

Lesson 2: Three Kinds of Death

In the last session, we learned that the gospel of Jesus is shaped like the letter J. Moving down into death and up towards resurrection. This is not only the shape of the gospel that saves us, but this is also the shape of the normal Christian life. As we abide in Jesus, we are drawn into various forms of death in everyday life along with real resurrection change in our hearts and circumstances.

Now, in this session, I wanted to look more specifically at what everyday dying looks and feels like. One of the easiest ways to distinguish between various kinds of death is to locate where trouble is. And so, if you look at this chart here, in the first form, trouble is outside of us and it moves towards us. And that's called suffering. An example of that you see 2 Corinthians 12:7-10, the Apostle Paul is feeling the effects in the natural results of living in a broken world as he deals with this thorn in the flesh.

Now, sometimes we are horrified to discover that trouble is actually not outside of us, but we are horrified to discover that it's inside of us. To put that sin or trouble to death, we repent. This is called dying and repentance. We see an example of that in Colossians 3:5-11 which we will take a look at later on in the course.

And then sometimes trouble is not inside of us, but it is outside of us, but it's not moving anywhere. And yet this is when we move willingly towards trouble, and this is called dying in love for the sake of the other. We see that in Philippians 2:5-11. These various J-Curves often trigger one another. For instance, when we choose to die and love for someone, and we start here... Naturally that comes at a cost and leads us... the love J-Curve leads us into a form of suffering. This shouldn't come as a surprise. I mean look at the love of Christ as described in Philippians 2:7-8. The first part is relatively pain-free. We see that Jesus emptied himself. He took the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men, and being found in human form, he humbled himself. And so, we see this choice that Jesus makes, to choose to die in love for the sake of an undeserving world.

But the second part, evil comes after Jesus, and he personally bears the consequences of love by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. And this draws Jesus naturally into a suffering J-Curve. The love J-Curve is easier in many ways than a suffering J-Curve because you're still in control. You willingly make a choice. But when that choice requires personal sacrifice, then it's easy to get confused and wonder if we're still doing the right thing. We may regret our decision to love or maybe try to even get out of it, but not Jesus. He became obedient to the point of death. even death on a cross.

So let's get back to Pastor Alisha. After the church split, Alisha has to feel like his ministry is over, even though it's not. It's got to feel like it. In fact, I wouldn't doubt if he was just beginning to wonder if it was worth it at all even to begin with.

Now, before this happened, Alisha was in a good transaction. He was giving up his time, his energy, his resources, for the sake of the church because he not only was called to do so as a pastor but simply because he loves the people of God. In exchange, in return, the people were giving him thanks, he saw growth, and there was great joy. But after the church split, this transaction changed. The shape of it was still the same. Pastor Alisha was still giving time and energy and resources, but now he's not getting good in return. So instead of honour, he's getting dishonour. He's getting criticism. And now he has a church split.

This can be confusing because sometimes we have a genuine desire to love and serve others well, but that leads us to pain and suffering. The world tells us there is something wrong. Maybe you're not setting healthy boundaries, and while boundaries are helpful, oftentimes we simply forget that love hurts because love costs the one who gives it. Love, especially Christ-like love, is sacrificial. And so, Alisha is in a love J-Curve. He started here, and that naturally led him into a suffering J-Curve. It would be tempting for Alisha to assume that he heard God's call wrong, or 'this is no longer a healthy ministry', that 'I must leave', or he needs to fight for his rights. But what's really going on here? Is Alisha's ministry done or is it just beginning?

Alisha's now entering the gospel. He's entering the path of Christ. So to serve joyfully feels like a death to him. He is becoming like Jesus in his death. And some of you might be discouraged because you feel like you don't have what it takes to love in this way. And you and I don't have what it takes, but be of good cheer. The good news of the gospel is that we don't have this kind of love but Jesus does.

In 2 Corinthians 1:3-6, we see this here. It begins here. The Apostle Paul said "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort who comforts us in all our afflictions. For as we share abundantly in Christ's sufferings, so through Christ, we share abundantly in comfort too. So that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction. If we are afflicted, it is for your comfort and salvation, and if we are comforted, it is for your comfort."

There is a cascading effect that Christ pours his comfort into us, and we pour our comfort into others. And as we pour our comfort into others, this may sound simple and easy, but we must remember what the trigger is for the flow of comfort, it's suffering. And so, as we give, as Christ gave us comfort it was through his suffering. As we give our comfort to others, it is through our suffering.

And so in a love J-Curve, my dying is for your rising. Every act of love potentially reenacts the gospel. Christ's suffering flows into our lives as comforts. As we suffer, our suffering flows into other's lives as we comfort. And this is the beauty of love. May God's comfort lead and empower you to love others in this way as well.