. And North American culture is probably the hardest place in the world to learn how to pray.

And it shows us that we don't I don't know that we really value our dependence on God and I don't know that we really value our dependence on one another. We need it though. We need this dependence.

We're kidding ourselves if we think we don't need it because Paul reminds us in verses 3 and 4 that our suffering is inevitable. Our suffering is inevitable.

[ 29 : 27 ] He writes you yourselves know that we are destined for this. For when we were with you we kept telling you beforehand that we were to suffer affliction just as it has come to pass.

And just as you know. So our suffering is to be expected. That is part of our experience in this age. In this age of history before Jesus Christ returns.

And that's true not only of opposition to our faith where we suffer because we have believed in Jesus Christ and chosen to live as his people and his family.

suffering. That's relatively mild in our setting here in Squamish. This is something that is true of all suffering. Of any sort of suffering. Notice how Paul says to the Thessalonians though in verse 4 that we were to suffer affliction.

Up to this point he has used the word we to refer to himself and Silas and Timothy. He has then used the word you to refer to the Thessalonians and now he's saying we, all of us together were to suffer affliction.

[ 30 : 45 ] And it's this approach to suffering that is very very different. This is something that Paul gets that I don't know that you and I really get. I don't think this way very often because what Paul is saying is that just like our joy you and I tend to view suffering we tend to view it as an individual experience.

that my suffering is purely my own. Your suffering is your own. We view suffering as sort of siloed off from the other people in our lives.

And this warped individualism has terrible terrible consequences in the church. Because I've known Christians who are suffering greatly from physical pain or a painful family relationship or a mental illness or whatever else the devil brings their way and they insist on keeping this suffering to themselves.

Because they don't want to bother other Christians. They think that they can bear the load themselves. Well first of all you probably can't.

yes God has given you the means to endure and stand up under suffering. Usually that means includes the rest of your family.

[ 32 : 09 ] You are cutting yourself off from the goodness and grace of God. You were not meant to bear the load of suffering yourself any more than the Thessalonians were.

Any more than the Thessalonians could. Second if you are suffering the rest of your church family will suffer.

If you are suffering the rest of your church family also suffers. I don't say they'll suffer if you let them know about it if you tell them about it. No. They will suffer period. And they do suffer if you're suffering.

The only question is how will they suffer? will they suffer because you start to isolate yourself because you hide your problems away because you fail to bless others with the ministry gifts God has given you?

Will they suffer because they sense something is wrong and you've become a cause for concern and worry for your brothers and sisters in Christ who don't know how to help you?

[ 33 : 15 ] will they suffer and not even realize it because of all the good things that God could do through you all the ways he could bless his people through you if only you would welcome other believers into your life and open up your heart to share your sufferings with them?

Or will they suffer because you opened up? Because you kept them updated on what you're going through? Will they suffer as they help to bear your burden by listening to you, by praying with you, by encouraging you, by serving of you, by giving and giving of their time and resources?

Now let me tell you what, if I am going to suffer, let me suffer alongside you, not suffer on account of you. I would much rather suffer alongside you than suffer on account of you.

Paul writes in Philippians chapter 3, verse 10, that Jesus Christ had invited Paul to share his sufferings. Not as though the atoning work Jesus did is something that Paul can do, but rather that suffering that comes with gospel ministry that Jesus experienced, Paul could share it.

If you are trying to shield other people from your sufferings, then you are trying to be more loving than Jesus. So stop it. Stop being so proud and start obeying our Lord and Savior.



[ 34 : 55 ] Open yourself up to words of gospel truth. Open yourself up to words of life and hope. We rejoice and agonize over one another because of our great expectations of life together together in Christ.

Our presence is a first response to our agony. Our great expectations are the basis for that agony. In our words, they're a second response. And finally, as a third response to our agony, we have our actions.

And Paul concludes in chapter 3, verse 5. For this reason, when I could bear it no longer, I sent to learn about your faith.

For fear that somehow the tempter had tempted you and our labor would be in vain. Notice here that Paul, he was not just sitting around like, you know, whining about the situation.

He wasn't just sitting around, you know, griping and pining over the Thessalonian church. They could bear it no longer, so what does Paul do? He puts some plans together and he takes action.

[ 36 : 06 ] He sends Timothy. not only to speak to the Thessalonian church, but to hear and to listen to them. To understand where their faith is, to understand how they're doing.

Paul does not fall into a trap that I often fall into. Here's the trap that I fall into. I have a tendency to be satisfied with good intentions. I think of a good thing that I could do.

I have all sorts of ideas of good things that I could do. And I sort of visualize it in my mind. I visualize myself doing it. I visualize all the response to it and all the good things that could happen as a result.

And man, that triggers feelings of happiness, right? Yeah, it feels pretty good. Wouldn't that be great? Yeah, yeah. And I get too satisfied. I'm satisfied way too easily with these good intentions.

I get that happy feeling and that's it. And I don't do anything. You know what? Good intentions that produce a happy feeling and no results, they are not just useless, they are worse than useless.

[ 37 : 16 ] Because they serve as a substitute for action. Satan would love it if your life is filled with good intentions and no action.

He would happily accept that. But Paul does not do that. Paul doesn't let these good intentions be enough. He wants more.

So he executes his plan. He sends Timothy because he knows that the tempter, Satan, he's not sitting around thinking, oh man, wouldn't it be great if this or that or that?

Satan isn't just sitting around enjoying his bad intentions. Satan is intending to act and he follows through. He is hard at work.

He is tempting the Thessalonians and Paul knows it and so Paul has to act too. Paul chooses to act in response to his own agony and in response to their suffering.

[ 38 : 17 ] Now that's significant for you and me because it challenges us. It challenges you and me to actually take action. Our decisions to encourage one another, our decisions to grow in maturity together, our decisions to serve one another, they will be a source of either joy or sorrow to those who love you.

don't think that somehow your decision to serve or not to serve or to do this or not to do that will have no effect on the body of Christ. Don't think that what you do in private will have no effect on the body of Christ.

It always does. Every decision you make has an effect on your family because we are woven together, because we are one in Christ. And especially it has an effect on those who are discipling you, on those who are serving as your elders here at SBC.

Basically, all I'm doing is just saying, this is just a fancy way of saying you are your brother's keeper. Don't be like Cain, who asked God, am I my brother's keeper?

As though he had no responsibility and no connection to his brother Abel. You and I do have a responsibility. We are connected to one another in the family of God. We are inseparable.

[ 39 : 31 ] And all the decisions you make and all the actions you take or don't take have an effect on the people around you for their joy or their agony. Let me give you a couple of opportunities for action.

So, a couple choices that you can make to strengthen your ties in the family of God. So, you know, we could just use the bulletin as our cue inside back page. First, if you've put your faith in Jesus Christ, but you haven't been baptized, now is the time for action.

If you truly have put your faith in Jesus Christ and you have not marked out your faith and demonstrated that you are a Christian with action, just as Jesus commanded, please talk with me about it after the service or if you don't have an opportunity to talk with me, that's what this communication card is good for.

Down near the bottom, you can check off, I would like information about baptism. Turn it in at the Welcome Center and I'll get in touch with you. We can talk about baptism.

That's a sign that Jesus chose as a clear mark of identity, a clear proclamation that you are in Christ, that you belong to the family of God. A Christian who has never been baptized is like a soldier who has never worn a uniform.

[ 40 : 48 ] Soldiers wear uniforms. It's just what they do. And Christians get baptized. It's just what they do. Second. Second opportunity.

Carl is planning to lead a class on church membership. If you're not a member of Squamish Baptist Church, let me explain to you a little bit about membership. Membership isn't something, it's not like baptism.

Baptism is a mark of a true Christian. Membership is not. Church membership is not a mark of a true Christian. It is not a mark of like a super Christian. Someone who's like extra holy and worthy to be a church member, okay?

First of all, let me tell you what. If that's true, there are zero, going to be zero members in this church. Because there are no super Christians. There are no people who are super, super holy.

Membership is this. Formalized church membership. It's not explicitly mentioned in the Bible. I think there's a lot of precedent in scripture for it and the genealogies of the Old Testament and the numbering of the churches in the New Testament.

[ 41 : 50 ] But I think formalized church membership is incredibly valuable because it's wise. It's wise. Because it's good communication. Anytime you're in a tight-knit, close relationship with one another, good communication is vital.

It is vital. And if you don't think so, then your marriage must be a mess. Good communication is vital. It is good communication to verbalize.

It is good communication to clarify our expectations of what Christians believe, of our expectations of what our behavior towards one another and towards God should be like here at Squamish Baptist Church.

Because let me tell you what, people come into our church with very wildly different expectations with one another. So we need to be on the same page. We absolutely need to be on the same page.

And that's what membership is so valuable for. Remember, every wise person in a close relationship with one another will communicate clearly about roles and expectations. That means that formalized church membership is wise.

[ 42 : 55 ] The alternative is an informal church membership, which is ill-defined and is just begging for Satan to tear us apart as he takes advantage of our poor communication with one another.

If you're interested in church membership, talk to Carl. If you don't know who Carl is, is Carl here? Where's Carl? He's there. Guy in the back with his hand up. So talk with him.

If you can't get in touch with Carl, that's what this yellow card once again is good for. Just check off at the bottom, I would like information about membership. And Carl will get in touch with you. I could list a lot of other things here.

I mean, there's a need for children's Christmas pageant. If you're interested in leading that, that's great. We're looking for someone to help with that. I could list off a whole bunch of other things.

Like, there are so many things that I don't even know about. So many needs in this church, personal needs that people have. And I know that many of you are serving in those ways, and that's awesome. That is so wonderful. That is so good.

[ 43 : 56 ] We need you. And I'm so glad. And I can just look out, it's all the faces here, and I can see so many of you are like, I know ways that they are taking action.

I know ways that they are active and serving and helping with our church. And that's awesome. I'm so proud of these people. I'm so proud of these dear brothers and sisters in Christ who are faithfully, actively serving.

If you'd like to know how you can serve in just any other way, if you just don't know, you want to, you've got the heart of a servant, but you want to know how you can take action and strengthen the body of Christ and encourage them.

You know what? You know, come talk to any one of us elders. We'll be happy to connect you with areas of need in our church. We'll be happy to connect you with people in need in our church. We do this because our great expectations, they lead us not to hold one another at arm's length.

We don't hold one another at arm's length. Instead, we draw each other in. We care for each other. That is what life is meant to be in the family of God.

[ 45 : 10 ] We rejoice and agonize over one another because of our great expectations of life together in Christ. Let's pray.