

Why?
Week 4
Day 1

You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

Romans 5: 6-8

Over the past several weeks, we've been asking the question "why" with regard to what we do and believe here at CCC. Three weeks ago we looked at why church exists, two weeks ago we looked at why we serve, and last week we looked at why we gather together.

This week, as we celebrate the fourth birthday of Community Christian Church, we'll look at why CCC. Why choose to call CCC home? Why make this community of followers of Jesus *your* community?

It comes down to the mission and goals of Community Christian Church. The mission of CCC is to help people find their way back to God. Our dream is that people who are far from God will begin to draw near to him. One of the first steps to making this happen is to help people understand God's love better.

There is a myth that persists that God loves us in proportion to how good we are. If I have a bad week, God loves me less. If I am impatient, if I say something particularly nasty, or if I'm unkind, God makes a note next to my name and I can be sure that bad things are coming my way. On the other hand, when I am extra nice, when I eat all my vegetables and when I drive the speed limit, God puts a gold star next to my name and I get a prize. We live our lives in the shadow of this myth that the love of God is contingent to our behavior.

The effects of this myth can be drastic and far-reaching. People live their lives waiting for the hammer to drop,

waiting for the punishments that they are sure they deserve. Or they live their lives with their hands out, anticipating good things that they feel they have earned. And so life becomes one huge classroom where everyone is either getting good grades or detention.

But the Bible teaches us that the love of God has nothing to do with us. It has nothing to do with our actions. It has nothing to do with how we lived last week or last year. It has everything to do with God.

God shows his love for us by dying for us because we were good enough and deserved it. God showed his love for us by dying for us because we are perfect people. God showed his love for us by dying for us after we decided to turn around our lives and live right.

Nope.

God showed his love for us by dying for us while we were sinners. God's love is the same when we are at our lowest. God's love is the same when we are at our highest.

And there are many things we can do with that love. We can embrace it, ignore it, accept it or reject it. But the love never changes. God's love for us never changes.

What would it look like for a community of people to live in light of this unconditional love? It is our dream that CCC will be just such a place.

How might your view of God change if you knew that his love is unconditional?

Why?
Week 4
Day 2

For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Romans 8:38-39

It is essential for people to know about the amazing love of God. In order for Community Christian Church to reach people who are far from God, this is an essential thing we must all learn.

What can separate us from those we love?

Death has a way of ending love. Death separates us from those we love and creates a distance that we cannot travel. And so we are sometimes left with an emptiness, or bitterness, or sorrow. Death has a way of ending love.

Life has a way of ending love. The faults and failures that come naturally to us have a way of hurting and injuring others. Love is often the first victim of the lives we lead.

The things of good can sometimes end love. There can be times when doing right and being "good" becomes an ends in and of itself. And love can complicate this and is discarded in the name of expedience or productivity.

The things of evil can sometimes end love. Evil has a way surrounding us and trying to overpower us. Evil has a way of turning our eyes inward and love is forgotten.

The present has a way of ending love. Our busyness of our lives can consume every second of our time, making us so hectic that love simply gets left by the wayside.

The future has a way of ending love. We fret and worry and press about the things to come, about the infinite possible futures that may or may not take place. And love is a dangerous future and becomes the one untaken.

Power has a way of ending love. The strong, the mighty, the powerful; these often do not see their need for love. Love is a weakness or a crutch, and is abandoned.

Things that are higher than us have a way of ending love. The things that are above us, that are out of our reach and beyond our attaining can make us jealous and angry. And when we reach for high things we can leave love on the floor.

Things that are lower than us have a way of ending love. When we look downward at things below us we can be tempted to feel righteous, superior and arrogant. And with these, love dies.

Yet, none of these things can separate us from the love of God. Death does not create a distance between God and us. Nothing in our lives is ugly enough to push God away. Things of goodness and righteousness bow before love in the eyes of God. The things of evil have been defeated by the love of God. God created 'now' and every second in it. God holds the future in his hands. None are more powerful than God. Nothing is higher than God. Nothing reached lower than Jesus reached.

Nothing can separate us from the love of God.

What can you do to make God love you less? Nothing.

**What would it mean to have the love of God in your life?
In what areas of your life could this love spill over more?
How should this love be expressed at CCC?**

**Why?
Week 4
Day 3**

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God's

*workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works,
which God prepared in advance for us to do.*

Ephesians 2: 8-10

Grace. It's a word that gets kicked around in a bunch of different settings. To have grace or to be graceful can mean that you are elegant or refined. To grace something can mean to be an embellishment or decoration. Before people eat they sometimes say 'grace,' which is a prayer of thanks. People even take vacations to Graceland! But God has something different in mind.

What does grace mean when it comes to God and the church? What does it mean with regard to CCC? The reason CCC exists is to help people understand and embrace God's grace for themselves.

We are a fallen people living in a fallen world. But you probably already know that. It doesn't take too much looking around to see it. We hear it on the daily news. We see it in our families. We feel it in ourselves. We are a people who are in need of saving.

And God sent a savior. Jesus Christ, the son of God came to earth to save us. And the way that he saves us is a work all his own. God does not save us by leaning into our strength or reading over our résumés. The salvation that comes from God is through grace.

This salvation is completely a gift from God. It has nothing to do with our good works. It has nothing to do with our personalities or our appearance. There is nothing that we can brag or boast about. It is all the work of God.

And what about those good works that we are sometimes tempted to show off? Those were set aside for us to do from the very beginning. We are God's workmanship, designed and intended to do the good works God set out for us. But notice that these works were prepared by God as well.

Every step along the way we are the recipients of the grace and work of God, given freely for us. This is grace. This is the gift of God.

What is your understanding of grace? What has it meant in your life?

Why?
Week 4
Day 4

For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value. The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love.

Galatians 5:6

One of the ways that churches can trip up is with regard to rules, both written and unwritten. Here at CCC, we want to remove all obstacles so that people can either accept or reject God because of who God is and not because of any manmade obstacle.

The book of Galatians in the Bible is a letter to a church that was facing some issues. This was a newly formed collection of people who were trying to align their lives with the will of God. And these people fell into two distinct groups; Jewish people and non-Jewish people. The differences between these groups was deep and went into how they identified themselves. Yet, both are now trying to live as one group and, as you might expect, issues arise.

The Jewish followers of Jesus were used to having some very strict and rigid definitions of what it meant to be "inside" and what it meant to be "outside." And so the Jewish believers set up requirements for those who were not Jewish, a set of things that they must do in order to be included among the people of God.

The idea is this: there are requirements before you can gain the love of God. There are requirements before you can be a part of the community. There are requirements before anything else can take place with regard to your spiritual life. And one of the main requirements was circumcision.

Paul, the author of this letter, makes it clear that these are not the requirements to receive the love of God. These are not the requirements to be a part of the community. God loves us before we even take a step toward him. God loves us without any requirements.

And the church is the place where this unconditional love of God is lived out and given to others. The requirements mean nothing, Paul is saying. What matters is faith acting in love. And just like the love of God poured from him down to us, so we are to become the sort of people who live and love each other in the same way.

Have you ever felt a lack of grace at church? What would a church look like that loved like God loved?

**Why?
Week 4
Day 5**

This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.

1 John 4: 9-11

He sat in his normal chair. It was in the middle of the row near the back of the room. The first time he sat there because there wasn't that many seats left and this one was

available, but it was a good location, offering a decent view. And so the next week he sat in the same chair. After that, it was just his seat. And so he sat in it this Sunday like he did every week.

It was a crowded Sunday and the seats were quickly becoming filled. A woman sat to his left, a woman who was much older than he was. He wanted to scoot away from her for no other reason than she was closer than strangers normally are to one another, but the seat to his right became filled as well. A boy of about ten sat in the seat, the youngest of his family that were trying to hurriedly get into the row before the service started. He readjusted himself to sit in the center of his seat, looking pointedly forward, avoiding eye contact with anyone and pulling his elbows in close so he wouldn't brush against those sitting on either side of him.

He shook his head. *Don't they know what time it is?* he thought as looked at his watch. The music was starting, someone standing at the microphone welcoming them. The boy beside him took off his coat, slapping him with each arm as he did so. *Unbelievable! Some people are so disrespectful!*

Everyone is asked to stand. He does so, still grumbling deep in his chest. There was a song being sung, something about God's love being amazing. The song says God's love is unchanging, steady and perfect. He liked that idea, enjoyed singing and thinking about God's love.

The older woman beside his began singing now, loud and wildly off-key. He closed his eyes, trying to ignore her but to no avail. He turned and glared at her, his look far from kind. She looked back and smiled warmly, clapping her hands softly as her voice warbled through the song. *If you can't sing, don't!* he thought with a snarl. *Why is she here anyway?*

"God loves you," the speaker from the front says. "We do not deserve it, we can not earn it, but God loves you."

Yes, he thinks, *I know I don't deserve the love of God and I am so thankful - what in the world is he doing now!* The

boy beside him unwrapped a candy, the wrapper crinkling loudly. *They shouldn't let kids in here.*

"God showed his love in Jesus, who died to prove his love to us," the speaker continued from the front. Yes, he thought distractedly. *The love of God, the sacrifice of Jesus, the - you've got to be kidding me!*

The older woman beside him was turning in her Bible, rifling through the well-worn pages, which were unyielding and noisy. "Amen, Jesus, amen." The woman whispered under her breath. "Amen, Jesus, amen."

He gritted his teeth, his jaw clenched. Angry words were bubbling to his lips and he swallowed them like acid. *I can't believe the people I have to put up with here!*

"How do we respond to the love of God?" the speaker asked from the front as the service ended. **When have you had to respond with love at CCC?**

Why?

Week 4

Small Group Guide

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

1. How did you first hear about Community Christian Church?
2. What have been your experiences with church? How has your experience with church influenced your life, both positively and negatively?

Think about it:

3. We normally live our lives with a cause and effect relationship with our actions. What are some ways that you receive what you 'earn' in your life?
4. The mission of Community Christian Church is to help people find their way back to God. How does someone's understanding of God's love effect this?

Bible: Read Romans 5: 6-8, Romans 8:38-39

5. How does the love of God, as described in these passages, compare with the love that we normally see in the world?
6. "While we were sinners, Christ died for us." This is the ultimate display of unconditional love. Have you ever felt this love in your life? How would knowing this sort of love change the way you lived? What are ways that a church like CCC can help people experience this love?
7. Nothing can separate us from the love of God. Is this how you normally think about God's love? Is this how you normally hear love talked about at churches?
8. At CCC we want to remove obstacles between people and God. What are some of the written or unwritten rules that act as obstacles? What are ways we can remove these obstacles so people can encounter God in their lives?