

**2 Corinthians 1:3** – *“Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort.”*

**2 Corinthians 10:15-16** -

*Neither do we go beyond our limits by boasting of work done by others. Our hope is that, as your faith continues to grow, our sphere of activity among you will greatly expand, so that we can preach the gospel in the regions beyond you. For we do not want to boast about work already done in someone else’s territory.*

In our series “LIFT” we’ve made mention of the many times in Ezekiel where it says:  
***“then the Spirit lifted me up.”***

One commentary I picked up when studying Ezekiel’s call said the following:

***“God comes to Ezekiel entirely unsought and reveals himself to the prophet NOT for the sake of giving him the quiet time to end all quiet times, but rather to commission him for a task and to entrust him with a message.”***

Isn’t that so true of us? I so often come to God for comfort.

When I open the Bible in the morning or evening I want the quiet time to end all quiet times.

When I come to a worship service I want to feel good vibes and warm fuzzies.

I want comfort!

Yet we can get so fixated by comfort and settled in that we become blind to the second part of God’s identity in 2 Corinthians 1:3- **“Father of Compassion.”**

## **COMPASSION**

The Greek word compassion used by Paul means ***“the visceral organs.”*** The inner organs like the heart, liver and lungs. This word compassion speaks to a deep, gut-wrenching affection.

It’s the same compassion Jesus feels in Matthew 9:36 when it says:

***“When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them because they were confused and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.”***

What’s key before he feels compassion - Jesus looked around. He saw the crowds.

When we worship, we look up and heavenward. We look down and inward.

But do we take the time to look around or look out? Do we feel compassion?

God is the God of all comfort. But he’s also the father of compassion.

The very fact we will NEED comfort from God speaks to the fact he calls us out of our comfort zones. If we were always comfortable we wouldn’t need it.

He calls us like he called Ezekiel - ***NOT for the sake of giving him the quiet time to end all quiet times, but rather to commission him for a task and to entrust him with a message.***

We too have a task and mission that will call us out of our comfort zone.

But how often do we cling to our branch of comfort instead of being stirred by compassion?

Again, as we read at the beginning, Paul says later in the same letter to the church in Corinth:  
*Our hope is that, as your faith continues to grow, our sphere of activity among you will greatly expand, so that we can preach the gospel in the regions beyond you.*

### **Three Levels of “Beyond You” that we’re all called to + 3 excuses we make**

The first level of beyond you is right here in this room – the 4 walls of the Church.

Paul’s first letter of correction sent to the church in Corinth he spends a good piece of it talking about the role of tongues and prophecy in church.

But the chapter also continues in a concern Paul has had throughout his letter...

Six times in the letter he speaks of the unbeliever among you  
and 3 times in chapter 14 alone he talks about the outsider in your midst.

Underneath the teaching on the proper place for tongues and prophecy is a clear criticism:  
*why are you so self-indulgent about your spirituality that you aren’t even concerned with the visitor among you?*

If we truly worship the God who leaves the 99 for the 1,  
the outsider among you should be the most valued person in the room.

As we celebrate our anniversary I ask: ***If Paul wrote a letter to our church what would he say?***  
Would he echo the same challenge – *Why are you self centered in your spirituality that you aren’t concerned with a visitor among you?*

I’d like to think the answer is no. I’d like to think we are still the church we were when Kathleen Houston came to one of our very first services four years ago and said:  
*“I’ve been in the church for decades and never felt more welcomed.”*

I probably owe Kathleen an apology, as well as half of the regulars in this room, because I’ve touched your arm mid conversation after service to interrupt you to go say hi to someone new.

What I know is if we want to reach our region but can’t reach the person in our midst on a Saturday, we’re striking out playing tee ball.

Let’s look up and down in our worship as we draw near to God and he draws near to us.  
Let’s receive the comfort he gives.

But we can’t get so stuck in our comfort that we forget to look around.  
Consider what’s beyond ME.

But I have to ask the question – *Would I rather this person came to church and felt like we were over-friendly, or risk them coming and feeling like nobody cared?*

To me that’s a no brainer.

I live at Starbucks.

*Do you know what multiple baristas have told me is the WORST rush of impolite people? Sunday right after noon. Right after people flood out of church.*

If you leave church with no motivation to love people – what was the point of going? Jesus tells us the greatest commandment in addition to loving God is to love others as he has loved us.

**OBEDIENCE is greater than sacrifice!**

Don't offer up some sacrifice of praise in a worship service and then disobey the most simple command we have – LOVE PEOPLE.

**MON – FRI** - Your workplace. Your school. The region that at times may feel entirely disconnected from what happens here. We live a life of duality, as if there's a whole slice of the spectrum of our lives that is sometimes untouched by our faith and God's grace.

In Genesis God is a gardener. A landscaper. In the Gospels Jesus is a carpenter. And whatever your work week looks like, he's there with you.

You didn't end up at your workplace or school by chance and God is throwing his hands up. God placed you there to be a light. God placed you there to reach people.

Are you mindful of the “beyond” that God has already placed you in?  
That nobody else in City Life of the Church can reach?

*We give three common excuses that keep us from feeling compassion like Christ did and reaching people with the hope we have...*

**I don't have the gift.**

There are lots of spiritual gifts in the Bible. The spiritual gift of evangelism isn't one of them. There are evangelists who equip people for evangelism (see Ephesians 4). But the commission is universal. It's called the Great Commission, and it's for all of us.

**I don't know enough.**

This is fruit of living in a culture where we're more concerned about being and looking right than we are about loving people. So we think we can't love people and share the love of Christ until we have all the answers. No where in the Bible are you told to answer every question a person has. The one question we should be prepared to answer:

*“What is the reason for the hope you have?”*

And that answer isn't hard: Jesus.

Stop buying the lie from the enemy that you don't know enough.

Another lie: **I'm not holy enough.**

I've got to get my own life right first before I get to talking about reaching anyone else.

The Gospel isn't about being good enough or attaining perfection. It's glory is in the fact I am imperfect and unholy but Jesus died to save me, and he's making me whole and he's making me holy day by day.

As we celebrate our anniversary I have to ask – *if Paul wrote a letter to our church what would he say?*

Do we care for people?

Do we care that we don't care?

Or are we drowning in our comfort, still seeking the quiet time to end all quiet times, forsaking our task and mission?

Jesus had compassion. He wept over people. His compassion was gut-wrenching.

And it's why Jesus left a legacy.

No human being has left a legacy quite like Jesus

It wasn't about success. He didn't have success on the world's terms.

**Success** is about what you can accomplish.

**Significance** is about who you are to others.

Jesus was significant. He redefined success.

What will our legacy be about?

May it be significance – who we are to those beyond those walls.

That will take letting go of the branch of our comfort daily to reach those around us.