

Wired for Connection

Week 4 - You are Incomplete Alone: Forming a right theology of relationships.

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Opening:

In this series so far we have debunked the idea through scripture and modern day psychology that the strongest version of you is a you that stands alone. See week 2 of the series.

You are only as strong as your tribe.

We also talked about how you literally take on the values, ideas and identity of the communities you engage in. See week 3 of this series.

You become your tribe.

This week I want you to consider this.

Real community is celebrated in times of joy but made and shown strong in times of tension.

- You really don't know how strong a relationship is until it is tested, right?

Let's define relational terms really quick.

- Pop Culture use of the word love: I feel emotionally drawn to something. The strength of this is an emotion.
- Jesus' use of the word love (agape): A setting of the will to work to the benefit towards something or someone. The strength of this is the will.

Charity' now means simply what used to be called 'alms'—that is, giving to the poor. Originally it had a much wider meaning. . . . Charity means "Love, in the Christian sense." But love, in the Christian sense, does not mean an emotion. It is a state not of the feelings but of the will; that state of the will which we have naturally about ourselves, and must learn to have about other people.

-C.S. Lewis, Mere Christianity

"A sensible friend who will unsparingly criticize you from week to week will be a far greater blessing to you than a thousand indiscriminating admirers if you have sense enough to bear his treatment, and grace enough to be thankful for it." -Charles Spurgeon, *Lectures to My Students*

(Insert three pictures from the wedding)

This last weekend our family gathered together for my nephew's wedding. We had a great time. Nothing like 20 hours in a car in less than three day's time, a hotel room and one bathroom with a family of six, and a three-year-old who coughed all night long. Honestly, it was fun. While we were there my dad, my brother and I were having a discussion about leadership and running organizations. Now, when the three of us get passionate we can get intense. We can start talking on top of each other, disagreeing, offering constant rebuttals and pushing back. My sons were listening to us discuss things. I love it! At the end of every conversation, even intense ones, there is so much respect and love. My kids were able to listen to family practice real honesty without any fear of fracture. Here is how we define trust and love.

- Trust is taking a posture of heart that is for the person even when you don't yet understand where they are coming from.
- Love is not first a feeling but a determination of the will to always fight for each other.

My kids see the power and strength of Christian love clearer when we are in times of tension than in times of joy.

To the Text:

"Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity."

Colossians 3:12-14 NIV

"If I speak in the tongues of men or of angels, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. If I give all I possess to the poor and give over my body to hardship that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing. Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away. For we know in part and we prophesy in part, but when completeness comes, what is in part disappears. When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put the ways of childhood behind me. For now we see only a reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known. And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love."

1 Corinthians 13:1-13 NIV

Sit in the History:

- The Corinthians are pursuing the gifts and knowledge of God in a heathen, non-Christian way. Paul is writing the Corinthians who are constantly working to create hierarchy based on their gifts. He is actually quite sharp with them. The "resounding gong or a clanging cymbal" is offensive. These practices were associated with heathen worship practices.
- The "how" of all the "what" that is done in Christianity is charitable love. A posture of heart that chooses to truly desire the good of the other. *"And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity."*
- How important is this decision to work in charity towards each other?
 - *If I give all I possess to the poor and give over my body to hardship that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing.*
 - *And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.*
 - *Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away.*

What does this mean for us today?

- We must set aside the assumption that we are complete without others and/or that we are superior to others. Pride destroys Christian community.
- Expect relational tension. The implication is that people IN THE CHURCH are in tension. Countless people have approached me in frustration with their current church and made comments about them wanting a New Testament Church. I want to shout from the rooftop the tension you feel is the New Testament church!

- Most modern “Christians” walk away from true Christian community and friendship before they even had a chance to practice the charitable love of Christ.
- Real community is celebrated in times of joy but made and shown strong in times of tension.
- How you handle your frustration with other Christians will show whether you are behaving more like a heathen (1 Cor. 13) who likes Christian values or if you are a true believer trying to embrace the heart of Christ.

Final Thoughts:

Where did I feel love in the church?

Pastor Tim McClellan was the first Sr. Pastor I worked for. It was really good and I learned a lot working for him. The greatest lesson was his posture of heart. While working for him I tried a ministry project that lost the church almost 20,000 dollars. I wanted to do an outreach event. I booked one of the biggest Christian bands, Skillet. I rented the best sound system I could find and I promoted the event as far and wide as I could. I needed a few thousand tickets to sell. I ended up with less than 200.

When it was all said and done I was in the hole almost \$20,000.

When I came into his office after the event was over what I found was corrective grace. He didn’t dismiss it but he didn’t dismiss me. My passion to reach lost people increased but so did my wisdom. He said he needed my optimism and big vision energy. He didn’t want to squelch it but he also wanted to bring a little wisdom to it.

One of my greatest leadership blunders ended up being one of my greatest memories of love.

Yet, this right posture wasn’t felt by all. Some of the other leaders in the church made me feel shame and failure. I had the opportunity to offer grace to them and because of Pastor Tim’s example I think I did well.

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Where is Jesus?

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Jesus gave up everything for his tribe, humanity. He even gave all for those in His tribe who were hurt and lost, even those who were hurting others. Jesus’ love wouldn’t back down from the cross. He is part of the perfect Trinity, the perfect family. He invites us back into the greatest of families. Accepting the cross is accepting the invitation back into family.

A few statements:

- Christian love is counterculture because it often requires times of personal sacrifice.
- Just because you offer charitable love doesn’t mean you will always receive it. Choose to love anyway.
- Be aware of the posture of your heart when you are with people.
- What you stay committed to often speaks way louder than what you walk away from.

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Next Steps Cards:

- In whom do you need to offer Charitable love?
- What posture of heart do you choose to have when you come to church?

Resources:

- Psychology Today, Why we all need to belong to someone.
<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/in-the-name-love/201403/why-we-all-need-belong-someone>
- *Every Good Endeavor* by Timothy Keller
- *Mere Christianity* by C.S. Lewis
- *Life Together* by Dietrich Bonhoeffer
- English Standard Version of the Bible