

- A 2018 PEW research study looked at why people go to church services:
 1. To become closer to God. (81%)
 2. So their children will have a moral foundation. (69%)
 3. To become a better person. (68%)
 4. For comfort in times of trouble or sorrow. (66%)
 5. They find the sermons valuable. (59%)
 6. To be part of a faith community. (57%)
 7. To continue their family's religious traditions. (37%)
 8. They feel obligated to go. (31%)
 9. To meet new people or socialize. (19%)
 10. To please their family, spouse or partner. (16%)
- Another study said that particularly among younger people, the top reasons they are not part of a church are:
 1. The church is irrelevant and full of hypocrites
 2. God is missing
 3. You cannot have serious conversations about your doubts
 4. Not learning about God.
 5. Not finding community.
- You will hear many people say that religion and the church are dying off. Yet this is simply not true.
- By this year, the Christianity in East Asia will have grown from 11.4 million Christians in 1970 (1.2% of the population) to 171.1 million (10.5%). There is no correlation between modernization and religious decline because this is happening as China modernizes.
- In 1910, 12 million people (9%) of Africa were Christian but as of 2020, that number is 630 million (49%)
- A 2015 Pew study showed the % of atheists around the world declining
- Even in the US, the declines are around inherited religion and liberal religion, but those who are choosing to lean into and be converted to faith is growing.
- Why does this all matter?
- The people around you in your neighborhood, the people in our communities, your co-workers, your friends at school, your family members, are looking for answers and meaning that cannot be found in a simple, naturalistic approach to life.
- Hope Chapel is a group of people that gather that has that meaning in Jesus. We want to grow in that and invite other people into that same good news.
- At Hope Chapel we say it this way: "People are invited to come as they are and be changed."
- How we are changed is that we grow in how we Love Jesus, Love each other and Love the world.
- Last week we looked at how we can grow in how we love Jesus.
- This week we will look at how we grow in loving each other.
- What does it look like to love others?
- How do you practice loving others?
- What stands in the way of loving other people the way you know you should?

- I want to go back to the same statement that we looked at last week.
- The Pharisees were going to try and get Jesus to trip up. To make a mistake. To say something that would turn the people against him.

Matthew 22:34 Hearing that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, the Pharisees got together. 35 One of them, an expert in the law, tested him with this question: 36 "Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?"

- This was a softball kind of question. It was taught to all the Jews. If they had gone to Sunday School, they knew this. It was considered the highest law.

37 Jesus replied: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind." 38 This is the first and greatest commandment.

- Jesus reply was right in line with expectations, but Jesus wasn't finished. Without pause and without giving them a chance to try and trip him up, he said:

39 And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' 40 All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments."

- What was shocking was that Jesus was adding a second command. And not a secondary command. It is not that loving God was first priority and loving people second. (second in sequence, not priority).
- What Jesus did here was huge. Essentially, Jesus was telling them that loving God and loving your neighbor are inseparable commands.
- You cannot separate how you love God and how you love others.
- We do this all the time. I love God, but I cannot stand that person and I won't do anything to help that person out. I love God but I cannot forgive that person.
- You cannot love God and not love the people that God loves.
- The logical question in my mind then is: "What does this look like? Does it mean I have to be nice to everyone? Does it mean I have to do the same things for every person I meet?"
- Jesus clarified this sometime later.
- The disciples had watched Jesus live this way while they traveled with him. They saw how he put others first. They watched him live differently than those around him.
- They heard him teach about loving others. And then, while they were having dinner the night before he was to die, he gave a crystal clear, painfully clear, description of loving others.
- They were having the Passover dinner. He had just finishing washing their feet and so things were still a little uncomfortable in the room. The picture of Jesus doing this for all twelve of them was still fresh in their minds.
- Then Jesus began talking again.

John 13:33 "My children, I will be with you only a little longer. You will look for me, and just as I told the Jews, so I tell you now: Where I am going, you cannot come. 34 "A new command I give you:

- Whoa. A new command. No one had the authority to do this. This was the area of God. It was blasphemy to say this. But they thought he might be the Messiah, so they gave him the benefit of the doubt.

- They all leaned in. Jesus says:

Love one another.

- Hold on. That's not new. We've heard that before. In fact, we remember when you told us that the entire law hung on loving God and loving others as yourself. We got it. A couple of us even wrote it down.

- Jesus said, "Hold on, I'm not finished.

As I have loved you, so you must love one another.

- He finished his statement by telling them:

35 By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."

- They did not even get this yet, but this is a game changer.
- What Jesus was saying was this.
- **HOW YOU LOVE IS WHAT MARKS YOU!**
- This seems crazy and most of us don't think this way. It is not how correct our theology is. It is not how many sins we avoid. It is not our political views. It is simply how we treat other people.
- The world knows how to love at a basic level. (SELF)
- They love when it is reciprocated. They love because of what they get from it. They are loved and love in return.
- The world around us sometimes even knows how to love altruistically. (OTHERS) They put others first. They help others. They try to serve and put their friends or spouses first.
- This is unusual but not the exclusive domain of Christ-followers.
- What advances the kingdom is third level love. (GOD)
- We are supposed to love others the way God, through Christ, loved me.
- **HOW YOU LOVE IS WHAT MARKS YOU!**
- You have never heard of someone leaving the church because "they loved me too much."
- Love became the distinguishing mark of the early church. The apostle Paul, who traveled for much of his life planting new churches and teaching them what it means to follow Jesus, started a church in a city called Philippi. Later, when he was no longer there, he heard reports that the church there was not acting in love the way Jesus had taught.
- So he wrote them a letter. In this letter (called Philippians) he showed them again what it looks like to love others the way Jesus loved us.

Philippians 2:3 Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, 4 not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.

- How do we love others the way Jesus loved us?

I. Be preoccupied with others.

- Our natural tendency is to be preoccupied with me. Paul uses a couple of different terms here.
- Selfish ambition – what advances my cause. I act and do and speak in a way that elevates me or my feelings whether it is at the expense of another person or not.
- Vain conceit – what makes me look good or feel good about myself. I will act in a way that defends my interests, my image, my comfort and my desires.
- This is not to be our preoccupation – rather, I am to be preoccupied with others.
- *"It is impossible to have a genuine relationship with someone you're always asking something for."*
- Consider . . . it has been a long day at work. It started really early. It was non-stop. You didn't even have time for lunch. You had contentious people to deal with. Nothing went right. The computer system crashed. You had to do something over needlessly. You hit horrible traffic on the way home and all you want to do is walk in the door, collapse on the sofa and veg for a while. After all, you deserve it after a day like that.
- Then you walk in the door. Your spouse has only just started to gather things for dinner. They blurt out, "I'm so glad your home – it's been a long day. Can you help get the dinner ready? Take the kids from me while I grab a shower?"
- What do you do? How do you respond? What attitude do you present?
- In that moment, we are supposed to be thinking of the interests of the other person. View the situation through their eyes. What is important to them? What do they need? And then treat those interests as more important than mine!

- Paul says to value them above yourself. This means that what they need and loving the other person is MORE IMPORTANT than getting what you desire or deserve.
- This is so countercultural but I am convinced that it would change everything.
- *“Humility is not thinking less of yourself. It is thinking of yourself less.”* (Rick Warren)
- If we lived this way, single people would date differently. Married people would stay married and be happier. Work would be smoother and more joyful. Friendships would flourish.
- **HOW YOU LOVE IS WHAT MARKS YOU!**
- This begins with being preoccupied with others.
- But Paul is not done. If they are not clear, he elevates what he has said. He gives a clear picture that can make us very uncomfortable.

5 In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus:

- In all of your dealings with people, friends – family, kids, co-workers, neighbors, strangers – your thinking and behavior is to be just like Jesus. Before they could even ask what that meant, Paul tells them.

6 Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; 7 rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.

- Jesus was God. He had the power of God. The position. He was exalted and was everything you would think of when you think of God. Yet he chose not to use all that for his own advantage. Instead, he chose to be a servant. He took the body of the very beings he created.

8 And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death – even death on a cross!

- He had power. Glory. He deserved to be worshiped. He could have made anything happen to anyone at any time. His word was law. His judgments could never be argued. Yet instead he chose to be small, lowly, suffer hunger and tiredness. He purposely allowed himself to be killed. Why? Because he put your interests above his and valued your needs above his own rights.
- And, Paul says, that is exactly how you are to love each other.

II. Leverage what you have for the benefit of others.

- Jesus willingly gave up what rightfully belonged to Him! He leveraged his position and his power on our behalf. He did what we could not do for us.
- To love others the way Jesus loved us is to leverage what we have for the benefit of other people.
- Loving others like Jesus did is not just avoiding bad behavior. It is not simply holding our tongues when we want to say something or not grumbling when we want to. It is using what we have in a way that raises others up.
- Everyone has things they can leverage for others:
- Leverage your time and energy for someone.
- Leverage your money. It is something you can use for others.
- Leverage your talents and skills. Don't use them only to benefit you.
- Leverage your ideas and training. Pass it on. Demonstrate it. Walk alongside another.
- Leverage your experience. There are others who can benefit from it.
- **HOW YOU LOVE IS WHAT MARKS YOU!**
- Jesus was sitting in a room with his disciples, less than 24 hours away from giving up his life in a horrific fashion on their behalf. Guys, I want you to love others the way I loved you.

- Mathew, remember how we met. You an outcast, family hated you. You had few friends. Remember what we did. Went to your house. That I did not accuse or condemn your behavior. That's how I want you to treat everyone that you encounter.
- Nathaniel, remember how we met. When you dissed my entire family and hometown. Remember how I invited you into my life. Treat everyone you meet that way.
- Peter, you don't even know if yet, but you have been one of my best friends and you are going to completely turn on me when I need you most. And I am going to forgive you. Forgive all those who wrong you the same way.
- He could have gone around the table for all twelve of them.

- **HOW YOU LOVE IS WHAT MARKS YOU!**

- Consider this: if you want to "be changed", to grow towards maturity, then love those around you like Jesus loved you.
- When I was a mess and had no thought for God, he loved me.
- When I acted in rebellion towards him, he died for me.
- When I was indifferent towards him, he sacrificed everything for me.
- When I sin and make mistakes, he loves me.
- When I get angry and fight against him, he walks alongside me.
- When we love others that way, it changes EVERYTHING!
- It will force you to be vulnerable.
- It will be costly
- But I wonder what would change . . .
- What would be different in our marriages if we loved them how Christ loved us?
- How would our relationships with our children change because of this?
- How we treat our parents would look different.
- What would people say at work if we loved those we work for, or those who work for us, the way Jesus did?
- What would happen if loved those who had a different faith, different race, different sexual orientation, different political viewpoint like God through Christ loved us?
- What would happen if we loved those who were our dead-on enemies the way Christ loved us?
- The kingdom of God would explode.
- *"Love talked about can be easily turned aside, but love demonstrated is irresistible."* (W. Stanley Mooneyham)
- Most issues would be resolved if we did this right.
- Abortion, Politics, Racism, Poverty, Immigration.
- Marriage problems. Church conflict. Family issues.
- When we begin to love others the way that God in Jesus loved us, we will be changed. We have to. It does certain things that cannot happen any other way.
- *"Do not waste your time bothering whether you 'love' your neighbor; act as if you did. As soon as we do this, we find one of the great secrets. When you are behaving as if you loved someone, you will presently come to love him. If you injure someone you dislike, you will find yourself disliking him more. If you do him a good turn, you will find yourself disliking him less."* (C.S. Lewis, Mere Christianity)
- Am I preoccupied with myself or with others?
- How am I leveraging what I have for the benefit of the person next to me?
- Daily question: how can I love _____ the way God through Christ loved me?