

# Loving Well in the Church

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[ 0 : 00 ] And before we get into tonight's message, I think one of the honors of getting to speak back to back is you get to add an addendum.

And so before we get to tonight, I want an addendum on the last message from this morning. As I left from preaching, this thought struck me that one of the main things that keeps us from a life of just basking in the perfection of Christ is a preoccupation with our own pursuit of personal perfection.

And I believe that is probably an impression that the Spirit may be encouraging you. I know we're going to have a time of contemplative prayer at the end of this evening. I'm excited to be a part of that with you guys.

But I think it's a faithful question. Is your own pursuit of personal perfection keeping you from enjoying and living in the perfection of Christ?

Because brother and sister, our faith is fully built on the perfection of Christ. Not the perfection of his people. And if our pursuit of that obstructs that view, we're missing a major life channel.

[ 1 : 25 ] And I just, I want to submit that. Now that said, we are turning to 3 John. And I am really, I mean, it's not like, I don't know.

If you ask me between 2 and 3 John, which one I love more, I'd actually go 3 John. But I love them both. So go ahead, turn your Bibles to 3 John.

Tonight, the title of our message is Loving Well in the Church. Something I'm picking up that you guys are already doing very well.

So, turn to 3 John. A way of introduction. How many of you like old homes? Great.

It's just a few of us. All right. I'll tell you what I love most about old homes. I love those old radiator heaters.

[ 2 : 30 ] Those cast iron ones. Christina's like, where is this going to go? These guys don't even know. They're Googling as we speak.

But if you've ever been in an old house, you see them. They're high. They're raised. They're ribbed. And what's wonderful about them is the kind of warmth they produce.

It's a deep warmth. You feel it in almost every area of the house. And I contrast those kind of old school cast iron heaters with what I would call cheap heat.

Like when you go to Target to get a space heater, you're concerned it's going to burn down your house. It's either too hot because it's directly on you, but it's leaving other areas cold.

And here's the reality. When we look at 3 John, when we've considered the truths already from 2 John, God intends to warm the church the right way.

[ 3 : 38 ] To not use cheap heat. In our day, cheap heat can be motivational talks that we should be kind to each other. That we should greet new people. But those can all come across as fake, even dangerous.

There is a greater, truer source of an imbibing warmth. And that's what the Apostle John is calling the church to be marked by.

And brothers and sisters, when we love the church well, we produce that kind of heat. And here's why that's so important.

It is a very cold world. It is a very cold world. And people don't just need heat. They need warmth. They need warmth. And if there's a place, they're going to find it. Find it like no other. May it be among us who are numbered as Jesus' people.

[ 4 : 44 ] All right. With that said, I want to read the first eight verses of 3 John. The elder to the beloved Gaius, who I love in truth.

Beloved, I pray that all may go well with you. And that you may be in good health as it goes well with your soul. For I rejoice greatly when the brothers came and testified to your truth.

As indeed you are walking in the truth. I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth.

Beloved, it is a faithful thing that you do in all your efforts for these brothers. Strangers as they are, who testified to your love before the church.

You will do well to send them on their journey in a manner worthy of God. For they have gone out for the sake of the name, accepting nothing from the Gentiles.

[ 5 : 49 ] Therefore, we ought to support people like these, that we may be fellow workers for the truth. Let's pray. Father, we want to live in the warmth that you intend.

Let us not substitute that for cheap sources of heat. We need a radiant and lasting warmth among us.

Lord, it's not just that the world is cold. There are things that are cold in us. That are tired and worn. So, bring us closer to that warmth in this passage. And as it is mainly found in Jesus Christ.

We ask this in his name. Come minister among us through your word. May it be so. All right, the big idea, friends, is loving one another well is what will warm the church brightly.

[ 7 : 01 ] Now, a little bit about 3 John. By way of word count, 3 John is the shortest book in the entire New Testament. And unlike 2 John that was written in a metaphorical sense to an unnamed church, here John is actually writing to an individual, Gaius.

And this is about as close as we're going to get to a piece of personal first century correspondence. Most likely, 1, 2, and 3 John were all delivered in a package.

And they were sent to different areas. And this letter went specifically to Gaius. And what we're going to see in this little letter is really what can make up the elements of our warmth and how we love one another well in the church.

We're going to look at it in three points this evening. The first is love in a whole way. See, if we're going to learn to love one another in the church, we need to learn to love one another as whole people.

People as we are. People in real life and real time. That is so important. But oftentimes when we think of care, we think about dichotomy.

[ 8 : 18 ] Well, if I'm going to care for you, am I going to care for you physically or spiritually? But the reality is we are all both. We are physical and we are spiritual.

We are whole people in that way. So if we're to have this kind of warmth, there must be a wholeness to our love. Look at this with me in verse 2.

He says this, Now many say that because John has more of a Greek influence, he was just doing your usual Greek introduction to a piece of correspondence.

But I think there's much more that's happening. There is a wider sense of care. The first part says that all may go well with you. What's included in that?

Well, I think circumstances and provisions. How many of you know that if your dishwasher goes out, that's a problem? Or your car breaks down?

[ 9 : 28 ] Or you lose a job? Or you have a health setback? Does that not affect your life? Does that not affect you? It absolutely does.

John's greeting here contains a thought for the whole of Gaius. That things provisionally, situationally, may go well with you because those things do matter.

They have a real place. I remember growing up, I would visit my grandparents in Dubuque, Iowa. And my grandpa would always ask me about how my car was doing.

Like even before I had a license. I was like, Grandpa, do you think I'm like just stealing cars and going around? No, you know, it's just part of how I care for people. And I ended up working, I had a career with Subaru for years.

And so oftentimes in the fellowship, I'll ask my congregants, how's your car running? And they're like, man, you care about our soul and our Subaru. I'm like, that's right. If you had a Honda, I really don't care.

[ 10 : 28 ] No, I'm just playing about that part. But listen, those things matter. It's not the main thing. But if we're going to love people in a holistic way, we're bringing the parts of their life in.

And we're showing care and consideration for those parts that just kind of seem nominal, unimportant, unspiritual. But that really affect the whole of our person and our lives.

So when we see that, we continue to go on because he continues to go on. And he says this, and that you may be in good health. Now here I do want us to slow up a little bit. Because I don't think we talk enough about health and our bodies. And you're like, oh great, like this guy, like we're going to be talking about protein powder and this crazy stuff. I knew this was going to go downhill eventually. No. Remember textually, the things John's fighting against have a strong Gnostic flavor.

[ 11 : 31 ] So because of their negative view about the body, it was hard for them to believe the incarnation. So they tried to deny it. But with that same thinking that our bodies are either bad or unimportant, wow, a prayer for health would seem out of place.

Unless there was a warm sense of care that not just your circumstances and provisions in life matter, your health matters. Your bodies matter.

Now listen, I think in our day, we run the risk of caring too little or too much about our bodies. And so let me just give a really short theology of the body if you're like tempted to downplay it. God is pro-body. He made us to be embodied spirits. And part of our hope of the resurrection is that our spirits will be rejoined with resurrected bodies.

As creatures, not the creator, we were always meant to be embodied people. But we have a lot of shame and discomfort with our bodies.

[ 12 : 43 ] What we need to understand is that God does not. He sees it as a good thing that we're embodied people. Not necessarily that all the ways our bodies are affected by the fall here.

Not all that is good. But the concept of a body and the eternal reality that we will be embodied in the new heavens and the new earth. Friends, we are bound to this.

So we must get comfortable with it at some level. Let me say this from Laura Ferguson Wilbert. God made us with bodies and came in a body and died in a body and rose again in a body.

And one day, all his people will dwell with him forever. Every one of us in our own glorified body. Each of those realities matter to the entire gospel narrative.

And so they should each inform the way we interact with the world around us or fellow humans on earth. Even think about the sacraments.

[ 13 : 50 ] What are the sacraments? They're a physical way that God is communicating spiritual reality to us. So we think of baptism.

That is what's something we've applied the merits of Christ to our life. So what baptism is saying, when I go on that water, I'm saying I'm identifying with Jesus Christ.

His death was for me and for my sins. That would be enough to profess that. God gives us a physical symbol in the church of that spiritual reality.

So that when we go down in the water and when we're raised, we're physically engaging a spiritual reality. Communion is the same way.

Have you thought about the significance of communion? To take in the elements. No, don't worry. I don't believe in transubstantiation or anything like that. But the fact that we're physically taking something in as a sign of I have received Christ as my own.

[ 14 : 54 ] His death was for my sins. His body was broken for my salvation. His blood shed for me. Yet we internalize them by ingesting them.

Those are both very physical. And who created the sacraments? Yes. They're from God to us. And so God is not ashamed of this.

Even John's desire. Did you see that at the end of John 2 today? What was he eager to do? To write the believers or to see them? He longs to see them face to face.

We all know there's a difference of communing with someone in person, in body, and not in body. Our bodies truly do matter.

Why am I saying all this? If we're to love one another in a holistic way, that thinking has to come into play. I know some of you aren't here yet, and you're going to be like, why did he use this one?

[ 15 : 55 ] I don't know. It's in my notes. Metapause is real. That's what my notes say. That's what people with hot flashes tell me. I'm not sure you have anyone in your church with metapause.

Listen. Yeah, I'm lost now. That was from my home congregation. I got a lot of sisters going through that right now. But in all seriousness, breaking an ankle matters.

Desiring to have kids matters. Not being able to have kids matters. Having kids and not being able to sleep because it's so hard matters. Losing sleep on finals or because of stress or anxiety, it matters.

And if I'm going to care for you in a holistic way, I'm going to embrace those things. You know the old adage, put yourself in the shoes of another. If I want a warmer, more holistic care, I'm going to try to put myself in your body so that when you're suffering, I'm not just going to say, oh, sorry, hope you get better.

I know how these things can throw us. But now, there's some other people that they prioritize the body too much. That's also a problem.

[ 17 : 14 ] They think that they'll turn back the hands of time. They'll reverse the curse if they eat enough vitamins and work out enough and everything else. That becomes its own kind of idolatry.

And we don't want to go that far, but we don't want to neglect the importance for care. And no matter where you're at on the spectrum, we have to realize that we care for one another as whole people, body and spirit, who are affected by the circumstances and provisions of real life.

Our care must include that to be helpful. Now, I'm going to expound where John goes here. Because he ends with this.

As it goes well with your soul. Now, soul here is not referring to the opposite of the material. Rather, soul here is communicating the whole of life.

This is a prayer for a holistic care. I want all of you to be well and in balance with what matters.

[ 18 : 24 ] You're like, man, this, how is this Christ-centered? Does not Christ, the Good Shepherd, care for all of who we are? He knows all our needs.

Even the very hairs on our head are known by him. The care we have of Christ is very holistic. And just a story about, we were in Indiana two summers ago, and my son Peter and I, who's now in the military, we went to go work out that afternoon.

And so after we worked out, we went to the Walmart to get protein. I know, it just sounds like a total bro story. It has working out Walmart and protein. I know, it's already bad.

But we're there, and the cashier kid starts talking to us, and he's like, so what do you do to bulk?

And so me and my son start talking about what we're buying and what we're taking, and I was just like, this isn't sitting with me.

And I stopped. I said, listen, man, I'm just going to level with you. None of this stuff really matters. Listen, we all have a certain body type. We can all get so big unless you want to get on roids, then you just ruin your life.

[ 19 : 36 ] But I got a little PSA in there. You know, I'm not for the steroids. And I said, but you know what really matters? And I actually quoted from this passage. I said, the Apostle John said, you know, I hope you're in good health and things go well, as it goes well with your soul.

I go, really, at the end of the day, man, this stuff doesn't matter. What really matters is that we know God and that things are well with our soul. So, you know, take all the protein you want.

You probably get a store discount, but I got something better for you. And so I talked to him for a few more minutes about that. It's not just unbelievers at Walmart that need those reminders. Some of us have downplayed this thing too much.

Some of us have put too much hope in here. I got bit by something. We think it might be spiders now. And by the way, all you guys are like coming up with Spider-Man jokes when you heard of spiders and not bed bugs.

I got bit by some bugs in Oklahoma and it knocked me out. It knocked me out. Friends, we're very weak. We're very weak.

[ 20 : 43 ] We need to be more comfortable with that. And we need to be more caring, humble, open, and honest with one another about that. I think that's the health that we see here.

I'm going to skip the Timothy passage because it basically says the same thing. Let's jump to our second point. And this may be one that catches your attention a little bit more. I appreciate you hanging with me on the other one.

Love in a rejoicing way. I want you to hear this in the third and fourth verse. For I rejoiced greatly when the brothers came and testified to your truth, as indeed you are walking in the truth.

I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth. Now that's kind of similar to some stuff in 2 John, isn't it?

But here's some notables. Beloved only appears here. Rejoiced greatly appears in 2 John. But this statement, I have no greater joy.

[ 21 : 49 ] I have no greater joy. I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth. John's not given to flattery or exaggeration.

His greatest joy is seeing other Christians living out their faith like we talked about. Here's the angle where I want to take this tonight.

Because this isn't just exclusive to John. What did Paul say about the believers? You are my joy and my crown. I want to ask you something.

When's the last time you have rejoiced over another believer? With that kind of joy. Because that kind of joy is the joy that our Father in Heaven has for us.

And are we mirroring that in our words and fellowship with one another? Of all the people, why this should be such an honestly warm place is that there are so many things to rejoice over in one another.

[ 22 : 59 ] I see you guys with those encouragement bags. By the way, I see them filling up. I see people working. I mean, you have like encouragement stations. It's like you guys are doing shift work. I see you going.

People are sitting in chairs. I love that. I love that ethic. Let me kind of switch this on you. God is making each one of you to be an encouragement bag.

And he's dropping things in you to share with other believers. Because I don't think we believe that we are rejoiced over.

Like the Bible says, God rejoices in us. But when we start doing this more, we're more mindful of that love from the Father when we learn how to do this well.

Now, how did John do it here? John says this, and this unfortunately falls on weird ears in our times. They testified to your truth. Now, your truth has become a popular thing, and I really don't like that line at all.

[ 24 : 00 ] What's your truth? I'm like, whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa. Truth doesn't work like that. But truth works like this. Testifying to your truth means, you know what? I see that you're the real deal.

So when I came up here and said one of my favorite things about Sean is he is the real thing, that's something that I rejoice in. But it's something that John is rejoicing the believers when he sees the genuineness of their faith.

That's their faith testifying to truth. And the truth testifying to their faith. He uses the same metaphor. He uses in 2 John, walking in the truth, that truth lived out.

The point is we need to learn to harness it. Like Monsters, Inc. Do you remember that movie? Some of you like... Was that a childhood classic for you?

Oh, yeah, see, that's one. Yes. I'm glad we have different seasons represented. But what did they originally think they could draw energy from?

[ 25 : 02 ] Fear. Screams. Screams, yes, technically, yes. Come on. I shouldn't expect you guys to be any less literal. Screams. But screams based on fear and horror.

And what did they actually find at the end of the movie? Left after. Yes. What's more powerful? Left after. Yeah. I think sometimes we think, if I can just be tough enough with other believers, if I can just be stern and serious enough, if I can scare them a little bit, yeah, that's really going to be what energizes and warms the church.

It's just, we're going to be serious. We're serious. Yeah, yeah. I bet we're serious. But we're seriously loved. And I'm seriously concerned we don't believe how much we're loved.

And actually, that's at the root of so many of our issues. And what I want us to see is that when we rejoice over one another in this way, it energizes the church more than fear, legalism, harshness, judgmentalism ever will.

Friends, and this is what we want. Forget about just the world. The world needs this. This is what we want more of. And this is what and why Jesus purchased these things.

[ 26 : 21 ] And so, friends, we want to learn to see other believers the way the Father does so we can join in His rejoicing over them so we can all come to believe that more and more.

When we do that, there's not a square inch of the place. There's not a person left out. You know what my concern about those bags is? Like someone's going to pull a Charlie Brown and not get any.

You guys already know who Charlie Brown is. You'll have to look that up. But I'm always afraid someone's going to be left out. Do you know the Father rejoices over every one of His children? He means for every corner of the room to be warm and every person to feel loved and secured. And friends, the work of the church, our work of loving one another, well, is not done until that is known.

And I do think it's possible. Last one. Love in a shared way. So first we have just embracing one another as whole people.

[ 27 : 25 ] We have the importance of rejoicing over one another in truth as it's lived out and believed. And finally, love in a shared way. Listen, if we're really going to be warm, we've got to work together.

You know the believers I know most? I know them by their forearms. Not because they're big, but because they roll them up and they work.

When you labor side by side with another believer, that's when you really bond. How many of you in the church, the people you're closest with are the people you serve with?

It happens. And I think it's part of it. And what I love is how many of you share the work. That shows good leadership. Good leadership brings in participation because guess what?

We all want to participate. Really, in our hearts, we don't want to be spectators. A lot of churches are hot because they have a show.

[ 28 : 28 ] But spectators are never warm. Spectators never produce warmth. But when we serve side by side with one another, when we feel that we have an actual place, that it matters that we're here, friends, that really does change the dynamic.

And we see it in verses five through eight. Beloved, it is a faithful thing you do in your efforts for these brothers. Brothers, strangers as they are, who testified to your love before the church, you will do well to send them on their journey in a manner worthy of God.

For they have gone out for the sake of the name, accepting nothing from the Gentiles. Therefore, we ought to support people like these that we may be fellow workers for the truth.

Now listen, at this point, 2 John is probably the last living apostle. That apostolic age is ending. And all the gospel proclamation that's going forward is happening through traveling missionaries.

We already saw in 2 John that the deceivers, ones going with a false or altered message, should not be received or endorsed. But now here, we're called to give wide and warm support to those who are doing this work.

[ 29 : 58 ] In fact, this here in 3 John is the strongest and most specific passage about support for missionaries in the New Testament.

Now here's the whole warmth of this. They're not getting the support because they're familiar.

They're getting the support because they're family. John says, strangers as they are.

Yet, their care, their support, John says that is faithful, and he recognizes their efforts, and he ties it back to love.

When we love the Savior, we love the gospel advance. We get behind the support of that, and that's how it ought to be. Because if our fellowship is in the truth, and these people are promoting the true gospel, that means they are true family.

They should have true support. Friends, that is a connection that is wonderful. And it actually is part of what our shared worship is meant to look like.

[ 31 : 05 ] And then, check this out. Did you know that 3 John is the only New Testament document that doesn't mention Jesus by name? But what it does say is amazing.

Why did these people go out? For the sake of the name. Jesus isn't referenced by name here, but for the sake of the name.

The name that is above all names. The name that everyone under heaven and earth will bow before. That name is their great motivation.

Listen, we don't even know these missionaries' names. And isn't that beautiful? To be lost in the name of another.

And then, think about this. John is saying, I don't want this to be funded by the Gentiles. And he's emphasizing those in the world who are unbelievers.

[ 32 : 06 ] But what he's really saying is, I intend the family work to be family funded. And there is a sense that that really works well. Have you guys ever heard of that Christian insurance, Samaritan's Purse?

Do you guys know what it is? It's kind of like you help pay the other people's bills and then you write them a note. I'm not sure it always works. I'm not an insurance person. But it's made to warm up the whole process of insurance.

It's made to give it a more rich kind of connected feel. That's something that people made. The gospel advance should always feel like it's coming from the family.

Should always feel warmth and connected sinews to it. And I love this. Ought to support is in the continual. Meaning that this is to be an ongoing conviction.

And then I love this line. Again, in a manner worthy of God. That's not just a standard. That's actually a window for worship.

[ 33 : 13 ] Friends, whatever we do in the church in love for one another should be with a thought that it matches the worthiness of our God. In a manner worthy of Him.

That we may be fellow workers for the truth. Do you see the investment there? You're like, how many of you feel like when you give money or support you're actually not doing the real work? John doesn't say that. He says that we may be fellow workers for the truth. John has a sense that everybody plays an important role.

And John is not downplaying those. He's not overplaying the people who are going or underplaying the people that are sending. Don't ever underplay your role.

If you are supporting the work of the truth, you are a fellow worker in that. Now, something we'll see tomorrow morning that I'll kind of get you ready for and we'll close with this, is this whole concept of name becomes very important for John.

[ 34 : 21 ] And we'll see this tomorrow, but here's where I want to end this. For the sake of the name. For the sake of the name. One of my favorite things about the church is that this is the one place we all come and we all say someone else is king.

Someone else is Lord. That makes this place so uniquely wonderful. And friends, I think one of the greatest things we need to do is we need to recapture the warmth that we have in the affections of Christ for us.

We sing about these songs. I think a time of contemplative prayer tonight is so good because we really, we won't love others this way unless we're already secure that we are this loved.

I feel like one of the reasons that we are so focused on our own names is because we feel like if we can make our names great, then we'll be loved.

Then we'll be secure. If I'm prominent enough, pretty enough, strong enough, tough enough, kind enough, helpful enough, if I make my name great enough, I will be loved.

[ 35 : 53 ] But that's not what creates the warmth among us. It's that there is one name above all. The only name that really matters.

And as my one sister said earlier in the game, and we find our names in his book. We find our names written on his hand. And if we find our names in that name, more specifically, if we find that we are truly that loved in a way where I don't have to look out for myself to be loved, then we become free to love one another.

And I just want to remind you, we're not making anything up. This love exists. It is truth. It is truth. You cannot be more loved than you are right now, but you can live in that love more than you do. You can live out of the health and security and freedom of that. And that, that is what I believe God is seeking to warm us in this part of 3 John tonight.

Let's pray. Father, Father, thank you that we're not alone in this work of believing this love.

[ 37 : 20 ] we thank you for the Holy Spirit who cries out in us, Abba, Father. The Holy Spirit that shows us the love of Christ and shines a light on it in our hearts.

We pray, Lord, help. Help our unbelief over your love. Lord, it's not weakness to want to believe your love more.

Lord, we're vulnerable and insecure and self-absorbed when we don't. So, Lord, for the sake of your name, for the sake of your name, let us know and be warmed in your love afresh.

Lord, there are some that are just tired. They're tired, Lord. Let them know that who you are is enough.

Lord, there are some that are so deep in the performance trap of just thinking they have to be perfect that they never stop to enjoy your perfection.

[ 38 : 32 ] But, Lord, Lord, may your name and your love be more to us. And may that make all the difference among us in Jesus' name.

So be it.