



LOVE 202

WE ARE FOUND

So we have established that, since we bear the image of God – the Imago Dei – we are valuable to God, and because others, even those who are still far from God, bear the Imago Dei, *they* should be valuable to *us*. We should be willing to accept others as they are and help them become what God wants them to be. This is the only framework within which the command to “Love your neighbor as yourself” makes sense.

♥ Do you think our culture values some people over others? Why? How does that compare to what Jesus taught – how he lived?

So if we want to follow Jesus, if we want to follow The Way, we need to value others deeply. But what do we do? How do we live that out? It is not enough to just accept them; loving others also requires us to be willing to put their needs ahead of our own. But what does that look like? Well, to start with, loving people in this way requires that we care enough to give them support and encouragement.

Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing.

~ 1 Thessalonians 5:11

♥ What does it mean to build someone up?

ONE ANOTHER

Throughout Scripture, we are given a picture of what it means to build one another up in love. Frequently, these commands utilize the phrase “one another.” Read this list of “one another” commands. How would it feel to live around people who were living this way?

Love one another. (John 13:34)

Be devoted to one another. (Romans 12:10)

Live in harmony with one another. (Romans 12:16)

Instruct one another. (Romans 15:14)

Serve one another. (Galatians 5:13)

Submit to one another. (Ephesians 5:21)

Forgive one another. (Colossians 3:13)

Encourage one another. (Hebrews 3:13)

Offer hospitality to one another. (1 Peter 4:9)



REFLECTION


Draw a star by the “one another” passages that stand out to you. Have you been that way towards someone else? Has someone else been that way to you? Write your thoughts.

If we could live out these “one another” commands consistently, imagine how far each of us could go - how different things would be. But to get there, we must commit to something new. We must each commit to Christian community.

♥ Based on your impressions of what Christian community is, what hesitations do you have?

What does the Bible say about community? What should it look like?

For when we came into Macedonia, this body of ours had no rest, but we were harassed at every turn — conflicts on the outside, fears within. But God, who comforts the downcast, comforted us by the coming of Titus, and not only by his coming but also by the comfort you had given him. He told us about your longing for me, your deep sorrow, your ardent concern for me, so that my joy was greater than ever. ~ 2 Corinthians 7:5-7

 This is a positive example of a church functioning as community. What “one another” things happened in this story? What were the results?


A community where the “one another” commands are carried out would be an ideal environment for learning and growing because challenges, experiences, and burdens would be shared not faced alone.

COMMUNITY

The early church that sprang up right after Jesus was raised was all about community. As the apostles and new believers came together, these ordinary people were transformed into an extraordinary community built upon God's love. The story of this community is presented in the book of Acts:

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved. ~ Acts 2:42-47


Wow. What an awesome picture. At WCC, we live out Christian community in many ways. For example, our small groups, which we call LIFEGROUPS, are cauldrons of community. In them, we learn to truly love people and build them up by sharing our lives.

 What do you think about being part of a group like that or going deeper with your existing group?

At WCC, we also experience community in our corporate worship and Adult Bible Fellowship groups on Sunday morning, connection on Wednesday night, and at other gatherings periodically. But we encourage every adult who attends WCC to join a LIFEGROUP. This is where this sort of burden-sharing, life-changing community is most likely to be experienced.

But even if you are not in a group, you are called, as a member of the family of God, to be like a family to each other. You are not given a pass if you are not an extrovert or a party person. Love your neighbor applies to everyone in the church.

This brings us to a difficult concept. Many of us do not have particularly fond memories of our families growing up. When the Bible uses terms like “father” or “family” we may not have a positive response. But the Bible teaches us to think of God as our “father” or “parent” and each other as “brothers” and “sisters.” What are we to make of that?

 Why do you think God chooses this route, considering the likelihood that we have experienced dysfunction in our familial relationships?

In the following passages, underline the family terms:


So you should not be like cowering, fearful slaves. You should behave instead like God's very own children, adopted into his family—calling him


"Father, dear Father." For his Holy Spirit speaks to us deep in our hearts and tells us that we are God's children. ~ Romans 8:15-16

Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to him, "Go. I wish you well: keep warm and well fed," but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it?

~ James 2:15-16

Clearly, this idea of community and even family among the followers of Jesus is central to our understanding of Christian living. We may not have had the family environment God intended while growing up. Even if we haven't known *anything* positive about family, God's desire is for us to find a loving family within the church. Perhaps we can let God's idea of family replace our broken ideas about it. But this is not always the case within the church.

 What is your experience with the church's (in general, not necessarily WCC) acceptance of broken people? Have you seen invitation or judgment?


 What needs to happen in order for people to be able to be "real? Are we encouraged to hide behind a façade of holiness? Can we really "come as we are?"


At WCC, we strive to provide a culture where no one stands alone. But that depends largely on you. That's right. If you refuse to let someone feel alone, you are contributing to that culture. If you allow someone to be passed over or ignored you undermine it. You are God's secret weapon! You are his agent for connection and community.

God designed us to have profound, mystical impact on the lives of others. We collide with family, friends, and fellow worshipers in countless ways and those collisions can be positive or negative. But God's desire is a new

redemptive community, a new definition of family that brings healing and restoration and points us toward the ultimate reality of the fully restored creation in store. When we choose to live out that new family life, we paint an ever clearer picture of what God has in mind for us in the long run. Even though this may not be what comes naturally, probably is not in fact, it is our calling as members of his family. And in this community, we begin to discover the power of redemption that overcomes our alienation. Our sin separates us from each other and from our God, but our love for each other is the earthly outworking of God's forgiveness – our response to his grace. And in this stew of personalities and opinions and backgrounds and lifestyles we experience life change as we seek Christ-likeness.

Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children and live a life of love. ~ Ephesians 5:1-2a

 Share a time where you or someone you know experienced the love of God through the hands of one of his people.

 What do you think of the statement, "My faith is personal; I don't need small groups or church?"

So we see that community, sharing our lives with other believers and reaching out to non-believers, is important to God. In our next segment, we will discuss some of the responsibilities of family membership.

SO FAR:

We must love O _____ A _____

The early church modeled C _____ C _____

We are part of the F _____ of G _____

Sin S _____ ; community R _____