

Why?
Week 3
Day 1

Read Genesis 2:15-24

Life moves faster than ever before. Faster cars, faster access to information, faster computers, faster food (which normally tastes as good as it sounds): add them all up and we are living faster lives. And maybe that's one reason why it is so hard to have real authentic relationships. Yet, people are constructed in such a way that we need (and crave) interaction with each other.

We see this exact principle at work in Genesis. The beginning of Genesis is an account of God's work in creating the heavens and earth, as well as Adam, the first person. God then takes Adam and places him in the Garden of Eden and Adam enjoys a time of great closeness with God. And yet, even here all is not right. Before there was sin, before Adam ate of the forbidden fruit, before evil entered the world; there was something wrong. The problem: Adam was alone. There were no other humans for Adam to interact with, no one with whom he could share his life. God looks down and says, "It is not good for man to be alone."

So God attempts to create a helper for him. God creates all the animals of the world and all of the birds of the air and brings them to Adam. But these animals and birds could not fill the space in Adam's life. This is a strange addition to the story. Surely God knew that animals and birds and livestock could never fill the void in a life that is missing human relationships. And I am convinced that God did know. But he wanted to be sure that

Adam knew as well. Nothing, not a pet, not a beautiful distraction, not livestock or the work of your hands; none of these things can replace human relationships. And now Adam knows it as well. Adam now is beginning to see the depth of the issue before him. Adam wants a human relationship as much as God does.

God now creates a woman, Eve. Eve is not a helper; Eve is the perfect fit for Adam. Eve was built in the image of God, in the same way that Adam was. Adam knows now what he was missing all along, real relationship with another person. Even with a perfect relationship with God, Adam was missing something. We are built the exact same way.

We need genuine relationships. We need interactions with other people. We need people to share our successes and struggles with. Nothing can fill that space except relationships. Nothing. Not work, not distractions, not even our relationship with God. No magazines or books can fill this need. Nothing but relationships with other people can make it so that God will not look down and say, "It is not good for people to be alone."

Think about the things that you allow getting in the way of authentic relationships. What things do you use to try to replace relationships? Television? Work? The internet? In what areas of your life can you create more space for authentic relationships?

**Why?
Week 3
Day 1**

Read Mark 3:13-18

When we watch movies we are sometimes drawn to the lone wolf character, the person who seems to be able to handle anything without any help. We find this sort of attitude attractive in our leaders or those in power. So we might expect this same sort of approach with respect to Jesus. Yet, this is not what we see at all.

When we read Mark 3, we see Jesus going out and intentionally spending time with people. He then takes twelve of these people and begins building deep, intimate relationships with them. So why does Jesus form these relationships? Some may answer that these relationships are a means of training these men, which is certainly a portion of the reason. But, this is not the entire story. Mark 3:14 makes it clear that one of the main reasons that Jesus forms relationships with these twelve men is so that "they might be with him." Jesus, the Son of God, invests his life in others because he knows that's how humans were meant to live. He knows that he needs these relationships. He needs these friends.

In case you have any doubts about the nature of the relationship between Jesus and these twelve men, allow me to give a little bit of historical information. Jesus was a rabbi, which means that he was a religious teacher. Literally, rabbi means 'great one' and they had a high level of respect and honor in the community. They would have a small band of followers who would be his students, just as these twelve men were with Jesus. Yet, the twelve were not the traditional students that a rabbi would have taught. Normally, a rabbi would

teach crowds, but would only take the best and brightest students to be his inner most pupils.

A quick look at the list of students that Jesus selected reveals that these are not the best and brightest, actually far from it. Some were fishermen, a profession for the uneducated. Another was a political revolutionary. Another made his living extorting taxes from his own countrymen. We do not know the full details of the lives of these twelve men, but it is clear that they are not typical students of a rabbi. T

These inner most pupils would then spend every minute with the rabbi, learning as much as they could during this time. And so it was with this twelve as well. Every minute of everyday they spent with Jesus, so much so that Jesus developed playful nicknames for several of them: Peter he calls Rock while James and John he calls the son's of thunder. In the center of this diverse and unexpected group is Jesus. He is their teacher. He is their friend. And they are his friends. Even the very Son of God needs friends with which to share life.

Think about the people in your life. Jesus gathered this group around him because he needed them near him. In what ways do you need the people who are in your life to be near you? What areas of your life do you need people to be near you that are not near you now? In what ways can you seek out and intentionally invest in the lives of others? Do you find it frustrating or encouraging that Jesus picked such an unlikely band of people to be his students? What does that mean for your life?

**Why?
Week 3**

Day 3

Read: Mark 2:13-14, Mark 3:18-19

Walk into any cafeteria in any high school and a certain truth becomes clear. People normally spend most of their time with those who are very much like they are. Whether it's the jocks swapping stories of sports glory, the nerds obsessing over grades, or the stoners dozing on the stairs; people like to associate with others who think and act like they do. And what's more, people tend to look down and criticize anyone who does not belong to their particular group.

The same dynamic was at work during the lifetime of Jesus. There are a variety of groups, each with a certain set of beliefs and each one looking down on all the others. There are the Romans, who occupy and control the majority of the world through power and the edge of a sword. This occupation includes the lands traditionally controlled by the Jewish people, which is where Jesus lives. This occupation has not been peaceful; in fact it has been particularly bloody in Jerusalem and other Jewish lands. The occupation gave birth to several other groups of people, the first of which are the Zealots. Zealots (as the name implies) mean someone who is zealous on behalf of God. In reality, they were political and religious fighters who believed that the Romans should be removed from Jewish lands by force. They were subversive to the ruling government and despised everything Roman and were unconcerned over who their attacks on Rome effected.

On the other hand, there is a group of people called the Sadducees (pronounced sad-u-seas). Sadducees were the conformist, those who decided

that since you couldn't beat the Roman Empire you might as well join them and make a profit along the way. One way that the Sadducees conformed was by doing the dirty work of the Romans for them; collecting taxes. If this wasn't enough to illicit hatred (I'm sure any IRS official will tell you it is) the way that tax collectors made a profit was to extort more money than was required for the taxes and then keeping the excess. As you might imagine, the Zealots and Sadducees did not normally hang out together watching football on Sunday. The Zealots saw the Sadducees as traitors and deserving of death. The Sadducees saw the Zealots as brutes and small-minded people who couldn't accept change.

With this in mind it might be surprising to find both a Zealot and a Sadducee in Jesus' inner circle of friends. I wonder what Simon (known as the Zealot) was thinking as Jesus walked past the tax collectors booth. I wonder if he was hoping Jesus would take this moment to teach a lesson, a lesson that would never be forgotten by anyone who sympathized with Rome. Here's your chance, he must have thought, here's your opportunity to strike a blow for all of us, a chance to show what a real Jew looks like. And Jesus did have a lesson to teach, but it wasn't the lesson Simon had hoped. Jesus invited Levi (also known as Matthew) the tax-collector to become a follower. He invited Levi to become a student, a follower, a friend. And so we find Simon and Levi following together, the only thing they have in common is the invitation of Jesus. And it's enough. Jesus is enough common ground for these two to stand together. It wasn't Simon the Zealot's job to call followers, but only Jesus.

It's the same with us. Any Sunday you can look around the church and find people who would never associate together, except for the call of Jesus.

It is not our job to call, only to answer the call of God. And Jesus is enough common ground to create a family.

How well do you handle diversity? Is it a challenge for you to have a lot of different types of people with lot of different viewpoints surrounding you? How can you help create the kind of openness that fosters the invitation of Christ? How can you make it difficult for others to come to church? How can you make it easier?

Why?

Week 3

Day 4

Read: John 13:34-35

Have you ever watched a sporting event on TV? Every now and then the camera will pan across the crowd and as far as the eye can see, everyone is wearing one color (say, purple, maybe?). And right in the middle of it all, in the middle of the monochromatic sea, a small cluster of opposing colors are huddled together. Just a quick glance and it's pretty clear who is supporting each team. So what marks us out as a community?

Jesus addresses this question head on. John 13 is set during the last days of Jesus' life. He

knows that his time is short and that soon he will be facing all the evils the world has to offer. He knows that soon this small band of followers will not have his direct guidance as they have over the past three years. Jesus knows that soon they will have to rely on each other in ways they never have before. And so Jesus teaches another lesson.

"A new command I give you: love one another." We hear about love so much in our society it becomes so easy to get confused about what it really is and what it really looks like. You can almost picture the twelve followers shrugging their shoulders, wondering what he meant. Didn't they love each other already? Weren't they all friends? Hadn't they spent the last three years together? Maybe they were nodding along, thinking that they already had this commandment licked. But Jesus isn't finished yet. "Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another."

Jesus had called each of them to follow him, had spent all of his moments with them for the last three years, had spoken words of life to them and had changed all their lives. And soon he would die for them. They may have still been shaking their heads and shrugging their shoulder, but it seems fair to assume that none thought the task was going to be easy anymore.

Jesus continues by saying it is this very act of love that will separate them from the world. It is by this that all men will know that you love me, that you follow me, and that you hear my voice and obey. And as obvious as a fan of the visiting team, you will stick out like a sumo wrestler in a kiddie pool. This is how Jesus' community of faith should act, in love for each other. The world will not understand it, but it will notice.

What would that look like in your life? What would that look like in your community? What would happen if we all began to sacrifice for each other, if we began to go out of our way to help each other, if we began to truly love one another? The world would take notice. Relationships would strengthen. Community would grow. And God would be pleased.

Who do you think Jesus is referring to when he says "love one another?" Who are the "one another's" in your life? In what ways would the world take notice if a community was truly loving each other as Jesus loves us? What would that look like in your life?

**Why?
Week 3
Day 5**

Read Acts 2: 42-47

Different areas of the county have different ways of acting. Anyone who has traveled knows that you do not have to venture far from home to experience new things and new people. Just ask someone from the Mid-West how to pick a crab if you doubt me (if your experience is anything like mine, you might find more fear than joy at having a pile of crabs before them). And so communities are sometimes formed and distinguished by some of the practices that become important to them. The same has always been true of the church.

Acts is a book that talks about the life of the early church as it began to spread throughout the

world. This early church is filled with all sorts of people, most of whom had little if any interaction with Jesus. Even beyond that, three thousand brand new followers had just become a part of this fledgling church. And so Acts tells us what actions became important for this community.

They were devoted to the apostles teaching, that is, the teaching given by those who were the original followers of Jesus. They would tell about the things Jesus did and said, so that even those who did not meet Jesus in person would get to know who Jesus was. They also gather together to break bread together. For the early church this meant more than communion as we participate on Sunday morning, but was the sharing of a meal together. Those who had excess feed those who had little or no food. It was during these times that they shared fellowship. This is the same as saying that they shared their lives together. This was not a collection of passive interactions but a real sharing of success and trials. Finally, they would be sure to pray when they gathered.

So what is the best setting for all of these things to take place in our lives? Sunday morning is a great time to gather together, to hear teaching and to share communion together. But it is difficult (maybe impossible) to do all these things on a Sunday morning. This is why Community Christian believes so strongly in small groups.

Sunday morning is a perfect time to gather together and celebrate together but it is not the right setting to do everything that the early church held as a vital. This is why small groups focus on spending time sharing life together, sharing meals, sharing joys and burdens. There is time and space in small groups for focused prayer, for fellowship and for walking together with Jesus.

And the church in Acts enjoyed "the favor of all people." Do you wonder why? Maybe when people live like they were living, it benefits everyone. Maybe when people love each other it trickles over onto everyone else around it. Maybe the rest of the world just saw that something amazing was taking place. Doesn't that sound like the kind of thing you might want to be a part of?

What do you think 'the people' around us think of our community? What would an ideal small group look like to you? Of all the things that took place in the church at Acts, which do you think is the most important? Which do you want more of in your life?

**Why?
Week 3
Small Group Guide**

Open: (Answer 1 or 2 of these questions as time permits)

1. If you could move anywhere in the country to live, where would you live?
2. Where did you grow up? What type of community was the one in which you were raised? (Urban, Suburban, Farming, etc.)
3. What are some of the distinguishing characteristics of the community in which you now live?

4. How can you tell if someone is a Christian?
How do they dress? How do they talk? What are some of the distinctive elements that make this the case?
5. What is different about a church than other groups of people, like clubs or teams?

Bible: Read John 13:34-35 and Acts 2: 42-47

6. In light of John 13:34-35 passages, how should Christians be distinctive from the world around them? How does this fit with what you have experienced in your life?
7. What are some of the distinguishing characteristics (that you don't find anywhere else) within the Church from Acts 2:42-47? Where do these normally take place?
8. Which of these elements would you find to be the most helpful during a small group session? The most distracting? Why?
9. How can we pray and support each other within this small group?