**This Changes Everything - Week 4 - Love Like Jesus**

**Scripture: Matthew 4:18-22, Matthew 20:21-28, John 13:34-35**

**Message Big Idea:** An apprentice of Jesus is committed to loving like Jesus.

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**Introduction: Sitcoms**

*(Series Graphic)* I don’t know about you, but I love a good sitcom. In my opinion, the sitcoms that have been the most successful throughout the years are ones that give us an ideal glimpse of community, regardless of how dysfunctional they may actually be!

*[Sitcom slide 1 – How I Met Your Mother, Friends, Big Bang]*

For example, who wouldn’t want to be friends with Ted, or Chandler, or Penny?  I know I would!

*[Sitcom slide 2 – The Office, Cheers, Parks and Rec]*

Or, if work could be as entertaining as it is with Michael, or Sam, or Leslie, we would never need a vacation!

*[Sitcom slide 3 – Family Matters, Blackish, Full House]*

Or, how about the heartfelt lessons learned from Urkel, or Rainbow, or Uncle Jesse?  These half-hour masterpieces give us a glimpse into what it’s like to experience life in community.

When I see groups of people like these, I often long for that kind of community in my own life - one with laughter and closeness… and ideally where everything is perfectly resolved in 30 minutes or less.

Ultimately, I think we are drawn to these shows because they give us a glimpse of the kind of love we long to experience in our lives. Something inside of us longs to give and receive love in the context of a close-knit community, but most of us struggle to find this kind of community.

In an article in the Harvard Business Review, a former Surgeon General notes:

**“During my years caring for patients, the most common pathology I saw was not heart disease or diabetes; it was loneliness.” –Dr. Vivek, Murthy, Former Surgeon General**

And after numerous studies, researcher George Gallup concludes:

**“Americans are the among the loneliest people in the world.” –George Gallup**

If all of that is true, how do we find a different way, a better way of living in this world?

**Series Recap**

*(Series Graphic)* We are in the fourth week of our series, **“This Changes Everything.”** This series is all about the good news Jesus came to proclaim.

**“The time has come,” he said. “The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!” Mark 1:15**

When Jesus announced that the Kingdom of God was here, what he was saying was that heaven was breaking through to earth. There was now a new way of living in this world available to everyone! It’s an eternal kind of life filled with love, purpose and meaning that we can experience right now!

And with this announcement, Jesus also extended an invitation. He offers himself as the way to experience this eternal kind of life. He says:

**“Come, follow me…” –Mark 1:17**

It’s an invitation to become his apprentice. You and I are invited, not to just *believe* things about Jesus, not to just *learn* things about Jesus, but to be active participants in *following* Jesus as his apprentices. He wants to show us how to experience an eternal kind of life in the Kingdom of God right now!

Last week we talked about how apprenticeship starts by **Being with Jesus.** This is about continually turning our thoughts to Jesus and living with an awareness that through the Holy Spirit he is always with us. Apprentices are intentional about spending time *with* Jesus.

Today we’re going to discover that apprentices are learning to **Love like Jesus.** In fact, Jesus himself said this would be a defining mark of his followers:

**“A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples,** (or apprentices) **if you love one another.” –John 13:34-35**

How did Jesus model this love? By living in community.

**Jesus in Community**

Now, Jesus has always lived in community – and not just here on earth, either. Jesus is one person in what we call the Trinity – Father, Son, and Spirit. So, within the Trinity itself, before anything or anyone was ever created, we get a beautiful picture of community.

Some call this relationship between the Father, Son, and Spirit “the dance of the Divine” – a perfect, selfless picture of community at its very best. So, if God himself is community, it would make sense to me that, as his image bearers, we too would be hard-wired for community too. We see this in Jesus!

*(Matthew 4:18-22)* When Jesus came to live among us on planet Earth, he was intentional about seeking and forming community. And not just with one person, he intentionally lived in a whole community of apprentices.

And notice that Jesus also had an extremely high bar of commitment. He didn’t say, “Hey, come be in my community when it’s convenient for you.” Or, “When you get a free moment, feel free to visit my website for more information.” No, what does he say? He says, *(highlight)* **“Follow me”** and they left their nets immediately! Both Jesus and his first followers committed themselves to live in true, authentic community. **Community is a byproduct of commitment.**

And don’t make the mistake of thinking that this commitment was always a walk in the park. Yes, this community was full of love, purpose, and meaning; but also disagreements, confusion, and sadness at times.

*(Matthew 20:20-21)* For example, in one case, the mom of two of the disiples even asks Jesus about placing her sons in the highest seats of authority in his kingdom. Quite the request, right? As you might expect, the other disciples are not thrilled. *(Matthew 20:25-28)* Yet this conflict gives Jesus the opportunity to teach his apprentices that the kingdom of God is not about climbing the ranks but being a servant. It’s in these teachable moments that the disciples are learning to love like Jesus. This kind of growth, this kind of learning happens in this community because **Community is the context in which we are transformed.** If we are to learn to love like Jesus, we have to be in a community.

**A Mistake We Make**

However, when it comes to community, there is a mistake a lot of us make. We mistake a network for community. Most of us have a significant number of people in our network. For most of us, you can look at our social media profiles and see that we are connected to hundreds if not thousands of people. We might be around dozens or even hundreds of people at our workplaces and schools and neighborhoods. We have expansive networks. But a network isn’t a community.

In her book *Reclaiming Conversation*, MIT professor Sherry Turkle writes:

**“Face to face conversation is the most human – and humanizing – thing we do. Fully present to one another, we learn to listen. It’s where we develop the capacity for empathy. It’s where we experience the joy of being heard, of being understood.” –Sherry Turkle, *Reclaiming Conversation***

She goes on to argue that we’re actually not built to keep in touch with the large number of people we have in our networks. In study after study of brain scans, hunter-gather tribes, and military theory, she claims that 100-150 is the max number of people we are capable of having true, meaningful relationship with. Yet most of us are networked to many more than that. As a result, networking is way up, while community is way down.

So what exactly is community? Merriam-Webster defines **Community** as *(Dictionary format)* **“people with common interests living in a particular area.”** The prefix, com, is Latin for “with.” Meaning, a community is the people we are *with*. The people we physically live near. The original Latin word is *communitas*, which literally means, “to share in common.” So a community is a group of people we are physically with, with whom we share something in common.

Now, don’t miss this: as followers of Jesus, what we share in common isn’t our ethnicity or our political persuasion or our demographic niche; it’s Jesus. For an apprentice of Jesus, a community is a group of people we live by and follow Jesus with.

And a community is right in the center of what it means to live as an apprentice of Jesus in the Kingdom of God.

Now, there are plenty of reasons we avoid this type of real-life, authentic community. *(TP should give a personal example of which of these he/she struggles with)*

One is: **Individualism**

Columnist David Brooks writes: *(add)*

**“We live in a culture of hyper-individualism. There is always a tension between self and society… Over the past sixty years we have swung too far toward the self. The only way out is to rebalance, to build a culture that steers people toward relation, community, and commitment – the things we most deeply yearn for, yet undermine with our hyper-individualistic way of life.” –David Brooks**

And that’s the rub; to live in community, you have to give up – not all, but some – of your autonomy. You have to come under the accountability of other people. To live in a community in the way of Jesus, you have to commit, which means you sometimes miss out on other options. You can’t just do whatever you want, whenever you want, *and* live in community.

A second reason I think we avoid community is: **Idealism**

Marriage is the ultimate example of this. The main reason most marriages fail is because of wildly unrealistic expectations. Many of us either won’t commit to a particular community because we are waiting around for the perfect fit, which never comes; or we bounce from one community to another to another looking for the perfect community.

But finally, I think a significant block to community is: **Intimidation**

We’re straight-up scared of it. And I don’t just mean those of us who are introverts. Introversion and extroversion have nothing to do with how relational somebody is. Some of the most relational people I know are high introverts; and some of the most individualistic, lonely people I know are high extroverts.

We’re scared, because we realize, even if only at an intuitive, gut level, that if we really commit to a community, our real self will come out. Who we actually are will come out in the open before God and each other.

**Challenge**

But here’s the truth… If we are serious about living as apprentices to Jesus, we can’t follow Jesus alone. Community is not optional. **Community is the context in which we are transformed to love like Jesus.** We just can’t learn to love like him on our own.

Fortunately, here at COMMUNITY, we have a plan in place to make finding a community easier for every one of us.  We call this community a small group. So let me issue a couple challenges:

**1 - Choose a Community**

First, choose a community. If you are not yet in a small group, make the decision to join one today. A small group is a community of people who are intentional about having conversations about who Jesus is and how we can be transformed to be more like him.

Now, as a pastor, it’s not uncommon for me to hear people say, “I already have a community. I see my friends all the time. I’m connected.” And not to take away from that - but are you intentionally chasing after Jesus when you are with them at the bar, or on the golf course, or at your book club? Absolutely keep those friendships alive, but if we want to experience the eternal kind of life Jesus came to bring, we have to invest in a community of people who are learning to live as apprentices to Jesus.

For an apprentice of Jesus, a community is a group of people you follow Jesus *with*.

If you are not in a small group, then I challenge you to choose one. Try one - try two – keep trying until you find a group. We have made it very simple to try out a small group. You can tell us on the communication card and put it into the bucket and someone will contact you. You can go to the app or website and fill out the small group interest form. You can ask the people you are sitting next to right now if they are in a small group and if so, ask if you can come this week to check it out. Just make the decision that today is the day you will choose a community.

**2 - Commit to Community**

And here is a second challenge: Commit to Community. Those of you who are in a small group know that it isn’t always easy. Just like the community of Jesus and his disciples, there will be times when we experience disagreements, confusion, and sadness.

In fact, I think our experience in a small group often goes like this:

*[Small group cycle slide 1]*



First, we join the group and things are great! We’re getting to know people and experience the bond of being accepted into a community of Christ-followers. Sometimes we just can’t get enough of the conversations, shared experiences, and a-ha moments as we’re learning to live as apprentices to Jesus.

*[Small group cycle slide 2]*



But inevitably, there’s a bump in the road. Someone new will come to the group who may challenge the dynamics of the conversation. A question is asked that feels confrontational. A statement is made that makes us angry or hurts our feelings. Maybe the leader starts talking about reproducing the group to make room for more people and we feel resistant. Or someone stops coming to the group and it leaves an uncomfortable feeling of uncertainty.

*[Small group cycle slide 3]*



Then eventually, when living in community with people, some kind of crisis will happen either in our lives or the lives of other group members. There will be a major health issue, a broken relationship, or a death. Something might happen that feels bigger than what can be handled in our small group. It can get hard.

It’s when living in community hits these points – when everything feels not awesome or even hard – that so many people bail. They walk away. And that’s tragic.

*[Small group cycle slide 4]*



Because those who commit to holding each other up, to praying for one another, to sticking together through the hard stuff…those are the people who learn to love like Jesus.

Authors Christopher Smith and John Pattison warn us:

**“People who stay grow. People who leave do not grow… It is a simple but profound biblical reality that we both grow and thrive together or we do not grow much at all.” -** **-Christopher Smith and John Pattison, Slow Church**

*(TP share personal experience in SGs)* In my experience, the times that I have been “all in” with my small group is when I seemed to feel closer to God. I was praying more and scripture was more alive. It’s hard to admit from this platform, but at times I have just shown up and checked the small group box for the week.  In reflection, those are also the times I felt disconnected from my relationship with God. Though I practically knew he was with me, I didn’t feel the same as I did when I was active in my small group community.

People who stay grow. People who leave do not grow. So once you choose your community, let me challenge every one of us to commit to that community.

**Conclusion**Jesus says:

**“A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.”  John 13:34-35**

Apprentices to Jesus are learning to love like Jesus, and this happens in the context of a community. As the first followers began to live this out, it showed up in a bunch of ways known as the “one anothers” in the New Testament. Here is a sample:

**“Be at peace with each other.” (**[**Mark 9:50**](https://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/Mark%209.50)**)**

**“Wash one another’s feet.” (**[**John 13:14**](https://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/John%2013.14)**)**

**“Be devoted to one another in brotherly love…” (**[**Romans 12:10**](https://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/Rom%2012.10)**)**

**“Live in harmony with one another…” (**[**Romans 12:16**](https://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/Rom%2012.16)**)**

**“Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you…” (**[**Romans 15:7**](https://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/Rom%2015.7)**)**

**“Instruct one another.” (**[**Romans 15:14**](https://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/Rom%2015.14)**)**

**“Serve one another in love.” (**[**Galatians 5:13**](https://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/Gal%205.13)**)**

**“Be patient, bearing with one another in love.” (**[**Ephesians 4:2**](https://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/Eph%204.2)**)**

**“Be kind and compassionate to one another…” (**[**Ephesians 4:32**](https://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/Eph%204.32)**)**

**“Spur one another on toward love and good deeds.” (**[**Hebrews 10:24**](https://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/Heb%2010.24)**)**

**“Live in harmony with one another…” (**[**I Peter 3:8**](https://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/1%20Pet%203.8)**)**

These statements tell us to actually “do something” with another person. It’s not a passive list. It’s a list of ways we can live the eternal kind of life filled with love, purpose, and meaning that’s way better than any sitcom. It’s the kind of life we long for now - not in the future - not after we die, but right now. It’s a life all about being in a community of people committed to loving like Jesus.

 “Love one another as I have loved you.” How did Jesus do this? He surrounded himself with a group of apprentices who didn’t always have it together, who didn’t always say the right things, who didn’t always get it perfectly right - but they were a community committed to him and to each other and to the mission of helping people find their way back to God.

**Communion Idea**

When Jesus knew that it was his time to leave, he made the choice to spend his last hours with his small group apprentices - his community.  The new command that Jesus gave to “love one another as I have loved you” was said during this Last Supper. He had taught them all that he could and showed them what love looked like.  They had no idea what was to come next. No idea how far his love would go. When he explained the significance of the bread and wine that night to the disciples who were with him, I’m sure there were some nods on the outside, while there were plenty of questions on the inside.  We even can imagine glances across the room at each other as Peter declares his allegiance to lay down his life for Jesus - and where did Judas go? They were definitely not a perfect group of people, and they had no idea at the time that we would be talking about them 2,000 years later.  Everything we learn from them as apprentices of Jesus happened on this side of heaven. Eternal life begins now.

We take time each week to acknowledge what Jesus taught us through this time of communion.  Let’s commit ourselves to love like Jesus.