

As Jesus was preparing his disciples for His departure, He gave them the command to love one another with the same love that He had loved them. Jesus' love for us was not simply a feeling, it was demonstrated by self-sacrificing action. It requires our willingness to put others ahead of ourselves. This is what shows the world a picture of Christ's love. But just like Jesus, such love makes us vulnerable. When we open our hearts, they may be wounded, just as Jesus' was.

When have you been the recipient of sacrificial love and care of a Christian brother or sister? How did that impact your faith? Has there been a church related experience that wounded you? If so, did it change your willingness to be vulnerable?

Jesus gave the command to love one another at the time when He dismissed Judas to betray Him and predicted Peter's denial. He knew that loving deeply can be painful, yet it needn't destroy the kingdom community. When we suffer for God's Kingdom, we must draw near to Jesus who knows our pain and heals our wounds.

WRAP-UP

Following Jesus was never meant to be something we do alone. We all need meaningful relationships with other believers where we can share life, encourage each other, pray together, and help carry one another's burdens. Being part of a Christian community means making time for people, opening our lives to them, and showing love through practical, sometimes sacrificial, care. Relationships can be messy, and we may even get hurt along the way, but we're called to keep loving and serving others while abiding in Jesus for the strength and healing we need.

MEMORY VERSE

25 And let us not neglect our meeting together, as some people do, but encourage one another, especially now that the day of his return is drawing near. - Hebrews 10:25 NLT

Challenge –

If you don't already have "1 or more" spiritual friends to gather with regularly, you will soon have an opportunity to make that connection. Or if your current group is open to adding members, you may be adding more. Sept. 22nd and 27th@ @ 6pm we will hold "1 or More" meetings to make connections, launch groups and find groups open to new members.

One or More Awake – Week 2

INTRODUCTION

Abiding in Jesus was not meant to be a solo undertaking. In Genesis 2:18 God declared it is not good for man to be alone. Yet we have seen a steady increase in isolation and loneliness across the generations. Not only is this true in the Christian community, but sadly it is intensified there. What should we do to combat this epidemic of loneliness? We can follow the example of the early church and search the scriptures to see what God tells us about joining with our fellow believers as we abide in Him.

Ice Breaker

Share about a time when you felt a strong sense of belonging in a particular group or community. What made that experience memorable for you?

Key Passage

42 All the believers devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching, and to fellowship, and to sharing in meals (including the Lord's Supper), and to prayer. 43 A deep sense of awe came over them all, and the apostles performed many miraculous signs and wonders. 44 And all the believers met together in one place and shared everything they had. 45 They sold their property and possessions and shared the money with those in need. 46 They worshiped together at the Temple each day, met in homes for the Lord's Supper, and shared their meals with great joy and generosity-- 47 all the while praising God and enjoying the goodwill of all the people. And each day the Lord added to their fellowship those who were being saved.

- Acts 2:42-47 NLT

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Devoted to What?

25 And let us not neglect our meeting together, as some people do, but encourage one another, especially now that the day of his return is drawing near. - Hebrews 10:25 NLT

20 Together, we are his house, built on the foundation of the apostles and the prophets. And the cornerstone is Christ Jesus himself. - Ephesians 2:20 NLT

As we study the birth of the early church, we find their devotion to one another was based on their devotion to Jesus. Jesus was not only at the

center, but Paul also tells the Ephesians that Jesus is the cornerstone of their foundation, which is based on the apostles and prophets.

The first step to being “the Church” is seen in Hebrews 10:25 ; we must show up. There are many things that challenge us to be present with other believers.

Where have you intentionally created “margin” in your schedule so that you show up in the lives of other believers? Is your schedule too tight to linger and engage with others beyond a quick “Hi how are you/bye? Is there a regular time in your week, beyond Sunday mornings, that you spend with other believers?

Act 2:42 lists four areas that the believers were committed to doing together; the Apostles’ teaching, fellowship, meals and prayer. It is significant that the Apostles’ teaching is listed first. Sometimes we get things out of order. Church, for some, may become primarily a social gathering. Community is important, but its cornerstone is Christ.

The earliest believers were grounded in first-hand encounters with Jesus, His teaching and miraculous works. The apostles’ teaching centered on the reality of Jesus as their risen Messiah.

If we are sensitive to God’s presence and we are spending uninterrupted time with Him, we too will have first-hand encounters to share with others. Take a moment to share where God was at work in your life this week. In what ways did you experience His goodness and when did you hear Him speak?

2. Koinonia

3 We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ. - 1 John 1:3 NIV

The early church was dedicated to fellowship (Gr. *koinonia*). That word might conjure up images of red punch and cookies in a church basement, but it means active engagement, communication and communing with other believers. Some of the ways we might experience fellowship are contained on our key passage; through meals, prayers and shared experiences.

- MEALS- In Jesus’s day sharing a meal carried a stronger social significance than it does today. It signified a mark of solidarity

and an unbreakable bond of fellowship. This is why the Pharisees were outraged when Jesus ate with tax-collectors and sinners.

How often do you share a meal with others? Is there someone you know who you could invite to eat with you that might be suffering from isolation or loneliness?

- PRAYERS – Our prayers are our conversations with God. They can be anytime, anywhere and about anything. But when we gather with others to agree in prayer, we experience prayer in a uniquely powerful way.

19 “Again, truly I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything they ask for, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. 20 For where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them.” -Matthew 18:19-20 (NLT)

When we join with other believers in prayer, we are demonstrating the unity that Jesus prayed we would experience. Praying in Jesus’ name is the expression of our desire to align ourselves with God’s will, not a means of promoting our own. Is there an area that you have been praying about for some time that is yet unresolved? Share that prayer request with your group and let their prayers be joined with yours as you seek God’s will together.

- Shared Experiences and Burdens

2 Share each other's burdens, and in this way obey the law of Christ. 3 If you think you are too important to help someone, you are only fooling yourself. You are not that important. - Galatians 6:2-3 NLT

As we abide in Christ, He impacts our perspective and softens our hearts to be more like His. When a brother or sister is carrying a heavy load, either literally or figuratively, we should do whatever we can to lighten that load.

Create a list of some of the burdens your friends may be carrying- emotional, financial, relational, physical... and then list how you can lighten their load, perhaps by spending time with them, paying a utility bill, praying together, or doing some yard work for them. The Lord has placed you in the lives of people to love and care for them as they love and care for you. This is what it means to live in community in the Body of Christ.

3. One or more-

34 So now I am giving you a new commandment: Love each other. Just as I have loved you, you should love each other. 35 Your love for one another will prove to the world that you are my disciples.” - John 13:34-35 NLT