

Five priorities for Christian life \* 2 Corinthians 13:11  
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Every so often in the Bible you get a passage of scripture that perfectly captures what it is to live the Christian life. Micah 6:8 is one of those - To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God. (Mic 6:8 NIV). Matthew 22:37 is another - 37 Jesus replied: " 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' 38 This is the first and greatest commandment. 39 And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' (Mat 22:37-39 NIV).

The passage of scripture that we're going to look at today is another and actually it works out the implications of how to love the Lord and love your neighbour. And given that this is the season finale for Keeping up with the Corinthians (season 2) it's a fitting place for us to end. Paul closes his letter by breaking down the basic priorities of Christian life and we can learn a lot about how to be the church together by looking at this passage. You want to know what it is to live a good Christian life? Let's go to 2 Corinthians 13:11 for the answer.

Let me read it to you from the newest New International Version – the 2017 version – 2 Corinthians 13:11 –

11 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.

Five priorities for Christian life.

Now, right off the bat, if you're using the older New International Version (1984), you're going to notice something a little weird. Back in '84, they translated it 'finally, brothers, goodbye.' Not 'rejoice.' And that certainly may have been what Paul meant, but I think they've got it right with the newest one.

Because what you have here is essentially five words, each of them a command. Be joyful, be restored, be encouraged, be of one mind and be at peace. It's like my kids' school work – the one teacher gives us a list of bullet points – here's the things you need to do today – and I think that's what Paul's given us – a list of five priorities for us as believers.

So first, rejoice. Let your heart overflow with the confident contentment that comes from knowing that God is working for your well being.

In the midst of this pandemic, that's important for us to hear, isn't it? We can so easily get discouraged and fatigued but Paul says – even in the worst of times – rejoice. Take courage knowing that this momentary, light affliction will soon give way to the eternal weight of glory.

And notice, joy is not necessarily happiness or the absence of trouble; joy is the confident assurance even in the midst of trials that God is working for good. When we rejoice, we draw courage and strength from the knowledge God is in control. So, priority number one for us as believers - rejoice.

Priority #2 - Strive for full restoration. Or some translations put it 'set things right.' Again, if you're using the old NIV, they translated it 'aim for perfection' – which again is possible – but I think the newer version is better. Because the language here is of mending nets. Picture James and John in their boats mending nets – it's this word – and the implication is that we'd go through our lives and mend up all the

broken places in light of the Gospel. Are there places where we are putting other things before Christ? Put Him first and make things right. Are we treating people in a way that's inconsistent with the Gospel? Mend that net. Priority #2 - Aim for restoration.

11 Finally, brothers and sisters, rejoice! Strive for full restoration... Priority 3 - encourage one another. Or comfort one another. Again, the old NIV – 'listen to my appeal' – is grammatically possible, but I think that it's much more likely that he's saying – encourage one another. Comfort one another. Take the comfort that God gives you and pass that on to others. I mean, that's an idea that's come up again and again in 2 Corinthians, and so I think Paul is just driving home the point. Encourage one other. If people are struggling, build them up. If people are grieving, sit and grieve with them. Use whatever power you have to lift them up. Don't tear them down. But instead, priority 3 - encourage one another.

Priority 4 - be of one mind – and here, the old NIV nailed it because this is exactly what Paul is saying. Be of one mind – that is, putting aside all selfish ambition and vain conceit, agree with other believers that God's will alone is the will that you are going to pursue together. Being of one mind means getting together behind the common goal of advancing the kingdom and work together to make it happen. This doesn't mean that we all think exactly alike, but it does mean that we all make God's priorities our priorities. So priority 4 – be of one mind.

And finally, priority five - rejoice! Strive for full restoration, encourage one another, be of one mind... and *live in peace*. And that's exactly what it sounds like. Insofar as it depends on you, be at peace with one another. Don't hold grudges. Don't scheme to get your way above someone else's. Having the same mind as Christ Jesus, unite behind the Gospel and be at peace with one another.

Five priorities for Christian living - rejoice! Strive for full restoration, encourage one another, be of one mind, live in peace. And when we do that, Paul says, the God of love and peace will be with you.

That's a pretty great blessing isn't it? When we do these things, when we pursue these priorities as a church – the God of love and of peace will be with us. And frankly, it's a bit of a chicken and the egg situation. When we decide to follow Jesus, we experience God's love and peace, and then we live it out in community to be joyful and encouraging and at peace and then we experience more of God's love and peace to extend to others and the cycle continues.

In light of the Gospel,  
Be joyful  
Be restored  
Be encouraged  
Be of one mind  
Be at peace  
And the God of love and peace will be with us...

Now let's think - just for a moment - about how we're doing as a church.

Are we characterized by joy – that confident assurance that God knows what He's doing – or are we living with a kind of spiritual pessimism that thinks of the church largely as a human institution? Do we aim for restoration with God and with people we don't agree with? Or do we just decide to tolerate holes in our nets?

Do we comfort and encourage one another? Do we share and act out of a common commitment to the Kingdom first? Do we make it our priority to live at peace with one another? Those are good questions to ask about our church, also good questions to ask about ourselves – are all of those priorities characteristic of you, or are there places where you need some work?

As your pastor, I'm really delighted to say that I think we're doing pretty good on this. The fact that we pulled together a meal for June 11 at Blessing Centre in a matter of hours, the fact that you keep faithfully sending cheques to the church, the fact that I haven't had a single person question our decision to keep supporting our missions even when the budget is tight suggests to me that we are of one mind – that Langford Church exists to honour God by serving Him with all the power that He gives us. I know you comfort each other; I know you work to work through disagreements together. And I think that we experience the blessings of the God of love and peace together.

So keep it up and let these Corinthian priorities guide your life.

#### BENEDICTION

14 May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. (2Co 13:14 NIV).