

The Word of God Creates Love Between the People of God.

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Life is lonely. Studies say we are the most connected generation ever to walk the planet with our cell phones, the Internet, Facebook and Instagram. We are also known as one of the most disconnected generations. We are so busy with life that we barely have time for friendships. We don't have time for a cup of coffee or to sit on the porch with our neighbors just to talk about life.

This world can be a lonely place. What makes this world even lonelier is what we talked about last week. As Christians, we live in a sin-filled world that presses sinful values and practices into our lives through movies, magazines, books and business. As Christians, we find we don't fit. As Peter said in the opening of this letter, we feel like exiles living in a foreign land.

What are we supposed to do when we are lonely in this world? What are we do to when we are not sure we belong? This morning we will find the answer.

If you are new, my name is Kurt. I am one of the pastors at CrossWinds. We are a multi-campus church with a campuses in Spirit Lake and Spencer. Across both campuses we are studying the book of 1 Peter. The title of our series in 1 Peter is "Hope in Hard Times". The book of 1 Peter has a lot to say about how God carries us through the rough patches in life. Last week we looked at the trial of living in a sinful society. How do we strive for sin-free living in a sin-filled world? This week, we look at the antidote to the loneliness we feel when we discover this world isn't the place we belong. Our text is 1 Peter 1:22-2:3. We will read it together.

Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for each other, love one another deeply, from the heart. For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God. For, “All people are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field; the grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of the Lord endures forever.” And this is the word that was preached to you. Therefore, rid yourselves of all malice and all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander of every kind. Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation, now that you have tasted that the Lord is good. 1 Peter 1:22–2:3 (NIV)

In these verses Peter began his discussion about the antidote to loneliness by talking about the Word of God. After he set the Word of God as our foundation, he showed us how the antidote to loneliness connects to it. We will build our study under those headings.

What is the Word of God?

...since you have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God... 1 Peter 1:23 (ESV)

The Word of God is living.

I know this sounds strange but your Bible is alive. Some of you will want to put your head to the cover to see if you hear a pulse. You won't find one. Others will check for breathing. You won't find it. In one sense the Bible is just a book so it can be published on paper, the Internet or via carried electrons on our phones. In another sense, this book has more life than a junior high boy. The Bible is simply words but it is God's words. Unlike our words, God's Word contains authority and power our words do not possess. I ask my children to pick up their rooms. How much authority and power do my words possess? In Genesis God said, “Let there be light.” God spoke and light was created out of nothing. That is power. That is authority. The Gospel of John tells us the

greatest expression of God's Word to us is Jesus. Jesus' words carry the authority and power of his father because Jesus is one with his father. This is why in John 11:43 all Jesus needed to raise Lazarus from the dead was to speak the words, "Lazarus, come forth." If he hadn't qualified it with Lazarus, all the other graves would have opened. God's Words are different from ours. They are alive. They contain authority and power. God's Word creates life.

In the same way, in the book of Revelation, when Jesus goes into battle against the Satan and all the forces that oppose him, he does battle with the sword that comes from his mouth. It sounds like Jesus is some kind of mutant with a long tongue. In apocalyptic literature, like the book of Revelation, the sword in Jesus' mouth is simply another way of focusing on the power of Jesus' words. Just as the Word of God is so powerful and authoritative that it created the universe out of nothing, the words of Jesus have the authority to destroy Satan and the vast army that is opposed to Jesus when Jesus simply speaks the word. The armies of heaven don't break a sweat. Nobody even tears a nail. Into the Lake of Fire will go the devil, the false prophet and everyone else lined up with him when Jesus simply speaks the word.

Peters' point was that just as God created the universe with his word, he creates spiritual life within us by his Word. The words of the Bible are the way God creates spiritual life within us.

For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. Hebrews 4:12 (ESV)

When we read the Word of God, God uses it to convict us. He uses it to show us our sin. He uses it to call us to repentance. God's Word cuts into our hearts. We suddenly realize God knows all about our lives and we are led to repentance. This cutting, conviction and repentance doesn't happen with any of our words because our words are just words. They don't have authority behind them like God's words carry.

Try this with Newsweek, Time magazine, Fox News or MSNBC. You don't find yourself convicted of your sin through those words. You don't find yourself repenting of your selfishness, arrogance and pride through those words. It is only through the life-giving, convicting power of God's Word in the Bible that this happens. I tell you, this book is alive.

If you are waning in spiritual enthusiasm. If you are declining in spiritual motivation. The answer is not a hot shower. The answer is not another cup of coffee. The answer is more time in the living Word where you meet the living God, and God will use it to make your spirit alive. Why do we spend time in the Bible? It is not because we have to but because we want to. We do it out of joy. We love to let God's words breath spiritual life into us.

The Word of God is alive. It is the only book that has the power to convict us. It has power not because it is words on a page but because God is the one who spoke the words.

The Word of God is abiding.

Abide means persevere. The Bible has persevered throughout the course of history. The only way we can persevere through the course of our history is by being in the persevering Word of God.

Peter made his point by quoting from Isaiah 40.

...for “All flesh is like grass and all its glory like the flower of grass. The grass withers, and the flower falls, but the word of the Lord remains forever.” And this word is the good news that was preached to you. 1 Peter 1:24–25 (ESV)

All people, cultures and nations are simply like grass waiting to be mowed. They are here today and gone tomorrow. All nations and peoples will go away, but the Word of God will stand forever. When Peter wrote to the churches in Asia, some of them were under threat of persecution from the Roman Empire. That was the most powerful empire in the world. It was all run by Caesar, the most powerful man on the planet. Guess what. Rome is gone. Caesar is dead, but the Word of God continues on. There will be a day when the USA is gone, when our president's name is a distant memory, but this book will carry on. People will still study it.

The only way to be spiritually alive is to come to the living Word. The only way to persevere spiritually is to stay in the persevering Word. All nations and people will come and go but this book will remain forever.

The Bible is translated into more than 3,000 languages. It is read by more people on the planet than any other book in the history of the world. Many times men tried to wipe it from the face of the planet. Everyone failed.

In the Roman Empire, shortly after the time of Peter, they began persecuting Christians, telling them not to read their Bibles. They stretched them out on racks and used tongue pinchers, thumb screws and whipping trees to get Christians to put down their Bibles. Some Christians were burned, others were boiled and still others beheaded. Others were drawn and quartered by horses all because they refused to put down this book.

In 300 A.D. decrees were sent out by the Roman government. Diocletian, the ruler of Rome, said the Bible was outlawed and every copy was to be burned and destroyed. Christians were to be executed. Today Diocletian is gone. The Roman Empire is a vague memory. The Word of God marches on. Even though Diocletian and others tried to exterminate the book, we still have hundreds more copies of the Bible *than any other book from the ancient world*, even though they tried to outlaw the Bible, ban it and burn it out of existence. All flesh is like grass but the Word of God remains forever.

John Wycliff was roasted alive like a hog over a fire because he translated this book so people could read it. Ulrich Zwingli was cut in five pieces then burned alive because he translated this book so people could hold it in their hands. William Tyndale was burned alive and strangled at the same time because he tried to get more copies of the Bible into people's hands. Why did these men endure such hideous deaths to translate and print this book? They knew the Bible isn't just a book. It is God's book with God's words. God's words have the power to raise the dead both literally and spiritually. Getting this book into people's hands is something worth dying for. Charles Spurgeon was once

asked to defend why he taught from the Bible. He said, “You don’t defend a lion. A lion can defend itself. All you need to do is let it out of its cage.” The Bible is alive. Powerful people and nations will come and go but this book will remain. You can’t kill it.

My favorite example of this is the French philosopher Voltaire who in 1728 said that within 100 years the Bible would cease to be read and it would pass out of existence. Fifty years after his death the Geneva Bible Society bought his house to use his printing presses because the society couldn’t keep up with the demand for this book.

Bible critics will come and go. They will mock the book. They will try to destroy the Bible but in the end all their efforts are like fists pounding into a steel anvil. You can strike it as hard as you want but you will lose every time. This book isn’t going anywhere.

The Word of God is pure spiritual food.

Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up into salvation. — 1 Peter 2:2 (ESV)

The Word of God is spiritual food. It is essential for life with God. We may trust in Christ but apart from filling our lives with the word of Christ we will be weak. We will get distracted from the truth. We will spiritually drift. God’s Word is the nourishment we need to sustain our spiritual lives. This is why we try to read it every day. Try skipping a meal and tell me how healthy you feel. This is why we memorize God’s Word. We can recall God’s Word to give us needed spiritual nutrition on the road like a granola bar in your backpack. This is why we

preach the Word of God. There is nothing better to feed the hearts of God's people than the Word of God.

The Word of God is called *pure* spiritual milk. In the ancient world they diluted wine to make it go farther. Sometimes they diluted milk. The problem is giving children diluted milk filled their stomachs but it didn't give them the nutrients they needed to grow their body. They would be weak and emaciated children even though their stomachs were full. The Word of God is like pure spiritual milk. It is pure spiritual nutrition. I challenge you to get the good stuff. Get undiluted milk. Go straight to the Word.

One area we can apply this is with our devotional readings. There are many devotionals on the store shelves. Some of them are very good. Many of them are entertaining. They have nifty covers and good stories. A number of them have a fragment of a verse on the top of the page then three or four paragraphs on a story and brief thoughts about the verse for the rest of the page. These are not all bad. There is some spiritual nutrition in them. I submit to you that having just four to six words of a verse as all of your time in God's Word will leave you surviving on diluted milk. There was so little of God's Word on that page and so much of man's words that you may be running short on spiritual nutrition. There is too much filler.

It is like trying to survive on cheese puffs, hot dogs and white bread. It may taste good but it is all filler. There is no nutrition. We need to eat our spiritual veggies to grow healthy and strong.

But he answered, "It is written, “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.” Matthew 4:4 (ESV)

The Word of God needs to be preached.

“...but the word of the Lord remains forever.” And this word is the good news that was preached to you. 1 Peter 1:25 (ESV)

We need preaching. Preaching is not culturally acceptable. Many churches hold a low view of preaching. When you hold a low view of preaching, you inevitably find a low view of the Bible that goes with it. The lower the view of the Bible, the more unconvincing and unconvicting the sermon in the church. We hold a high view of the Bible and a high view of preaching. That isn't a high view of the preacher but a high view of hearing from this book.

The book of Acts chronicles the growth of the church in the ancient world. Every time the church grew it was described as the spread of the Word of God. The spread of the Word of God was through preaching the Word of God. Preaching the Word of God is what grew the church. Nothing has changed. This is why we value Bible preaching. God's Word are powerful and authoritative. They create spiritual life.

So the word of God spread. The number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly, and a large number of priests became obedient to the faith. Acts 6:7 (NIV)

But the word of God increased and multiplied. Acts 12:24 (ESV)

When they arrived at Salamis, they proclaimed the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews. And they had John to assist them. Acts 13:5 (ESV)

What does the Word of God do in the people of God?

The Word of God creates and grows spiritual life.

...since you have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God... 1 Peter 1:23 (ESV)

Let me explain how the Word of God creates spiritual life. The Bible says we are born sinful. We are not a blank slate. We begin our life evil from the moment we are conceived. We are not connected to God.

Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me.
Psalm 51:5 (ESV)

...among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. Ephesians 2:3 (ESV)

I realize some of you don't like this. You fight this. You think you are a good person and a kind person. Belief in your goodness vaporizes once you hit your finger with a hammer when pounding a nail. Our sin nature floats to the surface very clearly in those situations. You can fight this but you won't win. It is like gravity. Even if everyone on the planet voted to outlaw it, nothing would change. Everyone is sinful at the core.

Some of you were born into a Christian home, that doesn't mean a thing. Some of you were baptized as a baby. I am thankful you got wet. The Bible says those who were born physically must be born spiritually. Religion is about me trying harder, doing better, trying to alter my conduct and transform my own heart. It never works.

Being born again by the Word of God is when God gives me a new heart, new desires, a new identity, new community and a new eternity. It is all as a gift. We have just as much participation in our spiritual births as we do in our physical births. We didn't birth ourself. If there is any discussion on this point, ask your mother. She did all the pushing and all the screaming. Trust me on this one.

You were just along for the ride. In the same way, we didn't choose God. He chose us. We were spiritually dead before God made us alive.

Just as the first inclination of a child that is born physically is to breath and cry, the first inclination of spiritual birth is to repent of our sin and call out to Jesus for grace and forgiveness. Just as crying out physically is the sign that a baby is physically alive, crying out to God spiritually for forgiveness of our sins through Jesus is the sign that someone is spiritually alive. It all happens through the Word of God.

We have nothing to brag about when it comes to knowing God. God doesn't call us to himself because we are smarter than others or better than others. It is all a gift that God caused us to be born again so we call out to him for grace and mercy.

Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up into salvation— if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good. 1 Peter 2:2–3 (ESV)

In the same way that God's Word creates spiritual life, it sustains spiritual life. It is what we need every day. Peter said that if you have been born by God, one of the signs of spiritual life is a craving for the Word of God so you can grow up in Jesus.

The Word of God creates love between the people of God.

Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth for a sincere brotherly love, love one another earnestly from a pure heart, since you have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God... 1 Peter 1:22–23 (ESV)

This brings us full circle to where we started. As Christians, we are lonely and disconnected from others in this world because we have a heart that desires holiness. Peter said, “Now that you have purified your souls by obeying the truth of the Word of God so you have a sincerely brotherly love for one another...” As Christians obey the Word of God and live holy lives they will find brotherly love among them. Church will feel like family. Sunday will feel like a reunion. Some of your best friends will become your church friends. Then Peter challenged us to “Love one another earnestly from a pure heart.”

The word for love here is a different word than brotherly love. You were loving each other like brothers, like friends. Peter took that up a notch and used the word *agape* for love. That is the kind of passionate and committed love God has for us. God chose to love us. We are to love others in the church like God loves us. How are we to love others? He said we are to love earnestly. Earnestly means intensely.

While the world is a lonely place for Christians, the church is to be the place where we love one another intensely and purely and passionately like God loves us. While we don't have a sense of belonging in the world around us, in the church we are to love each so passionately, intensely and honestly that we feel even closer than family in the church.

Where does this kind of love we are to have for one another come from? You guessed it. The Word of God. *You were not born of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding Word of God.* Just as the quality of

God's Word is imperishable and indestructible and perfect and pure and it lasts forever; the qualities of the Word of God are the qualities of the love amongst us.

This means at church we don't show up late and leave early because we are trying to get the church box checked off. We show up early and stay late because loving the church family is very important to us. The Word of God creates love between the people of God.

Folks, we need each other because we don't fit in the world. The apostle John spoke about the same thing. The Apostle John saw intense love between Christians as one of the signs we are born again.

We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brothers. Whoever does not love abides in death. 1 John 3:14 (ESV)

The Christian life is never one of isolation. It is always one of loving community where we show deep love to one another. This is why Peter challenged us to put away from our lives the qualities that were part of our past that destroyed community.

So put away all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander. 1 Peter 2:1 (ESV)

Malice — Malice is general unkindness or meanness toward people. It is not just the actions we take on the outside but it particularly refers to the things we think on the inside. It is what we say under our breath when nobody is looking. It is when we say to ourselves, "They are jerks." It is saying things in private about people you would never say in public. That is malice. When you role play in your mind how you will get even; that is malice. Put that all away. That is who

we were. The Word of God re-created us to love each other intensely and deeply.

Deceit — This means manipulating people to meet my needs. It is bait and switch. It is saying one thing and doing another. It is promising something but not keeping your word. That is who we were, not who we are. We are to love one another intensely and purely with the same kind of love God has for us.

Hypocrisy — This literally means acting two-faced. It is having a public life that is different from your private life. It is watching an R-rated movie on Saturday night while singing praises to God on a Sunday morning and thinking about the scenes from the movie while the preacher is talking about God's Word. Jesus reserved some of his most stinging criticism for the religious leaders of his day who were hypocrites. They wore long robes and made big public prayers when in reality they didn't love God. They just loved the public praise of their position.

Envy — This is the inability to rejoice with those who rejoice. Rather than being happy for people, you covet what they have or the experiences they enjoy. We covet their spouses, their money, their homes, their beauty, their intellect or their accomplishments. Don't rejoice with people and join with them in giving thanks to God for his good gifts.

Slander — Slander is trying to make ourselves look good by trying to make others look bad. We always look for points of criticism or attack. We look for ways to fault others. Rather than praying for people, we speak evil of people.

These are all ways of our old lives that are no longer who we are. They are not who we were re-created to be. Just as the Word of God is living, pure

and permanent, God's Word creates between us a love that is living, pure, intense and permanent.

One of the best ways I recently watched this being lived out is with my mother. As many of you know, my mother is dying of cancer. She is in a nursing care facility in Pennsylvania. Cindy and I are taking turns living in Pennsylvania to help care for her. It is impossible for one of us to be there all the time. Where would she be without her church family? While this doesn't happen every day, some days she has as many as nine visitors. They sit with her. They come in to feed her. They talk with her because I am an only child that lives in Iowa. At the beginning of the summer when our family drove to Pennsylvania to be with her when she was first diagnosed, her church pulled together to give us a house to stay in for free. The ladies of the church stocked the house with food. When we arrived, the refrigerator was full. When Cindy stayed for the summer people in the church gave her a car to drive for free for almost the entire summer. This past week some ladies from the church wanted Mom to have something more comfortable than her wheelchair and bed so they took up an offering and bought her a La-Z-Boy-type chair and brought it to the nursing facility. They accompany my father to doctor's appointments. They help Mom in and out of the car. They check on my father during the day. When my mom had a panic attack this week she called Christians and neighbors. These ladies dropped what they were doing with their family and came to be her side.

You don't find that kind of love in the world. You only find this kind of pure, intense love in the church among God's people because the Word of God creates it among us.

I also want to brag on CrossWinds. We are so thankful for the love we have in our church family. When the ladies of the church learned Cindy was gone for the summer and I am a terrible cook, they began bringing over meals. My children were thrilled and they learned in a new way the importance of a church family. Daniel grew like a weed over the summer. It wasn't because of my cooking. It was only because the ladies of the church fed him so well. I can't thank you enough for the cards, the continual concern of so many of you. Somebody even anonymously gave us some money to help offset the costs of the airline tickets. Where do you find that kind of love? It isn't in the world. It is only in the church. The Word of God creates love between the people of God. The church is the cure to the loneliness so many of us feel.

Conclusion

As we go, I want to challenge us to put away all the junk of our old lifestyle and love each other intensely. That may be serving as an usher or a greeter or at the coffee bar. I know it is inconvenient to arrive a little early but it is a baby step toward loving people like God loves us. I want to challenge you to get involved helping with AWANA or youth groups. Yes, it is hard to love kids but the kids need us loving them like Jesus. Don't just meet people in the foyer and forget about them until next week. Build relationships. Care about people. Ask them out to breakfast. Ask them to come over sometime for lunch or dinner just

to be friendly. No hidden agenda other than to love on them like Jesus loves us.

That is who we are, the people of God. The church is kind of a big deal.



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