

Big C, Little c
Week 1
Day 1

Read: 1 Corinthians 11:18-19

This is the first week of a brand new series called "Big C, Little c." There are two different big and little "c's" that we'll be looking at over the course of the next several weeks. The first is the word catholic and the second is the word church.

We need to clear up the definition of the word "catholic." In our world, most likely the only time you will run across the word catholic is in relation to the name of a church, such as this or that "Catholic Church" (with a capital "c"). The word catholic (with a lower case "c") is a word that simply means universal, or the church at large and in general. The early church did not envision itself as a collection of individual churches or as denominational clusters, but as a universal, "catholic" Church. The universality of the church was a focus beyond local manifestations of the Church.

The second "c" is the word church. In our nation, there are a multitude of individual churches (little "c"). Yet, the Bible speaks of a single Church (big "c"). Over and over again the Bible speaks about the church not as fragmented or as a divided unit, but as a whole.

Throughout the series "Big C, Little c" we will be looking at where these two "c's" converge. In our area of the Northeast, almost everyone has some sort of tie to the Catholic Church, whether it is

from our own backgrounds or that of our families and friends. Some people respond toward the Catholic Church with reverence and other with bitterness, but almost everyone in our area has some sort of reaction. Throughout this series we'll be looking at what we might be able learn for the Catholic Church and what the Catholic Church might be able to learn from us.

We do not want to downplay or minimize the differences between our traditions, nor do we wish to draw lines of division. Yet, perhaps we are unaware of the common ground we share with the Catholic Church and the things we can learn from each other. That is exactly what we'll be doing over the next several weeks.

What is your personal experience with the Catholic Church? How do you normally react to the Catholic Church?

**Big C, Little c
Week 1
Day 2**

Read: Isaiah 6:1-3

One of the things we can learn from the Catholic Church is the reverence and honor of God,

especially during worship. The Catholic Church has long been known for the elevation of God. From the soaring cathedrals to ancient artwork, the Catholic Church has emphasized a deep reverence for God.

In our tradition, we tend to emphasize the personal aspect of our relationship with God. But what can happen is that we get so used to engaging with God on very personal terms that we miss out on the fact that God is vastly above who we are. This isn't to say that we should never think of God in personal terms, but our interaction with God can become too casual.

The Catholic Church has long taught people the value of having an elevated view of God. All throughout the Bible we see people who view God in all his majesty and wonder and splendor, and they view themselves in the proper perspective in light of this. Jesus is not just my buddy, but he is the very Son of God. God is not just my friend, he is also the great God that Isaiah wrote about who sits on the throne and who is worthy of all glory.

One thing we can learn from Catholics is to have a high view of God.

What is one of the risks of having a relationship with God that is too casual?

**Big C, Little c
Week 1**

Day 3

Read: James 5:16, 1 John 1:9

A second thing we can learn from Catholics is the value of confession. While we may have different ways of practicing the discipline of confession, one thing the Bible makes perfectly clear is that confession is essential to the Christian life.

Our tradition often underemphasizes the value of confessing our sins to one another. We, unfortunately, often hide our sins away from other people in our community and even from ourselves. We may not agree on the specifics, but the Catholic Church keeps confession on the forefront.

The Bible tells us very clearly that if we confess our sins God is faithful and hears us, and he forgives us our sins. There is more to confession than just contrite feelings or remorse. Confession is a step in the direction of reorienting our lives toward God. This act of confession is a way of acknowledging that we see what God already sees. The Catholic Church makes sure that people know that confession is good for the soul.

We can all be fake. We can all pretend to be better than we are. But what confession does is it makes us raw and real before God.

So the question becomes in our lives, **what role does confession play in your life and faith?**

Big C, Little c
Week 1
Day 4

Read: Hebrews 12:1-2

We can learn from the Catholic Church the idea of remembering the saints. We have to be completely clear that the Bible doesn't talk about people achieving sainthood to become a sort of super-Christian or somehow different than the rest of us. The New Testament portion of the Bible actually uses the word saint to refer to everyone who believes in Jesus and we need to be careful not to idolize a person.

But there is great value in remembering those who came before us in the faith. Our tradition does not emphasize the great history from which we have come and so it is easy to forget those men and women of the faith who came before us. There are people throughout history who we can look to as a means of strengthening our faith as well as people in our own lives who have help lead the way for us.

We need to remember.

The church should hold up people with strong character and who exemplify the teachings of Jesus to encourage and inspire our own journey with God. In a world that is very individualistic, the church should help us remember the great community we have surrounding us.

The Bible tells us there is a great cloud of witnesses that surrounds us and that we are a community of saints. We did not get here on our own. None of us arrived to where we are without the help of others. Our faith is built up and fortified by others we meet along the way. Let us never forget or forsake those who came before us in exchange for an individualized faith.

Who is in your community of saints? Who has helped you come to faith? Could you write them down on a piece of paper? Some are people who are in our lives right now, some are people who have gone before us, and others have lead by their example even if we've never met them before ourselves. May our faith never become so private that we forget those who are the saints in our life.

Who are the saints in your life? How can we remember the saints well?

Big C, Little c
Week 1
Day 5

Read 1 Corinthians 11: 23-26

Of all the areas that we have in common with the Catholic Church, perhaps the most central is our view of communion. When it comes to communion, we have more in common with the Catholic Church than other protestant denominations.

There is no more powerful symbol to remember the sacrifice of Jesus than communion. The Catholic Church calls it Eucharist, which is a Greek word that simply means "thanksgiving." It is a time to remember and to be thankful for Jesus.

The Catholic Church, as well as CCC, holds communion as central to the Christian life and the worship service. It is not just an empty symbol but Jesus is alive and active during communion, in a mysterious way we commune with him. We might not agree on all the specifics of what happens with the bread and the cup, but we both believe that something real and meaningful is happening during communion.

Every Sunday when we gather, as does the Catholic Church, we celebrate communion as a way of remembering the sacrifice of Jesus. It is a way of maintaining Jesus as the central reason of our gathering and as the foundation of our faith. Taking communion unites us in the one thing that all Christians have in common, that of Jesus.

In what ways does communion help keep Jesus central in our lives and our worship services?

**Big C, Little c
Week 1
Small Group Guide**

1. What is your experience with the Catholic Church?

2. How do you normally respond to the Catholic Church?
3. What is your reaction to the idea that there is a lot we can learn from the Catholic Church and a lot the Catholic Church can learn from other traditions?
4. Throughout this week we looked at four different things we can learn from Catholics: having a high view of God, the value of confession, remembering those who came before us, and the centrality of communion. Which of these do you need more of in your life?
5. What sort of view do you normally have of God? Is it a high view or a very casual view? What is the danger of having too casual of a view of God?
6. What role does confession play in your life and faith?
7. Who would you include in the list of "saints" who paved the way for your faith?
8. What is your view of communion and does communion help you keep Jesus the center of your faith and worship of God?

Big C, little c
Week 2
Day 1

We are in the second week of a series called "Big C, little c," where we're looking at what we at CCC can learn from the Roman Catholic Church and what

the Roman Catholic Church can learn from others. Last week, we looked at some specific things that we have in common with the Catholic Church and ways in which we could benefit from learning from the Catholic Church. This week we will be looking at some of the differences between the Catholic Church and ourselves.

I don't think it will shock anyone to hear that there are some significant difference between the Catholic Church and churches like CCC or other independent churches. Yet, if hard pressed to name these differences or why these differences exist, many people wouldn't know how to answer. This week we are going to take an honest look at some of these differences.

I really want to stress that as we move forward there is absolutely no room for arrogance or condensation in the midst of these conversations. The Bible warns us many times against this sort of attitude (Romans 12:16, 2 Corinthians 12:6-10). The whole point of this series is to create an atmosphere where we can become the best followers of Jesus possible. In this area of the country what this includes is looking at the Catholic Church, from which many people draw their background. Our hope is that we are able to have hard conversations where we are able to help each other move forward.

Do you have any arrogance with regard to your spiritual background, church, or specific beliefs?

Big C, little c
Week 2
Day 2

One of the first things that often happens during Catholic Church services is a procession in which the Bible is brought to the front of the church. There is no doubting the fact that Catholics hold the Bible with deep reverence. Yet, as much as Catholics are careful with the treatment of the Bible during church services, the Catholic Church has not done as good of a job encouraging people to read their Bible the rest of the week.

The Bible is essential to our faith. Yet, the Bible isn't just for Sunday and it's not just church. The Bible is not a static book that sits on the shelf or simply an instruction booklet on life. The Bible is so much more.

The Bible is the inspired word of God. It is useful for teaching and instruction (2 Timothy 3:6). The Bible is alive and active, sharper than any sword (Hebrews 4:12). It cuts down into the deepest part of our souls. The Bible is our delight and our counselor (Psalm 119). The word of God is everlasting and will never wither (Isaiah 40:8).

Of all the things the Bible is, it is not something that is inaccessible or unapproachable. If we allow it, the Bible will get inside of us, and the Word of God can begin to change us. But in order

for that to happen, we have to read and engage with the Bible personally.

I hope everyone knows that here at CCC we don't want anyone to believe something simply because someone said it from up front during a message on Sunday. We hope and dream that you will take notes on what is being said and then look up in the Bible for yourself. Don't take our word for it, look at it for yourself.

Now let's get really practical. Are you reading the Bible? Is reading the Bible something that you have as a regular habit? Do you make a point of getting the Word of God inside of you?

If you don't have a Bible, get one. There are free Bibles available at CCC, so feel free to grab one anytime you're in the area. And if you have a Bible, make sure it's in a translation you understand. At CCC we have New International Version Bibles available, but there are plenty of good translations out there. If you are trying to read a Bible that sounds more like Shakespeare than everyday language and the language is getting in the way, get a different one. There is nothing wrong with the King James Bible, but it was written several hundred years ago and language changes. Or maybe you aren't much of a reader, than grab the Bible on CD (we have those available at CCC as well) and listen to it on the way to work.

The point is this, if you want to follow and learn about God, you need to read the Bible for yourself.

Do you read the Bible for yourself? How much of a personal habit is this in your life? What roadblocks have made this more difficult?

**Big C, little c
Week 2
Day 3**

At CCC, we rely on the Bible alone for our faith and practice. Yet, something as basic as this statement was one of the core issues that initiated the Protestant split from the Catholic Church.

Over the course of history, the church began to create some of its own documents and to write down it's own history. And what happened was that these documents, laws, and histories began to become elevated in importance. Before long, the Bible was not the sole source of authority in the church. Martin Luther and others began to question where the church was getting their authority for decisions being made, and this became one of the key issues at debate with the Catholic Church.

That idea of "authority" is what is at debate. History is important. Creeds and other documents can be very helpful. There are all kinds of writings and books and resources outside of the Bible that can be useful. But none of them have authority, only the Bible.

The Catholic Church, as well as other church traditions, will often hold up things other than the Bible as being authoritative. Yet, when we derive our faith (what we believe) and our practice

(what we do) from places other than the Bible, we are setting ourselves up think, believe, and do things that are contrary to the Bible.

And when a question arises as to whether or not something is within the will of God, where do we look and what has the authority to answer that question?

What sometimes happens is that the things that we find helpful (such as other books or writings) we elevate in importance. This is a dangerous thing, since it also lowers the value of the Bible.

What role or level of authority does the Bible have in your life? What else has authority in your life?

Big C, little c
Week 2
Day 4

If you've spent any time around Community Christian Church, you'll notice that one of the differences between the Catholic Church and CCC is the view and practice of baptism. The Catholic Church practices infant baptism, sometimes known as a christening, which normally takes place within the first few weeks after birth.

Community Christian Church, on the other hand, practices what is known as believer's baptism. There is no specific age associated with baptism,

rather it is tied to the belief and decision of the person being baptized.

These two views are obviously differing, so let's take some time to look more closely at the topic of baptism.

The point of baptism, as it is described in the Bible, is to identify ourselves with Jesus and his death (Romans 6:2-4), to turn away from our sins, and for the forgiveness of our sins (Acts 2:38). This sort of life changing decision simply cannot be made by an infant who isn't able to make any decisions, much less the path and direction of their life.

In the Bible, there are no instances of children or infants being baptized. Every instance of baptism seen in the Bible follows an adult making a personal choice to put their faith in Jesus. This is sometimes called believer's baptism, because it is only after the believer makes the choice for him or herself.

Here at Community Christian Church, we believe that it is important for children to be raised to know and love God for themselves. This is the reason we have child dedication services, where parents can make a decision of how they want to raise their children. This is a choice the parents make, not the child. Yet, it is the dream of all of these parents that the child will grow to make a personal choice to be baptized. To a large degree, when someone who was sprinkled as a child decides as an adult to be baptized, it is a fulfillment of their parents wishes when they were babies.

When it comes to the means of baptism, sprinkling versus dunking, we, again, rely on the Bible. The word for baptism in the Bible is "baptizo," which simply means dunk, dip, or submerge. This is the form which baptism took place in the Bible, which is why we baptize people by immersion.

Baptism is a really important step in the life of a Christian, a step that they must make for themselves. At CCC, we look to the Bible as to the how and when baptism should take place.

How does the view of baptism described above agree with or conflict with your understanding of baptism?

**Big C, little c
Week 2
Day 5**

If I were to say the word priesthood, you would more than likely think of men wearing black robes. The concept of a priesthood is often tied very closely with the Catholic Church. The idea of a priesthood is found in the Bible, only it might not be what you think.

In the Bible, the priesthood is everyone who believes and follows Jesus (1 Peter 2:9). This might catch some people by surprise, but the Bible never speaks of a specific priesthood, but only of the priesthood of all believers.

Early in the church's history, it became clear that some people were gifted to teach and to lead. Over time this became that those people were the only people who could teach. Then they were the only people who could pray for people, or help the poor, or read the Bible during a church service. And what began as people trying to honor God by using their gifts and talents became an exclusive class of priests.

What it means for many people is that they rely almost completely on someone else for their faith and spiritual growth. We can sometimes depend too strongly on others, such as priests or ministers, to "feed us" and to help us develop our relationship with God. But, it is up to each of us individually to grow and use our gifts for the kingdom of God.

Which raises that question: are you using your gifts and talents for the kingdom of God? Do you even know what your gifts are? The Bible assures us that those people who are followers of Jesus have spiritual gifts that should be used to buildup the kingdom of God.

Are you using your gifts for others, or do you have the mindset that such things are for ministers and priests?

Big C, little c

Week 2
Small Group Guide

1. How would you describe your spiritual background? To what degree is the Catholic Church a part of this background?
2. When you think of the Catholic Church and your own faith, do you think there is more in common or more differences?
3. This week we looked at some of the differences between the Catholic Church and other church traditions. Which of these differences
4. Do you read the Bible for yourself? How much of a personal habit is this in your life? What roadblocks have made this more difficult?
5. What role and authority does the Bible have in your life?
6. What is your view of baptism? Does your view of baptism agree with or conflict with the way described in this booklet?
7. Are you using your gifts for others or do you have the mindset that such things are for ministers and priests?

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Big C, little c
Week 3
Day 1

Read: Ephesians 4: 1-6

This week we're finishing up a series called "Big C, little c," which is a strange title that's

raised some questions. After all, what do those "c's" stand for and why is one big and the other not? What this series is really all about is looking at the similarities and differences between the Roman Catholic Church and churches like CCC and what we can learn from each other.

The two different "C's" deal with the word catholic. In our world, most likely the only time you will run across the word catholic is in relation to the name of a church, such as this or that "Catholic Church" (with a big "c"). The word catholic (with a lower case "c") is a word that simply means universal, or the church in general. The early church did not envision itself as a collection of individual churches or as denominational clusters, but as a universal, "catholic" (with a little "c") Church. The universality of the church was a focus beyond local manifestations of the Church. Throughout this series we will be comparing and contrasting the big C (the Roman Catholic Church) with the little c (the universal or general Church).

This is a vital series for anyone who lives in or is from the Northeast, where a significant number of Catholic Churches are located. It is our dream that "Big C, little c" will be a very helpful series which will clear up any confusion and misconceptions about the differences and similarities between the Catholic Church and churches like CCC. This week we're going to be closing up this series by looking at what we call can all still learn.

Why do you think it's important to have an understanding of how other traditions and churches follow God?

**Big C, little c
Week 3
Day 2**

If there is one area in which the Church needs to make sure its on track, it's when it comes to its mission. Jesus makes it clear that he established the Church on earth to accomplish a mission. The Church doesn't exist for it's own good or is own purposes; it exists for the purposes that God gives it. Unfortunately, some churches lose focus on what that mission is. If churches everywhere are going to all look at what we can all still learn (or relearn), mission might be the most important.

The mission of the church can be defined in several different ways from the Bible.

Jesus, just before he went back up to heaven, gives these instructions to his followers:

**Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."
Matthew 28:19-20**

Jesus leaves this mission for the Church: to help the world learn about and follow after him, to baptize those who want to follow Jesus, and to teach them everything that Jesus taught and commanded. Why is this aspect of the Church's mission so important? Because Jesus has the ability to change lives. If we decide to align our lives with Jesus and with what he taught, what we receive is a life really worth living. The mission of the church is to help people know Jesus bridged the gap between God and us.

Another way to articulate the mission of the Church can be seen when Paul, the author of much of the New Testament portion of the Bible, wrote a letter to a young church to remind them of their mission:

All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us.

2 Corinthians 5: 18-20

The church has been given this message of reconciliation, the message that our sins are not counted against us because of the sacrifice of Jesus and that the distance between us and God is gone. Just like we often need reconciliation in our human relationships to mend the brokenness that can linger there, Jesus has mended the brokenness between God and us. And so the Church is Christ's

ambassadors to the world, as if God is making his appeal directly through us.

That is the reason why our mission around here at CCC is to help people find their way back to God, because that's the mission of God. God's dream is to have people drawn closer to him and the restoration we have access to in Jesus.

Yet, it's easy for churches to get off track and to lose focus on this mission. As we're looking at what we can learn from the Roman Catholic Church and what the Catholic Church can learn from churches like CCC, we would be remiss if we didn't spend some time looking at what every church needs to learn or relearn with regard to our mission. This week we're going to be looking at the ways that churches get off the track.

**How would you articulate the mission of the Church?
Why do you think it's easy for churches to lose focus on this mission?**

**Big C, little c
Week 3**

Day 3

Read: Mark 7: 1-9

The first thing every church needs to keep in mind is that God is bigger than our church. This seems pretty obvious, but churches can slip into a mindset where the things we do and the way we do them become the only way things can be done. Without even noticing it, we can slip into worshiping our church or the way we do church instead of worshiping God.

It's surprisingly easy to lose focus. There are so many things that are useful in church that can help us draw closer to God. Music and the style of music can be moving or inspirational or it can be a connection for people to engage with God. But there is not just one way to do music or just one style of music that glorifies God. Or there are multiple ways of teaching and preaching about God and the Bible, there is not just one style. There is not just one shape of a church, there is not just model or method, and there is not just one way of doing church.

There's a natural shift that happens when something is particularly useful or meaningful; it moves from being useful to becoming almost sacred. This is an unhealthy shift because it elevates things that should not be elevated.

Jesus addresses this very thing. Jesus was once with his disciples and followers when an argument arose with a group of Pharisees. Pharisees were a group of Jewish teachers who created hundreds and hundreds of rules and laws outside of what the

Bible and God taught. The Pharisees held to tons of different traditions, which they not only thought were useful, but that they had elevated above the Bible.

One of these traditions, the washing of a person's hands before they eat, becomes a point of contention between the Pharisees and Jesus.

Is there anything wrong with washing your hands before you eat or with cleaning out cups or pitchers before they are used for food or drink? Of course not, but we're not just talking about using a little Purell before you eat lunch. The Pharisees had determined that unless you washed your hands in a specific way, then you were far from God. They had elevated the tradition of washing their hands before meals to the point that they believed that unless you washed your hands in a specific way, it wasn't just your hands that were unclean, but all of you. Never mind what the Bible says about it. To the Pharisees if you don't follow this tradition, you could not be close to God.

Jesus wants to set them straight. You hang onto traditions, Jesus says, you elevate traditions above the word of God. This is not the way it should be. Jesus warning them not to set aside the things that God says and replace them with the things that we say.

We can do the same things sometimes, where churches can lift up their own traditions above what God says in the Bible.

Let's not slip into loving the way we do church, more than loving God. Let's not get into the habit of worshiping CCC more than we worship God. Because God is bigger than any one church or any one way of doing church. God is bigger than our traditions. And all those things we think are useful; lets keep them in the proper perspective.

Do you find yourself looking down at how other people worship God simply because it's different from the way you're used to doing church?

**Big C, little c
Week 3
Day 4**

Read: Acts 15:1, Galatians 5:6, Galatians 6:14-16

Another way that churches can lose focus on their mission is with regard to people who are not a part of the church. Churches should remove barriers for people to come to God, not put them up. There are a lot of reasons why people question or have trouble believing in God, and there are a lot of reasons why people have issues with the church. Yet, instead of trying to address these questions and help make God more accessible, churches often do just the opposite and put up obstacles, which only makes it harder for people to encounter God.

What happens over time is that churches develop their own unwritten rules. No church is immune to this, not the Roman Catholic Church, not CCC, and the effects are always the same: these unwritten rules create obstacles for people encountering God.

The same thing was happening in the early church. For some reason, people like strict rules. We do. We might not act like we do when it comes to driving or doing our taxes, but the truth is we often respond much better in black and white situations where everything is neatly defined by a set of rules. And so churches create rule of what it means to be a Christian and what it means to be outside of that title, and these rules allow churches to draw lines.

In the early church, one of the main issues that arose almost immediately was with circumcision. While this might not be the kind of barrier we normally throw up in churches today, what we see in the Bible causes the same kind of effect.

The early church was a strange collection of people, which included Jewish people as well as non-Jewish people who were all doing their best to follow Jesus. What happened pretty quickly was that the Jewish Christians tried to establish some of their familiar customs and rules and barriers to those trying to follow Jesus, one of them being circumcision. After all, circumcision is required for Jewish people; why not just carry that rule over?

This threw people who weren't Jewish and who wanted to follow Jesus into confusion. They didn't know

all the background of the Jewish faith, or the background of circumcision, and so there was confusion about what really was required to follow Jesus.

Paul really addresses the topic head-on. He writes that circumcision isn't what matters. What Paul really wants people to understand is that we should never try to confuse people by adding requirements, like circumcision, to be saved. If following rules could save us, then Jesus died for nothing. Paul wants everyone to be crystal clear that rules do not save us, Jesus does. Paul wants them to get rid of all these barriers and obstacles they are building between people and Jesus.

It's fairly easy to know if we've fallen into this mindset because we start judging and boasting. We are not the keepers of who is saved and who is not, salvation is a gift from God. If you live a life that is full of judging and boasting, slow down and take a good hard look to see what the cause is. A life that is full of judging is a life that is constantly trying to place itself in the position of God, who alone is in a position to judge. A life that is full of boasting is often a life that is busy comparing itself to others, and deciding who stacks up and who doesn't.

Let's avoid creating extra barriers and obstacles that prevent people from coming to God.

Are you putting up barriers for people to get to know God, or are you doing all you can to break these barriers down?

Big C, little c
Week 3
Day 5

Read: Mark 12: 30-31, John 13: 34-35

A final way that churches can lose focus is with how they treat the message of Jesus.

Churches seem to know that they need to be different from the world around them, but they don't always seem to know how to be different. It's almost as if churches can't quite figure out how to distinguish themselves from the world and so they just settle for being weird. Or offensive. Or belligerent. Or just downright creepy.

I think you know what I mean. I would bet that all of us have had some kind of experience with somebody wearing a sandwich board or handing out fliers or with a bullhorn, all the while screaming and yelling about sin and brimstone and hellfire, and how your going to burn in hell.

And is anyone stopping to hear more or to investigate these claims further? Does anyone want the pamphlet? Is anyone taking a closer look at Jesus because all the yelling is so attractive? Can we honestly say that judging and condemning people are drawing them closer to God?

All the yelling is confusing for people, because people who don't know Jesus come into contact with

someone like this who claims to represent the church but who offer only hatred and yelling and judging. What does all of this yelling have to do with Jesus?

When Jesus is asked what is the absolutely most important thing, what is the one thing we better not miss out on in our lives, Jesus says:

Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.' The second is this: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no commandment greater than these."

Mark 12: 30-31

Jesus says that life is all about loving God and loving people. Love. That's what it all boils down to, love.

And how should we be distinctive from the world around us? Jesus says:

"A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."

John 13:34-35

Jesus says that our defining mark and our distinctiveness should come from love. Seeing a pattern here?

The love that we're talking about here isn't an emotional love and its not some warm and fuzzy feeling. We're not talking about love in the same way I might say I love a hamburger or how much I

love the Ravens. We're talking about nitty-gritty, hard, difficult kind of love.

It's when you've had a long day and the last thing you want to do is put someone else's needs or wants ahead of your own, but you do anyway. It's the kind of love that doesn't scream or yell when you get cut off in traffic. It's the kind of love that makes a sacrifice for others and that doesn't just look out for ourselves.

Jesus wants us to know that his mission for us isn't about yelling or judging or spewing hatred. It is about love. And maybe if people see love expressed in our lives, then maybe they'll take a closer look at the life changing love of God.

How are you doing with loving people, whether you agree with them or not? Can people see love in your life? If you are a follower of Jesus, could people tell just because of how you love others?

**Big C, little c
Week 3
Small Group Guide**

1. Do you think it's important to learn about how other traditions or churches follow God? Why or why not?
2. How would you articulate the mission of the church in general? Why do you think the church exists?

3. What are ways in which you think the church has drifted away from it's mission?

Read: Mark 12: 30-31, John 13: 34-35, 1 John 4:20

4. What does Jesus say is the greatest commandment? How do churches, in general, do with this regard?
5. How does Jesus say the church should be distinct from the rest of the world? How do churches, in general, do with regard to this command?
6. Why do you think it is so important to match our words about loving God with our actions with loving people? How do you think churches do with regard to this?
7. In your life, how is love expressed? Can people see love in your life? Could people tell you were a follower of God because of how you love other people? Do you love people with whom you disagree or only those who you like and get along with?