



Scott Turansky, Senior Pastor
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2 CORINTHIANS 13:11-14

2 Corinthians Series

[PRAYER] It means so much to us, Lord, that we can have life in you and enjoy that life in a special way. Lord, you've equipped us with so many tools and things to hear you. We can hear you through your word, we can hear you through the brothers and sisters in the fellowship as we come together. And we need that touch from you in our lives. Lord, we come to you as needy people. We come with our own challenges and struggles and things that we're facing every day. Lord, help us now to experience you in the midst of all of that so that we can experience the joy you want in our own hearts. Lord, take us into your word now. Use your Spirit to enlighten us in this passage. In Jesus' name, amen.

I know some of you have gone to a commencement ceremony over the last few days where you have someone you know graduated or your kids graduated or you graduated from something. And that is always a special time. The word commencement means the beginning of something. And so they call it a commencement in graduation. Why? Because it's the beginning. It's the beginning of where you're going, not the end of something. They want you to know you're advancing, you're moving forward.

Well we come to the last part, the last few verses of 2 Corinthians, and I would consider this Paul's commencement speech to us as he's finishing the book of 2 Corinthians. So congratulations, everyone. You've graduated from 2 Corinthians. Imagine yourself with your cap and your gown on and you're now hearing the commencement speech from Paul in his writing and hear the things he says about it. Where you go from here. We are moving forward. We are not just looking back.

So there's some real good teaching in these last few verses of 2 Corinthians 13. We're going to look at verses 11-15. If you have your Bible with you, open it up because I want you to see the wording that is in your Bible. The translation you have might be a little different than the NIV that I'm going to throw on the screen. Those differences are important because they help you to understand more fully what the words themselves mean.

Would you stand with me? Let's look at this scripture and we'll read this together.

Finally, brothers and sisters, rejoice! Strive for full restoration, encourage one another, be of one mind, live in peace. And the God of love and peace will be with you.

Greet one another with a holy kiss. All God's people here send their greetings.

May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

You may be seated.

We've been in this passage now for thirty-four sermons. I counted them up this week. This is number thirty-four. It seems to have gone quite fast, but there's really been thirty-four weeks we've looked at this passage of scripture.

I entitled it "All Things New." Mainly because as we're looking at the verses in Paul's writing, he comes to this verse in 2 Corinthians 5:17 – *If anyone is new in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has gone, the new has come!* We need to realize again that we're part of this new creation. If you accepted Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior, there's new creation happening in your life. Obviously a reference to the old creation, that is the first creation that God did when He started the world. Now He's doing a new creation in our lives.

I love spring because it's the time when things that appear to be dead come to life. We have buds that come out on the trees and we have flowers that bloom, and we have bulbs that are coming out of the ground. All of those things happen and there's new life taking place. If you're a Christian, then you are a new creation, a new life. New color is coming out in your life regularly. It's a process. God is growing you. All things become new. That's what He says. And that's how we live. That's what we enjoy in our relationship with Christ.

Also if you look at the subtitle, I called it "Embracing God's Power for Today." Because we learned all about God's power in our situations, in our inner being to deal with our own challenges, to deal with relationships. We see all of this about the power of God and how it is accessible to us. We have access to God's power. One of the verses that I remember in this study as we were going through it is 2 Corinthians 12:9 where it says – *But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me.*

So we even had t-shirts made that many of you wear that say "I am weak, but I am experiencing the power of God." There's this sense that as Christians we recognize that we are weak. Paul even goes further. He says – *I glory in my weakness.* That's advanced, I think, weakness training to be able to glory in our weakness. Because why? Because we see God is at work. Even though I am hurt or I am struggling or I have challenges, God wants to do some amazing things. Of course He says – *My grace is sufficient.* So it's God's grace that brings that power into our lives in a positive way.

So now we go into this last section of the book, the very last verses and this commencement speech that Paul gives to us as we rejoice in being done with the book. It's hard to say goodbye to the book, but as we finish this book, we're going into another one, and Paul has some concluding remarks that he wants to give to us to inspire us to go forward. So you can see that as you read the passage.

He says – *Finally, brothers and sisters*. So this is the end in his writing of this letter. He’s saying *finally*. In other words this is how I want to end my letter. And notice he’s talking to *brothers and sisters*. He’s talking to believers, like you and me. So we can take these ideas and we can receive them in this sense of this family relationship that Paul is sharing with them.

The very next word is a very important word, the word *rejoice*. In the Greek it means rejoice. But some of your versions say *goodbye*. The reason it says that in some versions is because it’s a salutation. It’s a greeting of sorts. If you were in the Jewish community, often they use a greeting. Their greeting is *shalom*, which means peace. Paul is giving a greeting here and the greeting is rejoice. So that’s why some translators have translated it goodbye.

When I lived in Kenya, there was a greeting I learned in Kenya in Swahili. If you’re just meeting someone on the street that you don’t know if they’re a Christian or not, you just say “jambo.” “Jambo” means hello. But if you find out that they’re a Christian or you know you’re greeting a Christian then you reach out your hand, you shake their hand, and you say “bwana asifiwe,” which means praise the Lord. Every time you greet someone, “Praise the Lord. Praise the Lord.” Every time. That’s the greeting. There’s meaning, there’s depth to that greeting that strengthens the bond between those people.

Now Paul is giving this greeting, *rejoice*, because it’s a summary. Maybe even a summary of Paul’s primary essence in his life. The guy had experienced a lot of pain, but rejoicing in the midst of all the stuff that he experienced in his life.

I just want to pause for a moment and suggest that greetings are important. If you’re in a marriage relationship, it’s important to greet your spouse. When you get up in the morning, you greet them. When you go to bed at night, you greet them. When you go on out the door, you greet them. When you come home from work, you greet them. Greetings are important because they oil the machinery of communication in a relationship. It’s very important. You might think that a “hi” or a “hello” isn’t that important, but it is important because it expresses value of the other person. Greetings are important. Now Paul is doing that here. He’s greeting these people and he’s saying *rejoice*. That’s the greeting that he gives.

Now the next four words... I say four words because they’re separated by commas here. In English it takes more English words to communicate than it does in Greek. Because Greeks, like Spanish or some of the other languages like that, have the endings of the word is telling you who’s saying it or whether it’s an exhortation or something like that. So we have four verbs here.

The first one is *strive for full restoration*. So that’s one word. The second one is *encourage one another*. The third one, *be of one mind*. And the fourth one, *live in peace*. So four different words are mentioned there. They’re all verbs or implied verbs there because they’re telling us what we are to do. So it’s within those words that we’re going to find some interesting insight into this passage and what Paul wants us to know in this commencement speech.

Let’s start with the first one. *Strive for full restoration*. Now in the bottom I put some of the other translations that come because this is a hard word to translate. There are just some words that are difficult to translate, so the translators come up with different ideas. As we look at several

different translations, we come up with a richness of what that word actually means. So it could be *strive for full restoration*, *aim for perfection*, *grow to maturity*, *aim for restoration*, *aim for perfect harmony*. Those are the translations. But I want you to see what they all have in common.

One – they all have this idea of growing into something or moving toward a goal. Thus the picture of the target. That they're moving in a direction. Maturity or maybe it's restoration or maybe it's this idea of perfection. The word actually means perfect is what it means. Perfect or complete. And the surrounding letters in the word give the impression that it's a verb that's telling us we need to do something and point us in a direction. So this idea of moving toward perfection.

Well what are we going to do with that? We'll come to that in a minute, but in just trying to understand what the word means, let's go to another place in scripture where the same exact Greek word is used. Sometimes when we're trying to understand the words in God's word in their context, we'll go to another passage of scripture where the same word is used and see how it's used in that context to give us some enlightenment in the midst of that. So we're going to do that by looking at Jesus' words. Jesus says in Luke 6:40 – *The student is not above the teacher, but everyone who is fully trained will be like their teacher*. Fully trained. Alright.

So I think I've given you an idea or a package of what this word looks like. Let's try to apply it for just a moment for what it means for us. See, I think there's an implied growth indication there that we need to be growing. So Paul in his commencement speech to us is saying life is not about just where you are now. You need to be growing. Life is about growing. Life is about growing. It's about setting goals and moving forward.

Now the idea of setting goals is a common thing that we can understand. We can set a health goal, an exercise goal. We can set a financial goal, a business goal. We also set goals for our own personal development. But let's think for a moment about spiritual goals. What kind of spiritual goal might God have you develop in your life so you have a target of where you want to go? If you're going to aim for perfection, that's quite a statement. Aim for perfection. Grow to maturity. You've got to have a goal of where you're going to be or next year at this time you're going to be in the same place you are now.

So what does a goal look like on a spiritual level? I don't know what your goal might be, but here are some ideas of some goals that you might take on. You might read through the Bible in a year or get involved serving the Lord more. You might try to overcome some kind of a habit or start a new habit of some kind. You might decide to write out your testimony and share it. You might decide to forgive someone. You might decide to work out a problem in your life that's hindering you. It's amazing how much our spiritual lives can, if we'll allow them, to impact so many other things. They impact our relationships. You might set a financial goal. I would encourage you if you're going to set a financial goal to make it a spiritual one. That I'm going to allow God to work in my money to get me to where I need to be over here at this other place. Growing in maturity. And I left a bunch of other bullet points there because I have no idea what God's going to say to you. But the idea is what does God want you to do in your own life?

Paul is making his commencement speech and he's saying move forward. Grow in your spiritual growth wherever you are. Whether you think you're mature or not mature, it's okay. We can all be growing. Grow in your spiritual life. That's the first thing he says. It's the first word in his exhortation to them at the end of the passage.

Let's go to the second word. The word *encourage one another*. Now encouraging others is important because we live in a world where there's a lot of weight that have the potential of dragging us down. I want to say it that way because just because there are weights out there doesn't mean they have to drag us down. But often they do. They have the potential of dragging us down. Now God wants us to live within a broken world that has a lot of weights falling all around us and He wants us to experience that joy inside. But as we're trying to experience joy, it's a challenge. Some of those weights are more pressing in on us than others, I would suggest. They impact our hearts in ways that are different than others might. Things like hurt. Hurt from the past. Or things like pressures that are going on right now. And so God has placed us as encouragers.

So we are in this place and this is why the word is so important. That we're the ones who are reaching out and encouraging someone, encouraging one another. Why? Because those encouraging words can do something to lessen the load, lessen the weightiness of life for someone else. So Paul is saying here that encouragement needs to characterize us. As he's sending us out at the end of his book, he's reminding the Corinthians that you want to be people who are encouragers. It characterizes who you are.

You may be at that place where you're saying, "Look, I need encouragement. I can't give it. I'm the one who needs it." And I understand that it's true and we all need it. There's sometimes when we just feel the need for that more than other times. And this is where faith steps into the picture more than ever. When we start to give encouragement to others and we ourselves find that encouragement in ways that we might not have otherwise. There's something very important about this word, about encouraging. You can encourage someone by giving your time, by giving your energy, by giving him a pleasant look. You can encourage them by your words. The idea is be an encouragement.

In a broken world that we live in where so many things are difficult... I mean just the people you talk to, you read the news, much of the news today is... Well negative news sells. So you turn on the news, it can be a real challenge. I think we as Christians need to be informed. But a lot of the information we could get could come from other places besides CNN or Fox News. *Christianity Today* is often making comments on the news that I think are fascinating.

We have this perspective, we have this way of understanding life that's different. We can come and be an encouragement to others. That's what God is saying here through His servant, Paul. So that word becomes important. You might just consider that. Maybe that's the word you'll walk away with today. I'm not sure what God will do with any of these things. I'm just sharing them with you and helping you understand them a little bit more. That's the second word that Paul is sharing. *Encourage one another*.

Let's go to the third one. *Be of one mind*. This is the simple word oneness or sameness. But the oneness we experience as Christians somehow embraces all of the differences. So we can come to this oneness in our relationships together even though we have a lot of differences, whether those be genders that have to do with cultural differences or financial differences. There's something that happens when we get together. We go, "Yes, I feel united with that person who's different than I am." There's this unity that's very important. So he's saying *be of one mind*. Be one together.

Now here's the principle and here's how I think we can use it. If you're in a relationship with anyone, then you have this balance that you have to maintain in your own heart with that person and that is differences versus oneness. Differences, disagreement, conflict versus oneness. What happens in a marriage relationship, for example, is that differences, disagreements, and conflict start to increase and oneness then isn't nurtured enough so it gets dropped down a bit. So now the relationship is characterized by conflict or disagreements or differences instead of being characterized by oneness.

So Paul is exhorting the people there in their relationships in the church and I believe also in our marriage relationships, family relationships, work relationships. Look for ways to increase oneness and unite over the differences and you'll be able to keep that unity that exists. We'll never be able to get rid of the differences. That's part of what makes us all special and makes the church actually beautiful. It brings all those differences together. But if you apply this in a relationship that you're in with someone else and you find the relationship starting to generate a lot of conflict and conflict is starting to dominate the relationship, you need to nurture the oneness. You need to be spending time building that up, strengthening that, and that's what Paul is saying here. He's saying *be of one mind*. Emphasize the oneness.

You have to do this in a marriage relationship. Because the differences then and the conflict tend to dominate or can dominate the relationship in ways that are not helpful. They just come. It's part of living in our world that we have differences and we've got to get things done and negativity starts to come into that. So we must be working on oneness. We're going to work on that oneness through common activity. We're going to work on it spiritually by praying together. We're going to work on oneness just by spending time together to nurture the relationship. Oneness must exceed conflict or your relationship will be in trouble. Whether it's a marriage or parenting relationship or friendship or work relationship. Those two things must be balanced carefully. We don't discount the differences, but we're emphasizing the oneness and that oneness is what Paul is exhorting the people in this commencement address. He's saying don't forget the oneness. Of the four words he chooses, that's the one. He chooses oneness. Make that very important for you in your life.

Let's go to the next word. The next word is *to live in peace*. In our small group this week we went around and just shared an area where we felt God might want us to work on in our lives as we kind of are ending this and looking at examination. We talked about last week about the testing. What's something God's doing in your life? Where does He want you to grow and develop?

When it came my turn, I chose this idea of peace. I want to develop this more in my own heart. Peace. It's not hard for me to have peace in my life when things are going well. That's not hard. I experience a great amount of peace when things are going well. In fact I've grown to the place where I can experience peace when a problem comes into my life and a challenge. I'm a problem solver and I seem to be a magnet for problems. So I love to do that. That's what I do. And when one problem comes by my way, I can be pretty peaceful. But I need to graduate a little bit further than that I think into having been bombarded by problems. You're talking about one problem on the phone, you hang up and the other one is in your email. Then you got another one and you didn't even get to work on those and somebody else is after you. So it's that kind of situation that then I start to feel overwhelmed and then my peace is allusive.

Paul is saying be characterized by peace. That's what he's saying. And I need that more in my life. I need to grow in that area of peace, contentment. Not when the problems get solved so I can say, "Oh I checked some things off my to-do list today, so I'm at peace." No. I need to experience the peace in the midst of the to-do list. I need to experience the peace in the midst of the struggle or the pain or the challenge that I'm experiencing.

I think this idea of contentment is somewhat contradictory. Maybe you experience this in your life. If we go back to the first one, *strive for full restoration* or be growing. What that means is don't be content with where you are right now in the sense of you need to be growing. Don't say, "Ah, I've arrived." There's some kind of godly discontentment that causes us to want to strive to be better and to grow in Him. But at the same time there needs to be this contentment or this peace that it's okay to be where I am now. It seems like a contradiction, but only in God's grace can we understand the difference and be able to take advantage of that in our own walk with Him. There's this idea of growth and challenge that Paul is suggesting that we see ourselves as target. I'm going to grow in these particular areas.

I have an activity app on my watch and I can set my goal of what kind of activity I want to accomplish and then it reports to me in the course of the day how I'm doing in reaching that goal on a daily basis. I like that. And in fact my brother... well he's my brother in Christ. My son, Ben, and I share the same app. So when I reach my goal he gets an automatic indicator on his watch. And when he reaches his goal, I get an automatic indicator on my watch of his progress. So we're watching each other reach our activity goals. So there's a little incentive there for us to share our goals and to try to meet them and report them to each other. I appreciate the encouragement that I find with my son. Of course his activity goal is much greater than mine. He's a U.S. Marine. But the reality is that there's a goal set there.

And in our spiritual lives we want to be growing. Paul gives us these words that we can put as targets out there. I don't want you to think this is humanistic. That's why we have to go to the next phrase. This isn't just buck it up, be more peaceful. Notice the phrase – *And the God of love and peace will be with you*. Two things we need. Love and peace. But it's not the love and peace that will be with you. What is it? It's *the God of love and peace*. It's the presence of God in my life every day that I need to cherish. Because sometimes life doesn't go the way I like or it's just a challenge. And so God says you don't have to do it alone. Paul is saying God is going to be with you. It's just such a great motivation.

If you've never accepted Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior then you probably don't understand fully what this means. Maybe you grew up even in a religious background that had God pictured as a person with a clipboard, a manager saying, "Oh you didn't do that. Mark that off. Oh you did that one. Okay good." So there's this clipboard mentality of God that I think goes against what God teaches about Himself. This passage says that it's the God of love and peace is with us as we're trying to move forward in these goals that we have.

I know you're eager to get to the next verse where he says – *Greet one another with a holy kiss.* What he's saying here is there is a greeting than what you do in the world. Now some of you are more touchy-feely than others. Some of you like to kiss, some of you like to hug, some of you like to hold hands, some of you don't like to do any of those things. That's not the point. Okay? The point here is that there's a different way that we greet each other as Christians than non-believers.

You see it when people come in the door here. When people are here in the fellowship you see them eager to talk to each other, eager to catch up on life experiences. Many of you come when church starts at 9:45 and when you do, we're interacting together and we're enjoying the conversation and we're greeting each other. There's something special about the relationships that we enjoy.

And then we break in the middle after our worship, before announcements, and we have a greeting time. Why do we do that? We do that because it's a biblical thing we do. We're greeting one another in a way that just draws us close together. We love that connection that we have.

And then I don't know if you notice, but at the end of our worship service when we say "amen," I know some people are going to the information table, some are getting some food, but a lot of people just turn around and there's groups forming here and there, people are talking to each other. Why? Because there's something special about our relationships together.

I want to suggest that God designed the church so that that is even a greater fellowship than what we have in our own earthly families. I know some of that is true for many of you, that you're in an earthly family, you're trying to work out your spirituality and your earthly family. That's great. But there's something about being in the church that fills in the gaps that God wants to do in a deeper way. It's a great picture. We're in this thing together. We're growing together. We're trying to accomplish these target goals together and when we're greeting each other, we're encouraging others, something happens in the midst of that that's special.

Yes, you can experience church at home, watching a church service on TV or you're listening to one on the radio or you're watching us on Facebook Live. You can do that. That's great. But sometimes we do that because we're doing other things. We're working, we're on the run. But there's something special about gathering together. And that gathering together is an opportunity for us to connect in a deeper way and we go away encouraged.

But it's not just here in this fellowship. Notice what he's saying there. *All God's people here send their greetings.* It's great to ponder the fact that there are Christians all over the world.

I hope when you read the news that you are reading it with a sense that there are Christians involved with that situation. There are Christians in North Korea. There are Christians who are crossing the borders in the immigration issues. There are Christians that are trying to figure out what to do with all of that. There are Christians who are involved in our local politics and the things that are going on around. When you hear about a disaster that's taking place, you can bet that there are Christians stepping up, caring for people around them. There are Christians that are doing that, and we are part of that. Every once in a while there's a flood or something and we actually send people down to care for the people in that area.

But there is this unity that we experience and Paul is just emphasizing that. He wants these people to understand. You're not alone. You're part of something bigger. So that's why he says – *All God's people here send their greetings.*

And then comes verse 14. I think this is the favorite part for me for this passage, so I just broke it out as one verse. It says this. This is a blessing. This is like at the end of the whole time, before we leave, these are the words Paul is praying over us and blessing us with. When you read these words you ought to just feel the presence of God over you, just washing over you in a very special way. Let me read them to you and just feel God's presence with you in these ways. *May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.* That's how he leaves his book. That's how he ends it. That's the sense that he's giving to us. He ends the writing there, that God wants us to know that there's a special relationship that we enjoy with Him.

The Trinity is demonstrated in this passage. You see that, right? First of all it's *grace* that comes from *Jesus Christ*. It's this grace we've talked about through this whole book. That he's talking about this grace that's sufficient for us, this grace that empowers us to do the work that he wants for us. That's what we're talking about, the grace. The grace that we need to live every day. Very important. But then he talks about this *love of God*, the love from the Father. We need to view God as this loving heavenly Father that wants to just envelop us with His love in a special way. *And the fellowship of the Holy Spirit.* That's the communion. Yes, it's the communion we take when we fellowship with God because of Christ's death, but it's also the fellowship we enjoy together as a body of Christ.

Just a great way to end. I just hope you experience that blessing that God wants to give you in your own relationship with Him.

I want to share just on a personal note some things. I really enjoyed my seminary studies. I would recommend anyone go to seminary if they want to be a pastor. It was great. I learned a lot about godliness, I learned a tremendous amount about the Bible. There were a couple things that bothered me in seminary. So these are minor in the course of things, but they happen to illustrate something very important today.

There was discussion in the seminary about whether you should have friends in the church or not have friends in the church. There were some in the seminary who said you can't really have friendships with the people in your church because you don't want them knowing really about

your personal life, and some of them leave or come and go, and you never know what's going to happen. I really didn't like that.

I want you to know for me, my friends are right here. I really enjoy this church and I enjoy getting to know you and spending time with you and developing friendship with you. I think that's important, really, for a pastor to do that because it brings authentic realness, I guess, with the ministry that takes place. That real part of this fellowship together. This is my church. I want you to know it's my church. It's my church in the same way it's your church. It's not my church because I'm a pastor here; it's my church because I've chosen to be a member here and I receive from you folks and I'm blessed by you. So there's this connection that I experience and I invest my friendships here in this fellowship. I'm really grateful. I just want to say I'm really grateful for you.

The second thing that there was a discussion in seminary, that is not everybody believed this, but some of the people believed that if you were a pastor and you're preaching, you need to get your sermon and do your sermon, but you need to have your devotions set aside differently. In other words you'd have your devotional life and your sermon preparation life.

I suppose that works for some people, but not for me. For me, my devotions are my sermon. So in the beginning of the week I start reading the passage for Sunday and I want to meditate on it. I want it to become part of me because I think that helps me again to be able to communicate with more realness that God wants to do in our lives. So I encourage you to study God's word on your own. To come and understand what it means. And as I continue to pastor here, my commitment to you is I'm going to share with you the things that God is teaching me. That's what I want to do. So when we come to a passage of scripture, we're coming to that scripture and God is working on that in my own heart in the course of the week and then I'm just sharing out of that with you so that you can experience whatever it might be.

The interesting thing is people tell me, "Pastor, I really liked that message. Oh I really liked this part." I'm thinking, "Did I say that?" It's something different than I had intended because what God does is He takes His word and He uses the spiritual gifts people have, whether it's preaching or teaching or exhortation or whatever it might be, and He brings out something that that person needs.

I'm excited about 2 Corinthians. I thoroughly enjoyed this study. It's made a mark on my heart. I hope it's done the same for you. Next week we study a new study and that study is in the gospel of John. I'm eager to see what God's going to do in my life and I'm eager to present those things to you as well.

Let's pray together.

[PRAYER] Heavenly Father, we are now coming before you and asking you to help us in our lives. We don't want to be the same people next year that we are today. We want to grow closer to you, we want to grow in you, and we want to grow in your word, so Lord, we're asking now that you would touch us deeply, that you'd use your Holy Spirit deep in our hearts to provoke us. We need you and we need your grace. In Jesus' name, amen.