

John 13:34-35 NLT *“So now I am giving you a new commandment: Love each other. Just as I have loved you, you should love each other. 35 Your love for one another will prove to the world that you are My disciples.”*

- Jesus commanded his followers to “love each other”
- He told them how to love, “Just as I have loved you, you should love each other.” Our love for one another should be patterned after Jesus love for us.
 - I am commanded to love you, in the same way Jesus loves me.
 - I am commanded to love you in the same way Jesus love you!
- Then Jesus adds that our love for one another will be the defining characteristic of the Church -- “Your love for one another will prove to the world that you are My disciples.” or from the NKJV: **By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.”**

Introduction

- We've been looking at Building Community
 - The first week we discussed the idea of community and the Biblical call for community. BonHoeffler, “Christianity is community in Jesus Christ and through Jesus Christ.”
 - Then we looked at community through shared gifts
 - The Sunday prior to Easter we discussed that community means Real Love – **Romans 12:9-21** NLT *Don't just pretend to love others. Really love them. Hate what is wrong. Hold tightly to what is good.*
 - This week we will look at the verse that got me started on this whole path
 - I listened to a sermon by Chip Ingram, of Living on the Edge ministry
 - Today's sermon is my adaptation of his message

Renowned psychotherapist concludes, “There must be a better way.”

From the book Connecting by Dr. Larry Crabb

“Imagine what could happen if God were to place within his people intangible nutrients that had the power to both prevent and reverse soul disease and then told us to share those nutrients with each other in a special kind of intimate relating called connection. Imagine what could happen if that were true, if we believed it, and if we devoted ourselves to understanding what those nutrients were and how we could give them away.”

“I envision a community of people who intentionally mingle in settings where these nutrients are passed back and forth, where I pour into you the healing resources within me and you pour into me what God has put in you. Like spiritual gifts, these nutrients only nourish our own souls as we give them away for the blessing of others.”

“In recent days, I have made a shift. I am now working toward the day when communities of God’s people, ordinary Christians whose lives regularly intersect, will accomplish most of the good that we now depend on mental health professionals to provide. And they will do it by connecting with each other in ways that only the gospel makes possible.”

In this book, according to Chip Ingram, Dr. Crabb tells the story of a man he had been counseling for years.

- This individual had deep psychological problems that required years of weekly therapy sessions

- Dr. Crabb relates in his book that he vividly recalls one session where they uncovered the underlying issue and he was able to give the counsel that he was sure would lead to this man's healing. This was certainly the break through session that would change this man's life, he had thought.
- During those years he happened to see this man eating lunch in a park, so he joined him.
 - He asked "how are you doing?" The man began to reply as though he were his counselor, but Dr. Crabb interrupted him and said, "No, I mean like regular people – how are you doing, and you say "fine" and we'll just have a normal conversation..."
 - The man eventually moved to another city and the two lost contact with each other
 - Years later Dr. Crabb ran into him and found that his life was transformed, totally changed and healed
 - Dr. Crabb, remembering that break through session, asked the man if there was one thing that led to his changed life, was there one moment that he could remember that was the start of the turn around
 - To Dr. Crabb's surprise, the man said, yes "It was the day that we had lunch together in the park. Somehow we connected then and I felt affirmed and loved as a person. We weren't working on my problems, we were just friends."
 - It was that encounter that led Dr. Crabb to reevaluate his whole paradigm of Christian counseling ministry and led him to writing the book.

Romans 12:10 NIV Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honor one another above yourselves.

Romans 12:10 NKJV Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another;

Romans 12:10 NLT Love each other with genuine affection, and take delight in honoring each other.

Romans 12:10 MSG Be good friends who love deeply; practice playing second fiddle.

"Be devoted"

- The idea Paul is expressing is that our relationship goes beyond membership to an organization or group
- That we are to live as brothers and sisters. That our love is to be on the level of family
 - Philostorgos is a combination of two greek words
 - Philo from which we get the word philadelphia From G5361; *fraternal affection*: - brotherly love (kindness), love of the brethren – which is found in this verse translated as "brotherly love"
 - And "storgos" which speaks of the fondness found in healthy family relationships, especially that of parents and children – a fondness that flows from the deepest parts of one's being.
 - Webster's "devotion" as "to give of oneself, to pursue with loyalty and deep affection
 - This is the description of the community that God intends His church to be
 - **This is GOD'S DREAM FOR YOU**, for each of us
 - To live in a community that are devoted to one another, that have genuine affection, that are good friends who love deeply, that honor and give preference to each other!

My goal is not to preach what the church “ought or should be.” I certainly don't want anyone to go away feeling condemned or discouraged because we are not living up to, or experiencing all of what God intends.

Our goal is to take seriously what Jesus said in **John 13:34-35** NLT *So now I am giving you a new commandment: Love each other. Just as I have loved you, you should love each other. Your love for one another will prove to the world that you are My disciples."*

- Sunday church is great, but can we really expect to enter into the type of relationship Jesus intends for us, and that Paul describes in Romans, by attending a meeting for 90 minutes once a week?
 - Church is a great place to learn Biblical truths
 - To worship together with other believers
 - To have opportunities to merge our efforts with other like minded believers and do great things
 - To serve others, and to create an environment where others can hear the good news.
 - But to go deeper and develop the brotherly love the Bible talks about requires more than a church service.
 - Sunday services, and all of the activities of the Church are intended to be the context or launching point for deeper and more meaningful relationships
 - Life groups are one way where you can get to know others in a more intimate setting, so that from there even deeper relationships can be formed.
- Community
 - What is at the center of community?
 - “U” -- you are.
 - I think this is a simple easy way to understand a big concept – something big enough to change our lives
 - The center of community is “U”
 - The level of community you experience is in direct proportion to the measure you connect with those around you
 - In your identity as a child of God
 - In the giving and receiving of shared gifts
 - And in the level of devotion, love and honor you give and are able to receive
 - Each of us interconnect through shared community – **we are a mosaic**

What keeps us from experiencing authentic community?

What hinders us or limits us from giving and receiving this level of biblical love for one another?

I. It doesn't happen automatically.

A. **1 Thessalonians 4:9-10** NKJV *But concerning brotherly love you have no need that I should write to you, for you yourselves are taught by God to love one another; 10 and indeed you do so toward all the brethren who are in all Macedonia. But **we urge you, brethren, that you increase more and more;***

B. **1 Peter 1:22** NLT *You were cleansed from your sins when you obeyed the truth, so*

now you must show sincere love to each other as brothers and sisters. Love each other deeply with all your heart.

- C. **2 Peter 1:5-7 NIV** *For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; 6 and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; 7 and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, love.*

II. It takes time, effort and intentionality.

- A. It is unlikely for someone to walk up after church and say, “Hi, my name is Bob, I'd like to have a deep devoted relationship with you.”
- B. In fact if this happened we ought to be a bit concerned
- C. Intentionality, means we do things purposefully to bring about a desired outcome
- D. We find ways to increase our level of relationship with one another – we work on it!

III. It is especially difficult for some of us to share at the “feeling level.” In fact the whole emotional side of Christianity may make us nervous or uncomfortable. This is often because:

- A. We fear rejection
- B. We have had poor family background
 - i. To some the comparison to family love only brings up pain
 - ii. Recognize that this is a barrier and do not allow it to hinder you
- C. We have had negative Church experiences
 - i. We've been set up with the love expectation before and have been burned
 - ii. We've had small groups that turned unhealthy, abusive or controlling or boring
 - iii. Life groups are intended to simply be a context where people can connect through shared interest.
 - iv. New Day is to be a place where we offer spiritual growth and opportunity for relationships and ministry
 - v. You know, most people have had bad church experiences, because churches are made up of people – and we all have stuff we're working through

IV. Personal unresolved anger and bitterness

- A. People with unresolved anger and bitterness are not a lot of fun to be around
- B. Walk around with a bubble – or stiff arm, keeping “safe” distance
- C. Sensitive subject comes up and they shut down, or get defensive
- D. This is a defense mechanism to keep people away – and it works!
- E. Find out where the anger is coming from and get some help – address it, so you can grow past it.

V. Excessive preoccupation with ourselves

- A. Chip Ingram in his message shared about a man who attended his church for several years.
 - i. He never fit in, because he told Chip that everyone else seemed to be part of one clique or another
 - ii. Then he went on a mission trip and served with a small group building a house for a family in Mexico
 - iii. Through that experience he was forced into community with others, and had to deal with his own issues
 - iv. He realized the real problem was that he was a clique of one – he evaluated

- everyone else by how they treated him
- v. Once he began to love others first the whole issue of acceptance evaporated
- B. Cliques are like the “dark side” of community
 - i. They are the perversion, or abuse of community, regardless of the size or reason for the clique
- C. Genuine biblical community offers deep commitment and affection without the exclusivity of a clique and the demand of being “like us” in every way
- D. People naturally and in a healthy way form into sub-groups, and will always have smaller groups that vary in deeper relationships
- E. We avoid becoming a clique by always going out of our way to welcome others into relationship, and by seeking out new people and new relationships

VI. Failure to recognize our limitations and capacities

- A. Some people over commit
- B. They can't say no
- C. They have hundreds of superficial relationships, and often get burned out
- D. We are all different
 - i. Some of us can have 20 or 30 deep relationships, other can only have 2 or 3
 - ii. The number doesn't really matter, as long as some relationships are deep

VII. Idealistic or unrealistic expectations

- A. This final reason simply involves not being realistic in our expectations
- B. We think we'll join a Life Group, or attend church and in 3 or 4 weeks we'll be connected in deep relationships
- C. The problem is that people in church are a lot like you and me, we drop the ball, we forget to return a phone call, we get overwhelmed, or we don't make the time
- D. Chip Ingram encourages his church to “get realistic, move slowly and trust God”
- E. Some of the greatest relationships are the result of working through the unmet expectations, hurts and let downs – when we get past our defense mechanisms and get to know and be known as we really are!