

Bear With Me

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[0 : 00] I am not Kevin Smith. My name is Y Plummer. Kevin is on vacation and I have the honor of bringing the Word of God.

Kevin, verse 5.

We are not Christian, Scythian, slave, free, but Christ is all and in all. Our scripture. Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts and kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another.

And if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other, as the Lord has forgiven you. So you must also forgive.

And above all, put these, above all these, put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.

[2 : 15] This is God's Word. Let us pray. Our gracious Heavenly Father, God and King, we thank you for your precious Word, which is able to encourage us, convict us, convince us of your reality.

And it never comes back void. So I pray that you would press it upon the hearts of your servants this morning. Let us leave change realizing that you are God and that in you we live and move and have our breathing.

Press that upon us. Help us. Help us. Help us know you better. Help us to rejoice in you.

We love you, Lord. And we pray these in Christ's name. Amen. You may be seated. Amen. Let me start off by saying that this is going to be a very personal sermon.

And so in part it's going to be kind of a prolonged introduction that's going to be personal and be confessional also. And hopefully mostly exposition.

[3 : 39] So I just would ask that you would bear with me. In June 2023, I retired after serving for 23 years as the African American Ministries Coordinator for the PCA.

And my job was to help African Americans come into this denomination. But after retiring in that June, I reflected on my life and began to realize something.

Most of my relationships, in spite of my job of connecting and pastoring, had been transactional. I didn't have many very long friendships.

After placing someone in a position, I really didn't know what to do after that. I thought the relationship was over. But it was interesting that I got a call from one who was here, Ronnie Perry, who was an intern here.

And he called me after moving. And I wondered, why is he calling? I've already done my job. And I didn't realize he just wanted to connect to be friends. I had really never learned to build long-term relationships.

[4 : 53] And so therefore, even today, I don't have any long-term relationships from high school. Some people do from college. Even when I worked as an engineer, I don't have any relationships.

I have some relationships, hopefully in this church, which are much more present relationships that I've developed over the past 10, 12 years after being at New City.

But at 75, I saw myself slowly withdrawing from the world. You know, I could have spent the rest of my life alone with Shirley and a couple of friends, and I would have been quite happy.

But I felt that God was pressing on me another life he wanted me to live. I sensed that God didn't want me to retire and withdraw from the world, but to learn a new skill called love.

So I prayed one of those prayers that you got to watch out for. I prayed that God would change me and teach me to love people. And God will quickly answer that prayer.

[6 : 04] He started by giving me friends, companions just to walk with. A number of you I've walked with during those early years in 2023. And then he led me to a Saturday morning men's Bible study that met at 7 a.m.

And I often used the 7 a.m. as an excuse not to show up, but God kept pressing me to go to that group every Saturday in spite of the fact that I don't like groups.

I struggled every week to go. But Shirley, are you going to group tomorrow? And I'd say, oh, if I can wake up. But God kept pressing.

There was a member of New City Fellowship that invited Shirley and I to join a weekly Bible study. And I said yes out of obedience knowing I didn't want to be in a small group.

Especially a small group. And I guess when you're my age, everybody's younger than you. But this was an especially young group. Young enough to be my grandchildren. children.

[7 : 18] How do you sit and learn from people who were that young? And let me be clear, my reservation and my awkwardness had nothing to do with the people.

It was all me, my discomfort with being around people. I began to read the scriptures and what it had to say about love and what my obligations were to love people.

And one of the scriptures that stood out talked about bearing with one another. And I realized that my biggest problem with loving people is that I didn't know how to bear with them.

Once the relationship got hard, I just left the relationship. You know, I had never thought about the word bear as being anything that was particularly difficult. I saw it as something rather mild.

Think about it. You're at the airport and they tell you, you know, your flight's delayed. So, bear with us. You know, a little gentle. You're on the phone with a customer service and they say, bear with us as we look up your account.

[8 : 27] But the more I meditated on the various scriptures, I began to realize that biblical bearing is deep. It's not just waiting patiently or being momentarily inconvenienced.

it's about enduring. Colossians 3, 12 to 14 showed me that bearing with one another is more than just tolerating.

In fact, bearing with one another is the center and the foundation for loving people. As I studied this passage, I realized I couldn't use my introversion as an excuse for not bearing.

bearing. The Christian life involves more than just transactional relationships. It involves bearing with real people, with real flaws, in real time, over a lifetime.

And so I want us to look at Colossians 3, 12 through 14 and what it has to teach us about loving people by bearing with them.

[9 : 35] And I want to look at this passage under three questions. What does it mean to bear with one another? Why should we bear with one another?

And how do we bear with one another? What does it mean to bear with one another? Paul writes to a church that is learning to live out their new identity in Christ.

They have been commanded in verse 3 to put to death what is earthly in you. And now in verse 12 Paul says put on then as God's chosen ones holy and beloved compassionate hearts kindness, humility, meekness, and patience bearing with one another.

The Greek word here actually means to hold oneself up under to endure to put up with for the sake of relationships.

It's used elsewhere in scripture to describe the kind of endurance that doesn't cut off or push away and stays committed even under pressure.

[10 : 56] So what does it mean to bear with one another? Let me give you three things. Bearing with one another means staying in the room. To bear with someone means you don't leave when it gets difficult.

You don't withdraw, you don't become silent, you don't disengage with them so that they'll change and then you re-engage. It doesn't mean that you approve of sin or dysfunction, but it does mean you don't walk away when someone's personality or immaturity frustrates you.

We live in a culture that says if you're draining me, I'm done with you. If you're not adding value to my life, I'll block you. If you cross me, I'll cancel you.

But the church, the gospel says, because Christ stayed, I will stay with you. Think about Jesus and his disciples.

He bore with Peter's impetuosity. He bore with James and John's wanting to call fire down on people. He bore with Thomas' doubts and Judas' betrayal.

[12 : 14] And he loved them to the end. If Jesus did that for them, how can we say, I'm out of here?

Secondly, bearing with one another means absorbing real discomfort. Bearing with someone isn't easy. It's costly. It means absorbing things like irritation, frustration, hurt, and not necessarily stuffing your feelings, but choosing grace over retaliation.

It's what Paul says in 1 Corinthians 13, 7, when he talks about love. He says, love bears all things. Again, this doesn't mean that we ignore sin, but it does mean that we are not easily offended.

We absorb a lot before reacting. We give the benefit of the doubt. We stay tender. Here's a hard question.

How much do you expect others to absorb from you? How much grace do you need every day from your spouse, your children, your church, your Savior?

[13 : 35] Think about it. You're a little harder than you think you are. Thirdly, bearing with one another means bearing up under their weight.

you know, people are heavy. And I don't mean that they weigh a lot. I mean that people have issues. We all carry baggage.

You know, I used to think that there were people in the world who didn't have issues. Everybody's got issues and everybody's got baggage. The call to bear with one another is not a call to tolerate.

It's the call to carry, to carry their baggage with them to help them. It means walking with someone struggling with depression and not rushing to get the hope that they get better soon.

It means being present with a brother or sister who's immature in their faith. It means giving someone time to grow without demanding that they meet your standards overnight.

[14 : 48] It's not always comfortable but it's Christ-like. here's another hard question. Can you be trusted with weakness? Can people be weak with you?

Or do they feel like they have to have their act together to impress you? They have to keep it together. To bear with someone means that they don't have to be strong for you to be with you.

Romans 15 says, we who are strong have an obligation to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves.

It's not about tolerating, it's about lifting. So what does it mean to bear with one another? It means staying, staying in the room, refusing to walk away.

It means absorbing discomfort without becoming bitter or reactive. It means helping to carry the weight, loving people in their weakness.

[15 : 57] And all of this points us to one person, and that's Jesus, the one who bore our sins on the cross, bringing us to the second point of why we bear with one another.

It's all there in Colossians 3.13. Bearing with one another, and if anyone has a complaint against another, forgiving each other as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive.

So there's two items about bearing. We bear with others because God bears with us. And we forgive others because Christ has forgiven us.

Why should we keep bearing with people when they're so hard to love? Because Christ is still bearing with us. We often think that we were forgiven at the cross and that was the end of it, but we don't realize that Christ is bearing with us even now.

He bears with our slowness to change. He bears with our hidden sins that we don't even know that we have. He bears with your forgetfulness, your fears, your critical spirit.

[17 : 19] He bears with your judgment of others even while you're struggling to bear with them. Think of how the Gospels portray Jesus with his disciples.

He didn't cancel Peter when he denied him. He didn't rebuke Thomas when he doubted him. He didn't explode at the disciples when they were failing to fall asleep in the garden.

The spirit is willing but the flesh is weak. How gracious even then. He bore with them even in difficult moments.

Hebrews 4 15 says he is a high priest and that is Jesus who sympathizes with our weaknesses. Not just tolerates not just forgive.

He feels for us and stays close to us. That's really hard for us to realize that he sympathizes he's there with us in our struggles.

[18 : 25] And so when you're bearing with someone else you're participating in the ongoing ministry of our Lord Jesus. You're saying Lord because you haven't given up on me I'm not going to give up on this person.

Why should I have to bear with people who are hard to love? Because forgiveness is not optional for those who have been forgiven.

Paul uses strong language in verse 13 when he says you also must forgive. He reminds us that forgiveness is not a suggestion it's a command.

Jesus told the parable in Matthew 18 about a servant who owed his master 10,000 talents of an unpaid debt and the master forgives him completely but that same servant goes out and grabs another servant who owed him a few hundred denarii a fraction of what he owed and demanded payment.

and when the master finds out he's furious and wonders should you not have had mercy on your fellow servant as I had mercy on you.

[19 : 47] And this is what Paul is saying in Colossians 3 you've been forgiven a great debt that you could never repay so how could you withhold mercy from someone else?

so to demand so to bear with someone means I will not demand from you what God has not demanded from me.

I will not punish you for your imperfections when God has shown mercy to me. If we would all remember that we are all difficult people we'll begin to see every hard relationship as an opportunity to extend grace and how God has been testing me this whole week.

It's interesting how God tests you when you have to preach a message. But there's one more reason why we need to bear with people and that's because bearing with one another is a witness to the world.

Jesus said in John 13 35 by this all people will know that you are my disciples if you have love for one another. Not if you agree with one another.

[21 : 08] Not if you enjoy one another. Not if your theology is right. Not if your church is growing. But if you have love for one another.

Love bears love with real broken awkward slow growing frustrating people. And that kind of love is rare.

And when people see it they take note of it. You're showing the world that the gospel is real. You don't just love God with all your heart and soul!

But you love your neighbor as yourself you love your brother and your sister as yourself demonstrably in your actions. Here's another hard question.

Is Christ's forgiveness still real to you? We often take forgiveness for granted but has it penetrated to your heart?

[22 : 07] Do you realize what you have been forgiven? Because if you forget that it will be so much harder for you to forgive if you don't realize how much you have been forgiven.

So why should we bear with one another? Because Christ is bearing with us because forgiveness is not optional and because bearing demonstrates a love that the world will take note of.

And it's not a burden it's our calling as Christians. It's hard but it's right. so we've answered two questions.

What does it mean to bear with one another and why we must bear with one another? And now for the final and most practical question how do we actually do this?

How do we bear with one another when it's so hard often? we want people that we agree with don't we? We want people that are nice.

[23 : 22] I guess if you have children you learn very quickly how to bear with others. But Paul tells us how to bear in verses 12 and 14 when he says put on then as God's chosen one holy and beloved compassionate hearts kindness humility meekness and patience and then in verse 14 he says and above all these put on love which binds everything together in perfect harmony in verse 12 he gives us a list of attitudes to put on like we put on clothing to wear each day but before Paul tells us what to put on he starts by reminding us of who we are he says as God's chosen ones holy and beloved we need to start here we need to start with the reality that we are chosen we were chosen before the foundation of the world you're not an afterthought

God chose you to be holy to be separate to be set apart for his holy purposes that you are loved you are loved in a way that you cannot imagine that's the foundation you're not bearing to become better people you're not bearing to become holy because you're already holy you're not bearing because you're proving that you've already been loved you don't have to prove anything you don't have to be good to prove anything because God has already said that you're holy and good beloved chosen and so everything that we do in terms of bearing comes out of the foundation of our identity in Christ so after telling us who we are in Christ he then tells us what to put on we need to put on

Christ character put on a compassionate heart and this means feeling with people not just about them it means entering their pain rather than standing above it to feel their struggle and often we need to pray Lord I don't want to do this soften my heart I want to lose it I know I shouldn't lose it help me help me to realize my identity in you and then we need to put on kindness just small gestures a note from someone can change their lives just kind words you don't have to always say what you think I had to learn that the hard way you know I once commented to a member of this church you know

I don't particularly like people and he brought that back years later well I know why you don't like people but would you mind coming to my graduation it was incredible watch what you say be kind be humble don't think too highly of yourselves this was something that I really had to learn in being a member of a group and not the leader of a group you don't know more than them just because you're old enough to be their grandparent you need to learn from them that's a hard lesson humility meekness meekness is not weakness meekness is power under control when you know that you can squash somebody and you don't when you know that you can humiliate them because you know that they're wrong you don't do it if they talk too much you don't say you know you talk too much

I did that once actually in the name of I'm just being me no no be Christ like don't just be you be Christ like be patient patience makes bearing possible endure slowness without resentment it finally verse 14 above all these put on love which binds everything together in perfect harmony love is the belt that holds everything together because you can actually fake all these things you can fake compassion and be condescending you can fake kindness and be manipulative you can fake humility just kind of be insecure and fake it you can fake meekness by just not saying anything you can fake patience by smiling but seething underneath but with love everything comes together a decision to stay when leaving seems easy a refusal to retaliate when you've been hurt a willingness to suffer to suffer for the sake of Jesus and this all means in terms of application in our families it means not responding with sarcasm to teenagers attitudes not rolling your eyes not looking like you're staying when you're really not in church it means refusing to let political differences and personality quirks and cultural divides become a barrier in relationships it means saying

[29 : 41] I'm not going to leave you I'm going to stay here whether I'm interested or not I laugh because that's one of my struggles I told you this was going to be half testimony and confession here in the workplace it means choosing not to gossip about a colleague who grates on you not to engage others who are belittling someone else that collective feeling of you know you're in agreement you want to say yes but you know that it amounts to gossip not engaging in that what will what prayer what earnestness it requires no I don't have to be right here I don't have to agree with this yet so I would ask you to pray pray the prayer that God had me pray pray that God would change you we are not we are not you cannot say that's just the way

I am that is not just the way you are until you become like Christ that is not just the way you are and I'm too old to change you are never too old to change pray for the people that you're struggling with pray that they not just change but that you change and show grace to them confess your limits confess that this is this is hard and I'm having a hard time bearing with this person stay in the word of God remember your forgiveness and stay in his word daily even if it's just a few words to stay in there the word of God will lift you up and encourage you and give you the foundation that you need to bear

I had said at the start that this was confessional and a testimony I just want to give a testimony to God that God can work miracles in you because two years ago you you you actually don't see your change until you go someplace else where people haven't seen you in a while and then they see you and I recently went up to New York to see a friend and I was telling them some of the things I was doing and they said I don't know who you are but would you bring back why because you're not why because God had changed me that much doing things that I never conceived that I would do two years ago God is gracious God is good God bears with us and teaching us to love one another and to bear with one another because Christ has bore our sins on the cross let's go to him in prayer our gracious heavenly father

God and king we thank you for this precious word every word in our scriptures is precious every word is like a morsel of food that we can take in and consume and changes us and I pray that these words in Colossian would change us that you would teach us how to bear with one another chosen holy and be loved I pray that you would teach us to put on compassion to put on kindness to put on humility to put on meekness to put on patience and finally above all these to put on love which binds everything together in perfect harmony I know that you hear us I know that you're present here with us and I know that you hear this prayer and I pray that and I know that there are those out there who are struggling in relationships and I pray that you would help them to learn to love by bearing with one another

I pray this in Jesus name amen