

November 12, 2023

Abide: Fellowship (John 15)

Live in the redefined love of Christ as you love the Family of God.

Hook – Lesson Learned (5min)

- Welcome (online), Notes and app
- Covid was a teacher – what were the lessons you learned?
 - For some, the lesson they took from it was that they don't need to attend church.
 - The fallout is staggering – studies have shown that attending religious services lowers anxiety, helps with mental health, and grows self-esteem. This is especially true in young people.
 - Anxiety up 75% in two years. Spending on mental health up by millions of dollars.
 - The lesson I re-learned – we are created for connection. I saw people spiral away from God, family, and spiritual health. I struggled myself – video was great but not enough. I grew my spiritual habits, but I longed for more connection.
 - I remember when my Life Group first met in person. There were tears! I will never forget that first day back – I don't want to take connection for granted.
- Fellowship – from Greek word “koinonia” = “shared life.”
 - We are sharing the life of Christ – in you and in me.
 - I need the Christ in you, and you need the Christ in me.
 - The family of God – you stick with it even when it is tough.
 - *Not just something we talk about – it is a love we live together.*

Prayer

*Covenant Grove loves people with the love of Christ (10min)

● John 15:5-17 (p.897)

⁵“Yes, I am the vine; you are the branches. Those who remain in me, and I in them, will produce much fruit. For apart from me you can do nothing. ⁶Anyone who does not remain in me is thrown away like a useless branch and withers. Such branches are gathered into a pile to be burned. ⁷But if you remain in me and my words remain in you, you may ask for anything you want, and it will be granted! ⁸When you produce much fruit, you are my true disciples. This brings great glory to my Father.

⁹“I have loved you even as the Father has loved me. Remain in my love. ¹⁰When you obey my commandments, you remain in my love, just as I obey my Father's commandments and remain in his love. ¹¹I have told you these things so that you will be filled with my joy. Yes, your joy will overflow!

¹²This is my commandment: Love each other in the same way I have loved you. ¹³There is no greater love than to lay down one's life for one's friends. ¹⁴You are my friends if you do what I command. ¹⁵I no longer call you slaves, because a master doesn't confide in his slaves. Now you are my friends, since I have told you everything the Father told me. ¹⁶You didn't choose me. I

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chose you. I appointed you to go and produce lasting fruit, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask for, using my name. ¹⁷This is my command: Love each other.

- Stories

- For years, people would say, “The people in this church are the best!” The people at Covenant Grove are amazing!! But JESUS is the best – and what you feel is the love of God shining through people. We started talking more about Jesus and less about ourselves – and it made a huge difference. (Church people will let you down; Jesus never will. Focus on Christ and let people be imperfect people.)
- In the middle of the pandemic, we were meeting in a tent – and people showed up even when it was really, really cold. I love this church! // Our world was being divided on politics and policies. I stood up in January and challenged our church family to have a media fast – no news...or movies, games, or even music. Focus on Jesus. We did this together, and it changed our church. The world didn’t change – but we did. This allowed us to let the love of Jesus and the Family of God be more important than anything else.

- Jesus redefined love = love each other with His love.

- Father loves Jesus (v.9), Jesus loves disciples, disciples love each other.
- This is only possible when we ABIDE in Jesus.
- **You can’t love others with the love of Jesus unless you are filled with the love of Jesus.**
 - When troubles or conflict come – what comes out of you? Your natural reaction or the love of Christ?
 - **Sponge – when squeezed – what comes out is what you have soaked up...**
- REDEFINED
 - The human (retribution) rule: “I will do to you what you do to me.” (I will be kind until you are unkind...)
 - Silver rule: “Don’t do to others what you don’t want done to yourself.”
 - Golden rule: “Do to others what you want done to yourself.”
 - The rule of Christ: “Love as I have loved you.”
 - You must be LOVED first. You are BELOVED = identity.
 - Then flow out His love to others.
- This is more than KINDNESS (our world’s definition).
 - Christ works for our good, even when we don’t like it.
 - Prunes us even though it hurts.
 - Has biblical, healthy boundaries and rules to follow.
 - Will sacrifice when we don’t deserve it.
 - The goal is restored relationship with God and each other.

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*True Love Stays Through the Storms (10min)

- John 15:12-17

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- Forgiveness. Sacrifice. Obeying Jesus. Serving. Friendship with Jesus together. Chosen to produce fruit in His mission. LOVE.
- Bonhoeffer – for real fellowship, the first thing that has to die is the fake ideal of the “perfect church.”
 - Love the church the way Jesus loved you – when you were imperfect.
 - I won't put down the Family of God like so many do. That's what the devil wants, and I won't do the devil's work for him. This is God's Family – imperfect but doing His work the best we can.
- Let's WORK together.

- *Serve on a Team

- We serve because Jesus served us – and calls us to build His Family.
 - Each person has been given gifts to build the church.
 - We are contributors not consumers.
 - If you are not serving – step up. This church needs you!
- Next Generation – another reason to join a Team. Our church has always had a heart for the next generation.
 - Young adults need to see adults serving.
 - Young adults are hungry for mentoring. Young adult in our church who never had bought a car before and didn't know who to ask. Older man in our church—and they served on a Team together—talked him through it, and went with him to the dealership to make sure he got a good deal.
 - I say to people – serve with your family...that is a bond. If your family isn't here...you wish your spouse or kids or grandkids would come – serve and invest in the kids here.
- Get on a Team. Step up. Ready for leadership? Talk to pastor.
 - This transition could be a big time to grow your faith and strengthen Fellowship.

- *Life Groups (and Accountability)

- And every day, in the Temple and from house to house, they continued to teach and preach this message: “Jesus is the Messiah.” Acts 5:42
 - We are called to connect BEYOND BORDERS or DIVISIONS—race, economics, age, anything—we are united in CHRIST.
- **We are a Life Groups Church.**

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- Over 75% of our Sunday attendance in KM, YG, LG.
- Not primarily events, or pastors, or specialized ministries.
- We do most of our CARE, accountability, serving community (20-30 projects per year).
- LGs are our primary form of discipleship – Bible study, SCIs, accountability, encouragement, challenge.
- Building Hope – The name of our Building Fund. This is a special heart for our church family, and God raised that money for a reason – don’t stop believing that!
 - The greatest way the heart for this grew was through our Life Groups. We studied Nehemiah together, shared stories, and processed concerns.
 - When you hear your brothers and sisters choosing to sacrifice and be faithful – it inspires you!
 - In this transition – choose Hope. Build Hope. This church is about Jesus, and we are committed to the Family of God.
- **What is your next step?**
 - This is your family. You don’t attend a family – you build a family with love and hard work.
 - *Live in the redefined love of Christ as you love the Family of God.*

Punch – Leaving Enochs (5min)

- When we started, we were meeting at Enochs High School. They let us rent there for five years, but then they notified us that we needed to leave, though they gave us a few months to find a new place.
 - When I announced it to our church, there was a lot of worry. Some people even told me that they considered leaving our church – the same thing I know some people have thought because I am leaving.
 - I said to them, “God is going to do something amazing. You don’t want to miss what the Lord will do.” People stuck around. People stepped up. And the Lord moved us from Enochs to an elementary school to this property – with over 100 new people joining our church in one year.
- When we moved in, we didn’t want to forget that the church is not a building – the church is a PEOPLE. We made a sign – you have probably walked by it countless times. Look at it every week.
- This is your family. Love this family. Don’t bail – build.

Prayer

Benediction – John 15:5

- Invite others
- Prayer Team available

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