

I LOVE MY CHURCH – WEEK 1 – John 13:34-35

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There are different places, locations, buildings that we eventually *have* to visit in life.

I'm not talking about Disney World, that's a "want to" visit place. I'm talking about the places we need to go to just because of the course of life: school, for example, or the dentist's office. Various necessary places will invoke a variety of responses in us. We feel different about going to the mall compared to say going to the dentist.

I'm going to put an image of a place up on the screen, and I want you to say the first word that comes to mind about how people typically feel in regard to having to go to these locations. Give me a word.

1st image: DMV

- 2nd image: Doctor's office
- 3rd image: Grocery store

Not the most rave reviews, right? Some worse than others, but in all three of them you can see that we go to these places in most cases because we have to, not necessarily because we want to. No one said, "Love it!" did they? You'll occasionally hear someone say they love their grocery store if a comparison with other places is going on, and the same for the doctor's office is possible. But if anyone ever says they love going to the DMV, you're going to assume they need help.

Now look at the last one but don't say anything out loud, but let's think about it honestly. Do we think about church the same way we think about going to the DMV, the doctor's office, or the grocery store? Is this just a place that we feel we "have" to go to or is there more to it? Think about people who aren't here with us today or maybe people who haven't stepped into a church in a long time or ever. I'd be willing to guess that some of them would describe coming to church like we describe going to the DMV, and based on their experiences, they probably wouldn't be far off from the truth.

Is that what God intended when He created the church? Was that His idea about this community of people? I believe the Bible tells us that *no*, that wasn't nor is it God's plan for the church.

I believe that God wants us to love the church. Not love what we see in the news sometimes or maybe have experienced in the past, but love the church as *He* intended it to be. That's what this series is going to be about—that we'd learn to be the community God intended us to be.

Let's turn to John 13 and read verses 34-35 together on page 1146 in the pew Bibles. **"A new commandment I give to you, that you *love one another*: Just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."**

This verse is a prelude of the church to come. The church will start in Acts, but here we find Jesus meeting with His disciples, telling them how His followers should be known, what the reputation will be of this community He is creating. They will be a people known for their love for one another.

Church people are meant to love one another. It's not optional, not an elective—it's a command from Jesus. We are to love one another. But what does that mean? What does it mean to love one another? When we say we want to love the church as God intended it and us to be, what do we mean by "love"?

Give a similar personal story here to what follows.

I loved a restaurant.

Give a similar personal story here to what follows.

I love my daughter.

What do we mean when we say, "I love my church"? What does it mean to love one another? Does He want us to love one another like I loved my experience at the restaurant, or does He want me to love the church like I do my daughter?

With the restaurant I was experiencing something given to me, a place offering me something. The restaurant fed me and provided a moment in which I could participate. If the experience itself was excellent, I could rate it so I could give it a positive review on Yelp, or recommend it to others. If it was the opposite type of experience, I wouldn't return and I'd tell others to avoid it.

With my daughter I am experiencing an important relationship. My daughter is someone I am intrinsically connected with. My love for her isn't based on what I'm receiving or experiencing but based on who she is and what is involved in our relationship. Because I love her, I care for her, want to spend time with her, we go through life together. That journey might bring about some not so great experiences, but we work through those. I don't rate my daughter. I love her.

The church was never meant to be like a restaurant; it's meant to be based on relationships. This begins first and foremost in a relationship with Jesus, and through that we are connected to one another.

Jesus loves us and brought us into relationship with Himself (**share the Gospel**). His death on the cross was an act of love for us. Earlier in John we are told it was because God loved us so much that He sent His son to die for us, that we might have real life. He intentionally loved us, served us, saved us.

In being brought into that relationship, we aren't only brought into a relationship with Jesus but also into relationship with one another. Being in a relationship with Jesus means being part of the church, part of His kingdom, part of the family of faith.

Many people treat the church like a restaurant. If the experience isn't just to their liking, they'll find somewhere else or not go at all. This is beyond unfortunate. This sets up expectations for the church that it was never intended to fulfill. Also, and we have to be honest here, this isn't relationship-focused; this is self-focused. This isn't loving as Jesus loved. This loves as I see fit, am comfortable with, and for my own gain. The church isn't supposed to be like that.

You will experience a love for the church when you intentionally love the church. You will have a deep sense of love for the church when you actively and intentionally practice love for the church. The opposite is also true: When you don't intentionally love the church, then you will not experience a love for the church. We'll love the church when it is about relationships, not when it is like a restaurant.

What does it look like to intentionally love the church? To be in community with one another as God intended it to be? Well, that's what this series is about! Let me give you an overview of what we'll be looking at:

- **Love by connecting.** Being in community—in fellowship, in relationship—with each other is more than knowing people's names and where they sit on a Sunday morning. We love one another when we stand alongside one another. Being connected with one another is ensuring no one stands alone.
- **Love by serving.** God has given each of His followers supernaturally empowered abilities to encourage and help one another and the community. Did you know you have superpowers? We're going to talk about that.
- **Love by giving.** Yes, we're going to talk about giving. But probably not in the way you'd expect. In fact, we won't talk at all about tithing or percentages. We

won't even try any ill-planned guilt trips to get you to give more. We'll simply talk about giving as an indicator of love.

- **Love by sharing.** The love that Jesus gives to us and that we can have for one another isn't to be hoarded within the walls of the church. The love that we are to have for one another is also meant to show our community what the love of Jesus looks like. If we aren't sharing the love of God with our words and deeds, then we aren't truly loving. We'll talk about this as well.

I invite you to stick with us for the next four weeks as we look at various ways that we can intentionally love the church as we see what it is God intended for the community of faith.

There are two things I want to challenge you with as we leave:

Let people know that you love your church. We have these T-shirts available. Envision these shirts as an easy conversation-starting tool. Think about it like this: We see someone with a concert or sports team shirt on, and it becomes an instant opportunity for conversation. You see someone out and about with a concert T-shirt on of a band you like and you ask him or her what show they were at and how it was. Strangers you normally wouldn't talk to you'll strike up a conversation with because they're wearing the jersey of your favorite team. Just think of the conversations that could come out of you wearing this shirt. Don't think about it; pray about it! Pray for God to give you opportunities to talk to people when they see you with this shirt on, that people would ask about it, inquire which church, wonder why you'd love a church. I really can't wait to hear what conversations do happen. Please e-mail me and let me know if you have one!

Get connected in a LIFE group....

This is going to be an exciting journey—and I'm excited we're able to go through this together.