

## “Love Each Other”—Fully Connected (1 of 4)

Over the next four weekends together, we’re going to look at what it takes for followers of Jesus Christ to become “**Fully Connected**” to each other. Last month it was “**Fully Alive...**”

In this series, we’re going to discover this simple and yet beautiful truth: “***The health and maturity of your relationship with God is determined by the health and maturity of your relationship with the people God puts in your life.***” Let me repeat that. . .

Jesus’ greatest desire for us, his followers, was made clear in his prayer in John 17: “*I am praying not only for these disciples but also for all who will ever believe in me through their message. I pray that they will all be one, just as you and I are one—as you are in me, Father, and I am in you. And may they be in us so that the world will believe you sent me.*” John 17:20-21 (NLT)

Jesus’ desire for us as his followers is to be as connected as he is with the Father. How close is that? Perfect unity. Jesus wants us to achieve perfect unity, and that unity will send a message to the world. But let’s be honest, the church is often just as messed up as everyone else!

Let me see, how many denominations do we have? How many churches are in the phone book?

It’s a sad indictment on followers of Jesus when we would rather *leave* a church than work through our problems and differences. It’s easy to leave, it’s difficult to work through the issues.

In Mark 12 we read that, “*One of the teachers of religious law was standing there listening to the debate. He realized that Jesus had answered well, so he asked, ‘Of all the commandments, which is the most important?’* (Fair question. . . how do I know I’m doing with God? What is the benchmark? We all want to know that, right? Wouldn’t it be great to wake up each day with a “God Meter” that told us how well we were doing with God? So, Jesus answers him.)

“*Jesus replied, ‘The most important commandment is this: ‘Listen, O Israel! The LORD our God is the one and only LORD. And you must love the LORD your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your mind, and all your strength.’ The second is equally important: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ No other commandment is greater than these.*” Mark 12:28-31 (NLT)

“Wait a minute! What do these two have to do with each other? Aren’t these two different commands?” Yes, but according to Jesus, they are closely related to each other—AND are indicators of each other: **VERTICAL vs. HORIZONTAL**)

But let’s be honest. If the most important command is to “*LORD your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your mind, and all your strength.*” I like that, because you can’t check up on me. You can’t see my heart, you can’t see my soul, you can’t see my mind and you can’t see my strength.

It’s easy to convince you that I’m a spiritually healthy and mature Christian. I can pray and I know my Bible and I can teach classes and I am faithful to church, but “*love my neighbor as myself*”? You can check up on me with that one. That’s visible and measurable.

Jesus is simply saying this: “*You can’t have a healthy relationship with me, if you don’t have a healthy relationship with those around you.*” It’s both the **Vertical** and the **Horizontal**.

Because, “***The health and maturity of your relationship with God is determined by the health and maturity of your relationship with the people God puts in your life.***”

The author, M. Scott Peck, writes that for any group of people to achieve community in the truest sense, they must undertake a journey that involves four stages: “**Pseudo-Community**,” where niceness reigns (these are the surface relationships that we all have); “**Chaos**,” when the emotional skeletons crawl out of the closet (these are the crises times when real life shows it’s dirty face); “**Emptiness**,” a time of quiet and transition (when you hang in the limbo of what to do next—flee or fight); and finally, “**True Community**,” marked both by deep honesty and deep caring. (It’s like scuba diving in the ocean/thermoclines.)

**ILLUS:** 1) Sonrise has grown (150-800, 65 people! Early Church/Heaven), 2) ???, 3) ???

**A group of people never become a community and stay a community.** They continually fall out of community, back into chaos or worse, pseudo-community. What characterizes a healthy, ongoing, sustained community is the quickness with which

it is able to say, *“Hey, we’ve lost it. We need to go back and work on ourselves.”*

We have a Biblical Mandate to pursue **True Community** . . . and not run when the **Chaos** hits!

Let me share with you three presuppositions that are going to guide our next four weeks:

**1. Your relationship with God is determined by your relationship with the people God puts in your life.**

•It’s a lot easier to have “religion” and leave other people out. BUT, you can’t keep God and People apart. Do you want to know how are you doing with God, then ask, *“how are you doing with those around you?”*

The true test of the health of your relationship with God (the vertical) is measured by the health of your relationships with other people (the horizontal). It’s easy to deceive each other about your spiritual maturity (if you measure your spiritual maturity solely by your relationship with God). However, God doesn’t give us this option.

It is so easy for Christians to downplay the importance of how they treat each other, thinking that how they treat God is much more important. But God doesn’t see it that way. Our attitudes toward each other are a direct reflection of our attitude toward God. He has commanded us to love, forgive, and accept each other. And if we fail to love and forgive and accept each other, then we’ve simply forgotten how much God has shown us love, forgiveness, and acceptance.

The success of our relationship with God is impacted by the success of our relationships with the people in our lives.

**2. It would be a lot easier to have a religion that focuses on God and leaves everybody else out.**

Because of our inward desire to build a “religious” life for ourselves, it is so much easier to exclude your life from the depth of relationships and pursue God on your own. Relationships are difficult and complicated. It is often easier to go through a series of motions with God than to really sort out the complexities with another person.

**3. As you begin to understand how much your Heavenly Father loves you, you will begin to realize how much he desires you to love each other.**

God’s agenda for your life is to gradually conform you into the likeness of Jesus Christ. Our relationships with each other provide THE vital training ground for this process.

As Jesus said in John 13, *“So now I am giving you a new commandment: Love each other. Just as I have loved you, you should love each other. Your love for one another will prove to the world that you are my disciples.”* John 13:34-35 (NLT)  
The standard by which we are to treat other people is the way God has treated us. “What’s the proof?” Not external spirituality. Not going to church. Not long prayers. BUT by the way we treat other people.

So with the rest of our time together, let’s go to one of the preeminent passages on the connection between loving God and loving each other. It’s found in 1 John 4:7-21 (p. )

And as we read this passage, let’s notice the inter-connectivity of the VERTICAL & HORIZONTAL.

*“Dear friends, let us continue to love one another, (HORIZONTAL) for love comes from God. (VERTICAL) Anyone who loves is a child of God and knows God. But anyone who does not love does not know God, for God is love. (In other words, if you can’t show love to other people, then you don’t realize how much love God has shown to you.)*

*“God showed how much he loved us by sending his one and only Son into the world so that we might have eternal life through him. (VERTICAL) This is real love—not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as a sacrifice to take away our sins. (GOSPEL MOMENT)*

*“Dear friends, since God loved us that much, (VERTICAL) we surely ought to love each other. (HORIZONTAL) No one has ever seen God. But if we love each other, (HORIZONTAL) God lives in us, and his love is brought to full expression in us.*

*“And God has given us his Spirit as proof that we live in him and he in us. Furthermore, we have seen with our own eyes and now testify that the Father sent his Son to be the Savior of the world. All who confess that Jesus is the Son of God have God living in them, and they live in God. We know how much God loves us, and we have put our trust in his love. God is love, and all who live in love live in God, and God lives in them. And as we live in God, our love grows more perfect. So we will not be afraid on the day of judgment, but we can face him with confidence because we live like Jesus here in this world.*

*“Such love has no fear, because perfect love expels all fear. If we are afraid, it is for fear of punishment, and this shows that we have not fully experienced his perfect love. We love each other (HORIZONTAL) because he loved us first. (VERTICAL)*

*“If someone says, ‘I love God,’ (VERTICAL) but hates a Christian brother or sister, (HORIZONTAL) that person is a liar; for if we don’t love people we can see, (HORIZONTAL) how can we love God, whom we cannot see? (VERTICAL) And he has*

*given us this command: Those who love God (VERTICAL) must also love their Christian brothers and sisters.” 1 John 4:7-21 (NLT) (HORIZONTAL)*

Do you see the connection between God and others? So how are your relationships with the other people God has put into your life? I know it's difficult to love difficult people, but when you begin to understand how difficult you were to love, it all comes into focus, *“We love because He first loved.”*

**VIDEO: MICHAEL SMITH'S STORY**

Do you want to know how you're doing with God? How are you doing with the people around you? True spirituality isn't about distancing yourself from other people, but learning how to love others as God has loved you. ***PLEASE HEAR ME ON THIS...***

Can I tell you something that's true about me? (and I know it's true about you, as well). If you hang around me long enough, *I will give you a reason to be angry with me.* If you hang around me long enough, *I will give you a reason to be irritated with me.* If you hang around me long enough, *I will give you a reason to be write me off as a difficult person to love.*

As long as we measure our relationships with each other based upon our performance, then we will feel justified in judging other people for how much they have hurt us.

But when we, as believers, lose sight of how much we have been loved, or forgiven, or accepted, by our Heavenly Father, then we somehow find it easy to stand up and act as lawgiver and judge when other people have hurt us, or worse, wounded us.

But God has not given us this option. If we, as loved people, refuse to show that same love to others; or if we, as forgiven people, refuse to show that same forgiveness to others; or if we, as accepted people, refuse to show that same acceptance to other people, then we have forgotten how much love and forgiveness and acceptance that God has shown to us.

We are no longer to do unto others as they've done unto us. We're to do unto others as our Heavenly Father has done unto us.

Just as your Heavenly Father didn't "bail out" on you, don't "bail out" on the relationships that he has put in your life. They are the tool that God is using to mold you to become like Jesus.

According to Jesus, the world will know that you are a Christian, not by your church attendance, not by your level of spirituality with God, but by the way you treat them. **(VISION MOMENT)**

**LET'S PRAY:** *Right now I want to give you an opportunity to let God examine your relationships. How are they? Are you loving other people? Everyone? Are there any relationships that are damaged or possibly broken? Does the other person even know it?*

*Before you decide about your next step with that person, are you willing to come to terms with the reality of God's love to you—in spite of your sin and brokenness?*

*Will you go to that other person this week and humble yourself? Don't go with pride or self-righteousness, but with humility and brokenness. Are you willing to take the first step? It's what God did to you, will you do it for others?*

*Jesus did not simply preach the love of God; He proved it by giving His life on the cross. He expects you to do the same for others. Will you be an obedient follow of Jesus this week?*