

CCC at the Movies

Week 1

Day 1

Read: Acts 17: 18-21

Almost everyone has a favorite movie. Some people like action flicks with lots of explosions while other people are drawn to romantic comedies where the guy always gets the girl.

Sometimes a piece of truth bleeds onto the silver screen that helps us better understand faith, life, and God. Today we are beginning a series called "CCC at the Movies" where we will be using movies as a spring board for conversations about God.

Some people might wonder why we would use movies to address truths about God. And to be fair it's a good question. After all, we won't be discussing movies with overly religious themes, but rather movies that are popular and well known (and pretty entertaining and successful as well). Why use something from within our culture to learn about God?

Paul, the author of about half of the New Testament portion of the Bible, was faced with a similar dilemma. How do you speak to people who may have heard about God before but whose ideas might be skewed, limited, or just plain wrong? Paul is in just such a situation in the city of Athens. During the first century Athens was the center of all things intellectual, philosophical, and (to a somewhat lesser degree) religious. What should Paul do to help these people hear and understand the message of Jesus?

It's a situation not dissimilar with our culture today. We have access to more information and ideas than ever. In a world so full of ideas, how do you engage with the culture?

Paul did what we will be doing throughout this series, he used ideas from within the culture to point to something more, to something greater.

What are the dangers of relying to heavily on the culture to learn about God? In what ways can the culture help us learn about God?

CCC at the Movies

Week 1

Day 2

Read: Acts 17: 18-21

In Athens, Paul found himself before a group of philosophers, some of whom were Stoics and others who were Epicureans. Stoics and Epicureans were two of the three main philosophical belief systems in Athens during this period (the third was Cynicism). We need to understand several things about each of these belief systems in order to get a full picture of what is taking place in this scene from the Bible.

Stoicism was a belief system which believed that god was a "world soul" or an eternal spark that existed in the heavens as the manifestation of "reason." They believed that all of humanity has a soul and a tiny piece of that eternal spark inside of it, which would return to the "main spark" after death. Therefore, the goal for every adherent of Stoicism was to try to avoid "passions" in one's life (this includes all emotional responses, both positive and negative) as a way of freeing himself or herself from the physical world. This could only be done by reigning in all emotional responses and through increased mental discipline. To the Stoics the physical world was nothing more than a barrier to god. The body and all that happens to it has no importance.

On the other hand, Epicureans held that the physical world was wonderful and the main goal in their lives was the avoidance of pain and suffering (not necessarily the seeking of pleasure, but the avoidance of all hardships often lead to the same ends). They believed that god (or gods) existed but outside of human affairs and so the goal of life was to live as painlessly and as easily as possible.

What would you do if you were Paul and you were speaking to these very different groups of people about God? What might

you say? The truth is that these beliefs are still alive and well today (though rarely labeled with these ancient titles). What would you say if you were Paul and faced with this situation?

How do we find points of contact with other people, especially people who believe differently than we do, so that we can have honest and meaningful conversations about God?

CCC at the Movies

Week 1

Day 3

Read: Acts 17: 22-28

Paul was speaking with a diverse group of people with an equally diverse set of beliefs. Some of them were Stoics and others were Epicureans. As we look at yesterday, these two groups were polar opposites. It is to these two opposing groups that Paul must find a way to communicate the message of Jesus.

Paul begins by noting something that would have been well known to anyone of that day: the people of Athens loved religion. In fact, they loved all religions and delighted in debating the merits of each. One of their methods of worship was to release a herd of sheep into the temple area that housed numerous idols and altars and wherever a sheep stopped to rest, they would sacrifice it to the god represented on the nearest idol. In order to be sure that they didn't offend any god, even those they didn't know, an altar was dedicated to an "unknown god."

Paul begins with what the people of Athens knew: the altar to the unknown god. It is clear that this altar was not built to honor the God of the Bible or Jesus. Yet, Paul leverages the one thing that these men respect, that there is a possibility that gods exist that they don't know about, maybe even some that are powerful and wonderful. Paul knows there is only one

God, a God revealed through Jesus. Yet, Paul doesn't begin with what he knows, he begins with what they know.

Paul quotes their own scholars back to them, but in reference to the God of the Bible. Verse 24 is a quote from Zeno, the founder of Stoicism. Verse 25 is one of the main tenants of Epicureanism and why they seek a life free of hardships. The first half of verse 28 is a quote from Epimenides, a well-known Greek philosopher and poet of which all of these men would have been familiar. The second half of verse 28 is another quote by a well-known poet, Aratus. Both Epimenides and Aratus were writing about the Greek god Zeus, but Paul uses these quotes here to refer to the God of the Bible.

Paul used things that his hearers would have been familiar with, things that were originally intended for a different purpose, but which Paul uses for God's glory. Paul puts these sayings to work to point out specific truths about God. We are doing the same thing. We are using movies that are familiar to help everyone understand more about God. These movies were not created for this purpose (they were created mostly to be entertainment and to make money) but through them we will be learning more about God.

What is your reaction to how Paul uses familiar sayings in order to teach about Jesus? How can this be done still today?

CCC at the Movies

Week 1

Day 4

Read: Romans 12: 1-2

The first movie we will be looking at during CCC at the Movies is *Batman: The Dark Knight*. *The Dark Knight* is a movie full of action and intrigue, all centered around the character of Bruce Wayne and his crime fighting alter ego, Batman. In this blockbuster, the masked crusader is once again out to protect the city of Gotham from an assortment of criminals, the chief of which is The Joker.

Bruce Wayne is torn between two worlds, one where he may lead a normal, comfortable life and another where he lives as Batman. Throughout the movie we see Bruce straining against these two worlds. He wants to live an easy life, a life of luxury and

free from pain and troubles. He has the resources to do so, with billions of dollars at his fingertips.

But he has another calling. He is called to be Batman and to take up the much more difficult task set before him. While he may desire comfortable living, there is evil that he must fight. In the life of Bruce Wayne, there is a greater calling than being comfortable. The same is true in our lives.

I think most of us desire to be comfortable, to live relaxed lives. There's nothing inherently wrong with that. But what happens is being comfortable becomes our highest goal, the thing for which we fight and strive. Eventually, being comfortable can become the center of our lives.

It was once said of basketball legend Michael Jordan that he was living the American dream because he could do anything he wanted and not do anything he didn't want. This may or may not have been true of Jordan, but this is certainly the goal for many people.

Yet, those who want to follow God are called to something more. We are called to live in such a way that we focus on something greater than simply being comfortable. We are called to sacrifice.

We are called to give up ourselves as living sacrifices given up to God for a greater purpose than our own comfort. This is the way we should worship and honor God, by sacrificing ourselves to him. This isn't a literal sacrifice, God doesn't desire ritualistic suicide, but people who put the goals and desires of God ahead of their own. This is a sacrifice of our wills, which sometimes is harder than a one-time sacrifice. The hard part is that this sacrifice goes against everything we see and hear from our world. The Bible tells us that we must no longer conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by God.

What does this look like in your life? Would you say the highest goal you your life is to be transformed by God or to be comfortable?

CCC at the Movies

Week 1

Day 5

Read: John 3:16, Matthew 22: 34-40

Batman is an epic figure in the movie *The Dark Knight*. There is something very appealing about these sorts of epic figures, these larger than life characters who face insurmountable obstacles yet prevail. Even more than the characters himself or herself is the mission they have. There's something stirring about having a mission to fight for.

Batman certainly has a mission. He knows what he's fighting for and what's at stake. He fights to protect the people and to preserve justice. Even when this mission becomes difficult or, in the case of *The Dark Knight*, when others are actively working to thwart it, Batman continues to fight because he knows his mission.

I sometimes wonder if we do. Do we live like we have a mission? Do we live like there is something at stake? When we face adversity or opposition, do we continue to persevere because we understand our greater mission?

Jesus' mission on earth was to restore people to God and to teach people how to love God and each other well. When asked what the most important command is, Jesus responded by saying everything can be summed up in two things, to love God with everything we have and to love people the way we want to be loved.

Our mission is the same. We are called to learn to love God and people more and more. We are called to help people find their way back to God and to help people encounter Jesus so they can experience the transformational love of God for themselves.

It's a great mission. It's an adventure. It's worth our energy, our efforts, and our lives.

Sometimes the Christian life is characterized mainly as trying to avoid doing things that are wrong, or by obeying a set of rigid rules. The truth is that by following God we are accepting a grand mission and we are entering into an adventure.

How would you describe the mission of Jesus on earth? How would you describe the mission of someone trying to follow

Jesus? Do you see the Christian life more as a set of rules to follow or as a great mission and adventure?

**CCC at the Movies
Week 1
Small Group Guide**

1. What is your favorite movie? What is your favorite movie genre? Why?
2. What do you think about using movies to learn about God?
3. How do we find points of contact with other people, especially people who believe differently than we do, so that we can have honest and meaningful conversations about God?

Read: *Romans 12: 1-2, Matthew 22: 34-40*

4. Which would you say has a higher priority in your life: being comfortable or being transformed and used by God?
5. How would you describe the mission of Jesus while he was on earth? How would you describe the mission of someone trying to follow Jesus?
6. Do you see the Christian life more as a set of rules to follow or as a great mission and adventure? How has this view affected your life?

**CCC at the Movies
Week 2
Day 1**

Read: 1 Corinthians 1: 26-31

We are in the second week of the series "CCC at the Movies" where we are using movies as a springboard for conversations about faith, life, and God. What we often find is truths about God have a way of bleeding onto the big screen, and we can learn about God from secular movies if we learn how to watch them well.

This week we'll be looking at the animated movie *Kung Fu Panda*. *Kung Fu Panda* is based in China and uses anthropomorphized characters (all the characters are animals that act like humans). The main character is Po, a giant panda who dreams of being a kung fu master. The main focus of his admiration is the Furious Five: Tigress, Monkey, Mantis, Viper, and Crane, a group of kung fu masters who are the protectors of The Valley of Peace.

Yet, a threat exists in the character of the evil kung fu master Tai Lung, a snow leopard. Fearing that Tai Lung will escape from prison and attack the Valley, a kung fu tournament is held to identify the legendary Dragon Warrior. The Dragon Warrior is the only master who is worthy to receive the Dragon Scroll, which is said to hold the key to limitless power.

Po, who works as a noodle salesman, attends the tournament to sell noodles, but the gates are closed and locked. Po is determined to get inside to see the tournament, and through several humorous and slightly catastrophic events, Po finds himself not only inside the gates of the tournament, but in the center of the action just as the Dragon Warrior is being selected. To everyone's shock, Po, a fat, clumsy, and a complete novice to kung fu, is chosen as the Dragon Warrior.

He is the most unlikely choice of all. He has no qualifications that anyone can see. Yet, he is identified as the Dragon Warrior.

God often chooses people that seem completely unqualified. All throughout the Bible, God selected people that the world considered worthless. God often used the least likely people, the lowly and the insignificant, to display his power. Though we often feel bumbling and clumsy in our lives, God chooses us to accomplish his work on earth as well. If you don't feel

qualified to be selected by God to do his work, good, because you aren't qualified. But by being selected God supplies what we need to accomplish the task he gives us. God does not call where he does not supply what is needed.

Have you ever felt called by God to do something? Did you felt unqualified for this? What is your reaction to the statement God uses unqualified people all throughout the Bible?

CCC at the Movies

Week 2

Day 2

Read: Romans 12: 3-8, Galatians 6:4

Po, the giant panda, begins training under Master Shifu, a red panda (which looks like a big-eared fox) and along side of the Furious Five. The Furious Five are resentful of Po, seeing him as an undeserving upstart. Shifu is angry that a fat, clumsy panda was selected as the Dragon Warrior instead of his protégé Tigress. So Shifu begins to put Po through a series of grueling tasks and pits him against the Furious Five.

Po lacks any kung fu training or ability and is physically and mentally beaten up through his first day of training. Each of the Furious Five have a specific strength, and Shifu runs Po through a number of tests and trials that the Furious Five can do easily, each exercise suited perfectly to their strengths. Po fails completely.

Po is completely demoralized. His abilities can't even come close to comparing to the abilities and giftedness of the Furious Five. Each test and task forces Po to once again

compare himself to these highly trained, highly gifted kung fu warriors. Po looks at himself next to the Furious Five and realizes he doesn't measure up.

In our lives we are sometimes tempted to compare ourselves to others. We look at other people's abilities, their resources, their gifts, and sometimes we draw comparisons. We want what they have. We want to be in their situation. We want to be blessed the way they are blessed.

But we are not called to compare ourselves to others. We are called to use the gifts and abilities we have been given, not daydream about the things we wished we had. The problem with comparing ourselves to others is that while we are looking at what others have, we aren't using what we have. Over and over again the Bible uses figurative language to help us understand how people who follow God should treat each other.

One of the main images is that of a body. We are called to be one body. Yet, every body is made of many different parts. We'll be spending time this week looking at what it means to be one body made up of many parts.

In what ways is the church like a body?

CCC at the Movies

Week 2

Day 3

Read: 1 Corinthians 12: 1-13

Po, the giant panda, idolizes the Furious Five. This super kung fu team is the object of his daydreams. He wishes he could fight like them, could be strong like them, and that he was skilled like they are. Without intending to be, Po finds that he is jealous of their abilities. His jealousy leads to him overlooking his own abilities. What this leads to is a further dejected Po.

We should not look at someone else's giftedness with jealousy. We are reminded in the Bible that while there are different kinds of work and different kinds of service, there is only one God who we are serving. What this really means is that we often focus on the act of service or how we're gifted, and maybe there is something better to focus on. Perhaps instead of focusing on what we do or don't have, we should focus on God.

Instead of looking at other people and wishing we were someone else, we should focus on the God who gives every gift and to whom all of our gifts should be directed.

There are many gifts. There are many talents. There are many skills and abilities. But there is one God. There is one God who gives all gifts. There is one God to be praised, worshiped, and honored with these gifts.

When you are tempted to look to the left or to the right, I encourage you to instead look to God.

Have you ever felt jealous of other people's gifts, talents, or abilities? How does focusing on others take your focus away from God?

CCC at the Movies
Week 2
Day 4

Read: 1 Corinthians 12: 14-20

Master Shifu, who is responsible for training Po and the Furious Five, is constantly frustrated and disappointed with Po. Po simply seems unable to grasp even the most basic concepts of kung fu. Shifu, who has trained some of the best kung fu warriors in the world, finds his tactics and instruction are not producing any results. Po, for his part, is trying his best, but nothing seems to click. Shifu is on the verge of giving up on Po.

Sometimes we expect people to fit into a certain mold. This can sometimes be the case when we look at our own giftedness as being the height of all giftedness. This often expresses itself in subtle ways, but when we begin comparing ourselves to others, we've begun down a dangerous path.

We are warned in the Bible that we ought to look at ourselves with sober judgment. What this means is we shouldn't downplay or look down on the way we are gifted. And it also means that we shouldn't look at ourselves as the standard everyone else should try to attain or measure up to.

What is the most important part of the body? There are a number of possible answers. Perhaps the brain is the most important part of the body. After all, if your brain gets damaged it affects everything else. Or maybe the heart of the most important part of the body. If your heart stops beating you're in a lot of trouble. Or maybe it's something as simple as your skin. I mean, can you have a body without having something to put it all in? You might be able to list a number of other things, but the point is if you don't have it all working together, the whole body suffers.

Even the things that we might consider unimportant, like our fingers and toes, are essential for the body to function at its very best.

It's the same way with the church that is often called the body of Christ in the Bible. There are no unimportant parts. If the body is going to function at its very best, it needs every part to work together. Remember, the people who you might be tempted to think of as worthless or "less than" are also called to be a part of the body of Christ.

How does the body function as a collection of parts? How does the body function as a single unit? How does the malfunction of a single part of the body effect the whole?

**CCC at the Movies
Week 2
Day 5**

Read: 1 Corinthians 12: 21-31, Jeremiah 29: 11-13

In the end, Po was perfectly suited to defeat Tai Lung, the evil snow leopard terrorizing the Valley. Tai Lung's power to paralyze whoever he is fighting has no effect on Po. Po's resilience and almost complete imperviousness to pain makes him the only one who could have stopped Tai Lung.

At first glance, it looks like choosing Po to fight against Tai Lung was a sure death sentence for Po. After all, what can a fat, clumsy panda with no training do against a powerful, skilled snow leopard (besides sit on him, which he does several times)?

But the role that Po was called into, no matter how impossible it seemed at first, was the role he was perfectly suited to fulfill.

The same is true of us. Often we are called into situations where we seem unqualified, undeserving, or simply overmatched. We might feel like God has made a mistake to ask us. Surely there is someone else who is better suited to the task. Surely there is another way, you might be thinking.

But God has plans for you, plans to prosper you, plans for which you are perfectly suited. It might not feel like it right now. It might seem like you're in way over your head. But together with God, you will be perfectly suited to the challenges ahead.

What is your reaction to hearing that what God desires from you he supplies for you? Are there any situations that you're being called into right now in your life?

CCC at the Movies
Week 2
Small Group Guide

1. Have you ever been in a situation where you felt unqualified?
2. When you were in school were you ever jealous of a classmate? Why?

Read: 1 Corinthians 12: 1-31

3. In what ways is the church like a body?
4. What are ways the body and the church can function well as a unit and what are some ways that it malfunctions?
5. Have you ever felt jealous of someone else's talents, gifts, or abilities? How has this drawn your attention away from God?
6. Where in your life is God calling you? What will it take for you to step into this call?

CCC at the Movies
Week 3
Day 1

Read: 1 Corinthians 12: 12-13

We are in the third week of CCC at the Movies, where we've been using movies as a means of looking at deeper truths about life

and God. This week we'll be looking at the newest Star Trek movie.

Star Trek is a movie that centers around the crew of a starship called Enterprise. What I want to really focus on from this movie and what I want you to zoom in on is how a collection of people come together under a single purpose and for a single goal.

This is really a great picture of what a church looks like. It's a collection of people from different backgrounds but who join together to make a single crew. What I want to really focus on this week is how the church is also a collection, referred to in the Bible over and over again as a body.

In the reading for today we get a great picture of this. We are told that the body of Christ, the body of Jesus, is made up of many parts. And though all the parts are different, they are joined together into one body. So what is the body of Jesus? We are. The church is the body of Christ. When we are baptized, we are baptized into one body, so all that other stuff from before doesn't matter. So before you were baptized, you might have been tempted to put your identity in that you were a Jew, or a Greek, or rich, or poor; but after your baptized into one body, into Jesus' body, that is your identity. We are the body of Jesus.

Because we are the body of Christ, the body of Jesus, this means some things for us that we'll be looking at more closely this week.

To what degree do you are you tempted to put your identity into things other than Jesus? What do you think it means that the church is called the body of Christ?

Read: 1 Corinthians 12: 17-20

The movie Star Trek is really about this collection of people. It's an interesting collection of people, to be sure. There are different people, different races, different backgrounds, different skills, and different gifts. But everyone is on the same ship, working under the same leadership, and working toward a common goal. There might not be a more diverse group than the crew of the Enterprise. Not only do you have humans from different backgrounds, you have all these different aliens as well.

This really is a great image of what the church looks like. It's a collection of people who are diversely gifted with a myriad of different backgrounds and different stories, but who gather together as the body of Christ.

Think about your body. Think about the amazing diversity it takes to make your body run. There are 210 distinct types of cells that make up your body. There are 206 different bones in an adult's body. You have over 230 movable or semi-movable joints in your body. Your body includes eyes and toenails. Your body has a brain and also knee caps.

It takes amazing diversity to make a body function. The body of Christ, the church, is the same way.

The church was never meant to be an exclusive community consisting of a single type of people. It was meant to throw the doors open wide, inviting everyone. And in the end, we are not the one who create diversity, God does. God organizes the body of the church just like he organizes our physical bodies, with great diversity.

What role does diversity play in a person's body? What role does it play in the church, or the body of Christ?

CCC at the Movies
Week 3
Day 3

Read: 1 Corinthians 12: 21-24

But being a part of a body doesn't mean only diversity, being a part of a body means having unity. Diversity isn't enough, because diversity without unity is chaos.

We see this very thing in Star Trek. There comes a part in the movie where a choice has to be made about which way to go, about which path to take. In this moment of decision there is disunity. In the midst of conflict, when unity is needed the most, disunity prevails. And while there is disunity aboard the starship, it doesn't function.

The same thing is true in our bodies. When a part of our body is in disunity with the rest of it, it's really bad news. We've all experienced this to some degree, even if just in a minor way. When a muscle spasms or cramps, it is rebelling against the body, it is concerned with itself and not the body as a whole.

While an ear or an eye cannot function outside of the body, a cell can. A cell can be a loyalist to the body or it can cling to its own life. A cell can function in the body, enjoying the benefits and shelter of the body while maintaining its independence. Do you know what these types of cells are called? They are called cancer cells. This can happen in a church as well.

In a body, disunity, eventually, will lead to death. In a church, disunity will lead to death as well.

This happens in very subtle ways in our world. We tend to put value on people according to how much money they make. So we tend to think a CEO has more worth as a person than a janitor. Without even meaning to we begin to sow the seeds of disunity. We begin to separate into subgroups of people who are like us and those who are unlike us. This is not what the church, the body of Christ, is called to. We are called to be united.

To what degree do you fight for unity? To what degree do you

sow seeds of disunity?

CCC at the Movies

Week 3

Day 4

Read: 1 Corinthians 12: 24-26

Being a part of the body of Christ means that we begin to see people the way that God sees people, that there are no worthless people. This is a hard thing for us in our culture which is so tied to results, but this is what it means to be a part of the body of Jesus.

This also has to do with what David talked about last week, how we are gifted. Part of what the Bible teaches is that those who have placed God first in their life and who love him are gifted by God's spirit. There are a bunch of different gifts that we can have and our temptation sometimes is to rank these gifts in order of importance. We think that some gifts are more desirable than others, namely those gifts that are more external, more upfront. People sometimes get the idea that if you can't teach, or if you can't lead, than your gifts are second rate. Nothing could be further from the truth.

The value of the gifting God gives us is not on how important we think our particular gift is, but how much we use it in accordance to what God has given us. What is important is not which gift is more valuable than others, but it's about knowing and using the gifts we have. If you have the gift of leading but don't lead, it's worthless. If you have the gift of encouragement but you don't use it, what's the point?

If you don't know or aren't sure what your spiritual gifts are, I encourage you to find out. If you know what your gifts are, are you using them? If the body of Christ is going to function the way it was meant to, than everyone needs to be fully using their gifts.

Do you know what your spiritual gifts are? Are you using your gifts for the body of Christ?

CCC at the Movies

Week 3

Day 5

Read: 2 Peter 3:9

Finally, being a part of a body means having a mission.

If you've ever seen the television show Star Trek then you know that every episode starts with this little monologue, a kind of introduction. My bet would be that even if you've never seen an episode before you're probably familiar with it, it goes:

Space, the final frontier. These are the voyages of the starship Enterprise, whose mission is to explore strange, new worlds, to seek out new life and new civilizations, and to boldly go where . . . no one has gone before.

Right in the beginning of every episode there is a spelling out of their mission. Explore, seek out new life, and go boldly where no one else has ever been. Every single person on the ship has a clear understanding of what it means to be a part of the Enterprise. No one is going to be shocked when the Enterprise pulls over to check out a strange, new world. No one on the Enterprise is going to complain when there is some new life or new civilization to explore that's going to take them out of their way. No one is going to freak out because out because they're asked to go boldly into the unknown.

They all know the mission. They are all on the same page. And there's something powerful about having a unifying mission that brings great clarity to a group of people.

We have a mission too.

The way we frame it up here at CCC is that we exist to help people find their way back to God. And you know, this is God mission to, to help people find their way back to him. It's why he sent his son Jesus to earth, to restore people back to him. At CCC our dream is to help people find their way back to God.

What is your role in this mission? How much have you bought into this mission and what does this look like in your life?

CCC at the Movies
Week 3
Small Group Guide

1. What is your favorite television series? Movie series?
2. Can you list some movies of television shows that have a diverse cast that works together to accomplish a goal? Why do you think people enjoy movies and television shows like this?

Read 1 Corinthians 12: 12-26

3. To what degree do you are you tempted to put your identity into things other than Jesus? What do you think it means that the church is called the body of Christ?
4. What role does diversity play in a person's body? What role does it play in the church, or the body of Christ?
5. To what degree do you fight for unity? To what degree do you sow seeds of disunity?
6. What is the importance of having a clear vision? Can you name the mission of Community Christian Church?
7. What is your role in this mission? How much have you bought into this mission and what does this look like in your life?

Read: 1 Corinthians 13:1-3

We are in the fourth and final week of CCC at the Movies, where we've been using movies as a starting point for conversations about life, faith, and God. Over the last couple of weeks we've been looking at what it means to be called by God (using the movie *The Dark Knight*), that God gives spiritual gifts to those who follow him (using the movie *Kung Fu Panda*), and that a collection of people who are called and gifted by God are like a body (using the movie *Star Trek*).

Today we're going to look at what the overriding principle is for all of these things: love.

I know it sounds a bit trite, but the Bible teaches love is a vital component to everything else we've discussed throughout this series.

To illustrate this concept of love we'll be looking at movie *Gran Torino*. Just a few words before we engage fully with this movie. *Gran Torino* is rated R and it contains language that some may find offensive or inappropriate as well as some violence. Yet, as is often the case, love is best illustrated in the context of harsh reality, with all of its ugliness as well as its beauty.

The movie *Gran Torino* centers on the character of Walt Kowalski, played by Clint Eastwood. Walt is a retired automotive worker and Korean War veteran living by himself in a neighborhood that has become dominated by immigrants. Walt's attitude toward his neighbors is harsh, critical, and racist. On top of that, Walt's family is self-centered, belittling, and frankly, obnoxious.

With all of Walt's experiences, skills, and talents, his life is dominated by frustration and anger.

The Bible teaches that without love, nothing else matters. Without having love in our lives, none of the rest can make up the difference. If we have skills and gifts given by God, but we don't have love, than it's all worthless. If we have unbelievable intelligence and unshakable faith but don't have

love, than we might as well not have the ability to think or believe in the first place. If we give up ourselves sacrificially and hold nothing back but we don't have love, than what we have done doesn't make any difference. Walt's life is loveless, and he senses the futility of it.

We'll be spending the rest of the week looking at Gran Torino and love.

What role does love play in your life?

CCC at the Movies
Week 4
Day 2

Read: Romans 12: 9-12, 1 Corinthians 13: 14-16

In the movie Gran Torino, everything changes when Walt's young neighbor, Thao, attempts to steal his car as an initiation into a gang. When the theft fails, the gang comes to Thao's house and assaults him. Thao's family, including his sister Sue, tries to fend the gang off but with no success.

The fight is finally broken up when Walt comes outside with his rifle and orders the gang off his lawn. Walt insists that he simply wanted to get them off his lawn, disregarding the thanks he is given.

When the neighborhood hears about what happened, they respond by bringing him food, houseplants, and other tokens of their appreciation. Walt doesn't want any of it, just to be left alone.

The neighbors understand something about showing appreciation and honoring one another. Walt doesn't know how to react to the honor they give, but it's certainly something he can't ignore.

The Bible teaches us that we are to show love to each other and honor one another above ourselves. We are called to love each other in tangible ways, to honor each other in practical ways, and for our love to be sincere. It's not always an easy thing, but our interactions are intended to be reflective. When people are rejoicing, we are called to rejoice with them. When people are mourning, we are called to mourn with them. When we are able to do this well, we will begin to have genuine harmony with each other. In the movie, the honor and appreciation shown to Walt is the first step toward breaking down the wall between them. It makes love possible.

How do you honor those around you? How well do you rejoice or mourn with those around you?

CCC at the Movies
Week 4
Day 3

Read: 1 Corinthians 13: 14-16, Galatians 3: 28

Throughout the course of the movie, Walt's attitude begins to change. He attends a cookout with his Asian neighbors, the same neighbors he was spouting racially charged insults to earlier in the movie. He becomes something of a mentor to Sue and Thao. Walt no longer sees his neighbors as an inconvenience or a burden. Something very interesting happens.

Walt, with all of his crudeness and racism, begins to see his Asian neighbors as his family. In the movie Walt makes the

comment, with a note of disgust at the realization, that he's closer to his neighbors than to his own kids.

One of the very best things about the church is that it can become a family. Walt saw his neighbors as below him, as inferior to him. But by the end of the movie he saw his neighbors as people he loved, respected, and those whom wanted to protect. Their differences no longer mattered because they had learned to love and care for each other.

The same can be true for our church.

When you look around on any Sunday morning, you'll see people who look different than you. There will be people with different backgrounds and experiences. But when we place Jesus as the leader of our life and our church, our differences don't matter as much as what we have our unity in: Jesus.

Do you tend to focus on differences or on the unity found in Jesus? How can love overcome the differences we have with each other?

CCC at the Movies

Week 4

Day 4

Read: John 15:12-13, 1 Corinthians 13: 4-6

Walt Kowalski is sick. Several times during the movie he coughs up blood. Walt goes to the doctor's office and things don't look good. Walt knows for sure that his time is running short.

Knowing this is one of the reasons Walt doesn't hold anything back to protect and support Thao and Sue.

I think it's easy to hold back in our lives. It's easy to think of ourselves first. It's easy to worry about what our kindness and our love is going to cost us.

1 Corinthians 13 is one of the most well known areas of the Bible. Even if you've never read the Bible before, you've probably heard some of these verses before during a wedding. It's all about love.

One thing you'll find over and over again is that love is the most important thing. We are sometimes worried about what love will cost us, but what we forget is what *not* loving will cost us. The Bible teaches that not loving will make everything we do insignificant. Not loving will handicap all of our relationships. Not loving will cost us more than loving ever will.

One thing Walt learns is that when he has nothing to lose he is able to love more freely. The same is true of us. When we stop holding back in our lives, when we stop worrying about what our love will cost, we are freed to love completely.

How often do you worry about what love will cost you?

1. What is your favorite thing about your neighborhood? Your least favorite?
2. What is something that causes you frustration in your life?

Read 1 Corinthians 13, Romans 12: 9-16

3. What are some of the barriers to love in your life?
4. How often do you focus on the differences of others, especially at church? How often do you focus on the unity formed by following Jesus?
5. How can loving others overcome the differences between us? Have you experienced this in your life?
6. What ways are you held back because of what loving others might cost you?
7. The Bible teaches that without love, the rest doesn't matter. How have you seen this play out in your life?