

Series: Jesus Changes Everything

Community—Life Together

Sermon by Lead Pastor Paul Joslin

John 13:34-35

Waterstone Community Church, Littleton, Colorado

Sunday morning, January 26, 2025

Good morning. My name is Hannah, and it is a joy to be with you today as we hear the word of the Lord and explore the importance of community in the body of Christ together. Today's scripture passage is John 13:34 and 35: "A new command I give to you, love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this, everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another," the word of the Lord.

Paul: Thanks. How is everyone doing today? Good, good. Is anybody excited for some playoff football today? A couple, yeah, I saw some Bills jerseys as we were coming in. Are we all Bills fans today? Can we just agree on that? Okay, all right. That is good. I also need to just let you know it has been a tough week. The Cowboys hired Brian Schottenheimer, which if you do not know who that is, neither do I, and yes, it has been tough. No, actually, truly this week has been a little crazy, because some of you have already heard this, but on Friday some pipes in our front offices were frozen, and they burst, and it flooded our entire offices, and so actually Billy's office, Brooke, who is just doing church life, and then a lot of our other offices were completely destroyed. Ceiling tiles were falling on us as we were shoveling water out. It was crazy. It was just, yeah, it was not fun, but we had an awesome team who showed up. We had staff come in on their day off. We had just people in the community who were happening by the church picking up kids from preschool, and everybody pitched in, but I said all that to just give you a little heads-up. If you have trouble getting a hold of us this week, we are trying to figure out where we are going to be working. We have to move some offices. In fact, it is like the majority of all our office furniture and computers and stuff is just in the activity center behind the carpet boards right now, so it will take us a little bit to get things up and running, and so just be patient with us as we work through that, but we have a great team, and we just banded together to rally through it. We, in fact, actually, when Larry stepped into the lead pastor position six years ago, the exact same thing happened, so yeah, I don't know if it's just like a church transition thing, if we need to just budget for that the next time there is a change. I don't know. We will figure it out.

Today, as we continue in this series, this idea that Jesus changes everything, one of things that I would like to do in the coming weeks is not just tell you about why I think Jesus changes everything in our lives, but actually allow you to hear stories of ways that Jesus has changed people's lives, and so we are going to have some space for testimony in the coming weeks, and so today I would love for you to welcome Peter Gomez as he comes to the stage. Peter Gomez, yeah. Peter is actually a resident on staff with Waterstone. He is a student at Talbot Seminary, and he and his wife Sophie, who is here today, she is awesome. She works for Wycliffe Bible Translators, and so they are just a power couple for the kingdom. We love having them on our staff and our team, but Peter, as we have been meeting him as a resident and talking through what it means to be in pastoral ministry, and as he has been going through seminary, we have been talking about this idea of Jesus changes everything, and he has had some great thoughts. I just

wanted him to share a little bit of his story, what he even thinks about this phrase, this idea that Jesus changes everything. Yeah, so can you just tell us a little bit of some of what our conversations have looked like over the last couple weeks?

Peter: Yeah, I would love to. Thanks, Paul. Good to see you all, Waterstone. Yeah, this question of, “How does Jesus change everything?” So, there was a period in my life when it was right after high school, I went through a period of depression in my life. There were quite a few difficult circumstances that were happening. I think I would describe my life in that period as lonely. I felt hurt, broken, and in this period, if you guys are familiar with Psalm 22, David expresses this feeling of lament. He feels like he is forsaken by God, that God is far away, that God does not see him or hear him, and so when I was in that season, I felt the exact same way, like “Jesus, where are you? Jesus, do you even care?” and as I wrestled through this season, God showed up in a real way in my life. God provided different opportunities for me in California to get plugged into a good Christian school to build meaningful relationships and friendships, and so as those things happened, God breathed a renewed sense of purpose in my life. So, I went from feeling like life was meaningless and purposeless to feeling like I had a renewed sense of passion and meaning, and so maybe you resonate with Psalm 22. Maybe you have said those exact words. Maybe you felt those feelings, but what I am reminded of is that Jesus can take the things of our lives, He can take our laments, and He can turn them into praise, and He can take our morning and turn into thanksgiving.

Paul: Yeah, absolutely, amen. Yeah, one of the things I have loved about meeting with Peter and talking with him is that as we have talked about this idea of Jesus changes everything, one of his questions was, “What about the moments where it does not feel like that is happening?” and that is a very real thing that a lot of us experience, so thank you for your vulnerability and just sharing some of that. I know also for you that as you got plugged into Waterstone, community played a huge important role in this idea of Jesus changes everything. Can you just tell us a little bit about what that looks like even as you guys have helped to lead the twenties and thirties and young adults and all that?

Peter: So yeah, for us, I went to school in California. I came here to Colorado, a new church, new job, and new relationships. Everything was completely new, and so when we walked into Waterstone on a Saturday night, we were welcomed with open arms, and Waterstone was a welcoming place, where people invited us in, and we plugged into small groups a couple months after, and really small group for us became just a sweet gathering of me and probably eight other people, and I actually was excited to go to a small group, which was awesome, and we would connect and go deep, and there is a real sense of vulnerability and honesty with those people, and that for me was transforming, to be in a place where I could be open and vulnerable about not only the good things, but also the difficult things.

Paul: Then the cool thing about Peter’s journey is as you have stepped into leading the twenties and thirties and young adults with Sophie, you guys have really tried to replicate that and create a space for people where they can be real, honest, raw, not have to show up at church and pretend everything is all right, and so it has just been a beautiful thing, so would you guys just thank Peter for sharing his story with us today? We love Peter. Thank you so much, and he is so awesome. We are so thankful that he is a part of our team. Let me pray for us, and then we are going to jump into the message today.

Heavenly Father, God, wherever we may be coming from today, maybe we are in a season of vibrancy, where we feel like this idea that Jesus changes everything is true, and we see that, we feel that,

and we are experiencing that in our lives. God, there may also be some of us who are here today wondering, “Could this actually be true for me? Where is God in this moment? Has He forgotten me? Is He far from me?” God, I pray, whether we are in that place or anywhere in between, I pray by the power of your Spirit that you would encounter us today and that we would just feel Jesus’ presence in this place, that we would connect with you and with one another as we open your word today, and it is in Christ’s name we pray, amen.

A few months ago, it was Thanksgiving break, and my family and I were making the long drive from Colorado to Texas to see my wife’s family, and you know how the road trips go. There are a lot of pit stops for snacks. You have to do the diaper change, bathroom stops, and in the middle of that, we decided what we really need on this Thanksgiving break is Chipotle, because nothing really says holidays like guacamole and chips and burrito bowls, and so we go into this Chipotle, and as we are sitting there and eating as a family and trying to let the kids stretch their legs, a basketball team walked into this Chipotle, and they were clearly on a road trip going somewhere. I honestly could not quite tell if they were a high school or college team, but I played basketball in high school, and so I know that when a team comes into a restaurant like that, you have been on the road, you are in the van, usually there is just this spike in energy. Everybody starts joking with each other, getting on the coach about what he did in practice or something. There is just this energy and hype that comes into the room, and so I was really taken aback when this team walked in, ordered their food, and then they all proceeded to sit at different tables in the Chipotle, not together, and they all just pulled out their phones and started scrolling. I was just like, “What in the world is this? This is so annoying.” It could have been literally like these twelve guys were in twelve different restaurants. They just did not interact with one another at all, and I remember watching that and thinking, “This is really weird. Isn’t the whole point of being on a team like being a team?” It just seems like that is what we are supposed to do, and I couldn’t help feeling this sadness actually, and just thinking like they have no idea what they are missing out on by just pulling out their phone and scrolling instead of being in face-to-face communal relationship, and also at that moment it felt like just a perfect snapshot of what we experience so much in our culture, where we are more connected than ever. We have access.

I mean, I do not know about you, but I think I have a thousand friends on Facebook. I am super cool. Like you don’t even use Facebook anymore. We have all sorts of connections with all sorts of people, and yet this face-to-face interaction, deep, meaningful, committed relationships, where we actually are known and know others, feels so foreign to how so much of our society operates. I just remember feeling this sadness at this moment and that it just felt like this perfect cultural snapshot of how we tend to operate, and this loneliness that I think just pervades our culture, because while we are connected, there is this disconnection that we have in actual relationships with each other.

In fact, I do not know if you have seen this study, but the surgeon general a few years ago came out and said that loneliness is an epidemic in our country, and they had some just alarming statistics that go along with this idea of loneliness and this disassociation, disconnectedness that we have from one another. They said that loneliness is associated with a greater risk of cardiovascular disease, dementia, stroke, depression, anxiety, and premature death. Those are all the bad ones. That is like, nothing on that list is anything that we want, and it goes even deeper than that. It says that the mortality impact of being socially

isolated or disconnected is similar to smoking fifteen cigarettes a day, that it has the same impact on our health, and actually, loneliness has a greater impact on our health than obesity and physical inactivity.

Loneliness, this disconnection that so many of us feel, is quite literally killing us, and the question is, does it have to be this way? Do we have to live life in this disconnected, individualistic culture, where I do not feel like I am known, and I do not feel like I know other people? In fact, in this study, it came out that they estimate that the majority of men in our country have one close friend that they could have a confidant in or have an honest relationship with, one, and for some of you, you might think, “Wow, that is like high. I thought that was a little bigger than me.” We all feel this lack of community and connection, and do we have to live and exist in this place? I think the opportunity that the church has in this cultural moment is to step into our culture of isolation and loneliness and individualism and offer something different. I think Jesus is calling us to be a people of community in a culture of loneliness, into a way of life that is rooted in deep, intentional relationship with one another, and so the question is, “How do we make that happen? How do we experience that if that is what Jesus is calling us to?”

I want to call your attention back to an image that we used a couple of weeks ago as we kicked off this series, and this is the paradigm for how we experience change. If you remember, we talked about this idea that oftentimes in the church we get sucked into this idea that we if we just know enough, if we just have the truth, then that will produce change in our life, but actually, that does not always work. We need this multifaceted approach of experience in community as well, all infused by the Holy Spirit, and that is the way that we actually experience the change that we are longing for in our lives, but here is the thing. This community piece is essential, and what I need you to understand as we start this journey of talking about community today is we will never, and I mean this, we will never experience the life-altering change and transformation that Jesus calls his people to, that Jesus offers his people, if we are not in community with each other. Community is essential for experiencing the change and transformation that we all are longing for in our lives, and so this idea of community is such a key piece of experiencing change and transformation, this idea that Jesus changes everything, and so what I want to do is unpack a little bit of Jesus’ call of what community is supposed to look like, and I want to talk a little bit about some of the challenges that we all feel in trying to live up to that standard of community. Then I want to end the sermon with a couple of practical applications of how we can practice community together.

So, Hannah just read this beautiful passage from John 13, and if you have your Bibles, if you want to turn there, I would love for you to follow along. We are going to be camped out on this verse the whole time. If you have your phone, you are welcome to flip it open, but do not check the scores or the things going on. Let’s just let’s stay in the moment, all right? So, I want to set the scene. It is John 13. Jesus has taken his disciples, his closest followers, his most intimate community, the people who have followed Him for the last three years of his life. They have been doing life together, day in and day out, and this is the last night of Jesus’ life. He is about to be betrayed, and the next day He will be crucified, and so He pulls his disciples into what we call the upper room, where He begins having a conversation with them about what they can expect in the coming night. It had to be a really confusing conversation for the disciples, because it is Jesus talking about how He is about to be killed. He is talking about how one of them will betray Him, and there is this fighting going on, and in that scene, Jesus does something that was totally unexpected. He disrobes, and He gets down on his hands and knees, and He begins to wash the disciples’

feet, which is something that was completely unexpected of a rabbi, and it is after Jesus does this act of humility and sacrifice and servanthood that He says these words: “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another, and by this type of love, all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”

Now there are two things that I want to call your attention to in this new command that Jesus gives, and the first is this, the standard of love. Jesus says that we are to love one another, and that would be hard enough. Let’s be honest, if Jesus just came and said, “Hey, you need to love people in this room,” you can probably look around the room and think, “Yeah, I don’t know that I like that person. That person voted differently than I did.” Like, that is hard, to love people who are different than you, but Jesus raises the bar and the expectation. He raises the standard. He says that we are not just to love one another. We are supposed to love each other how much? As He has loved us, you but think about that for a moment. Think about the lengths and extent that Jesus went to, in order to love his disciples. Think about all the different stories from the gospels, where the disciples just trip all over themselves, and they do not understand what Jesus is saying, and they frustrate, and they annoy, and they can’t get anything right. Jesus never gives up on them. He never leaves them. He stays committed to them. He gets down on his hands and feet to wash their feet. How many people in this room would be like, “Yeah, I would totally do that”? Like that is weird. Like you are not going to go wash someone’s feet. I mean, that is a total act of humility and sacrifice, and to go beyond that, Jesus is not just grounding it in this moment. He is grounding it in what is about to happen, where He is going to lay down his life for the sins of his disciples.

See this is the standard of love Jesus is calling us to in Christian community. It is not a love of convenience. It is not a love that waits for others to earn it. It is a sacrificial, unconditional, others-centered love. Jesus says that this is what our communities are supposed to look like, and do not miss this. This standard of love that feels impossible if we are being honest with each other, it is not just a suggestion. Jesus does not say, “Hey, if you want to follow me, then like you should try really hard to do this,” or “this is important.” He says, “A new command.” He says, “I am commanding this of my followers. If you want to follow after me, if you want to be my disciple, if you want to become like me, then you need to love others as I have loved you.” How are we doing? It feels like a high bar, doesn’t it?

This past week, my family, we were watching Bluey together. Are there any fans of the TV show Bluey here? Right. You remember. Last night people did not know what I was talking about, and I was like, “All right, you guys have to go home and watch Bluey. You need to get Disney plus or whatever and get on this Bluey thing. Hey, Bluey is amazing.” All right, and this if you do not know what Bluey is, for the uninitiated, let me give you a little heads-up. It is a family of blue heeler Australian dogs. It’s a cartoon. They are not real, and it is a mom, Chili, a dad, Bandit, and then two little girls, Bingo and Bluey, and it is just this amazing TV show. It is not really like a cartoon TV show. It is really a manual for life. That is what you need to know about it. Like it just it teaches you how to live, how to pair. It is this amazing way they blend in this idea of just like parenthood is this messy, chaotic, lovely, amazing, beautiful mess that is relatable and exhausting, and that is just how they capture it so beautifully. We were watching Bluey this week, and there was this episode where the kids are like fighting about they how did not want to take their dishes over to the sink, so they asked the dad, “Why do I have to take the dishes over to this sink?” and Bandit, the dad, says, “Because I said so.”

Now I am sure none of you have ever said that as parents, no one here. I mean, that is the phrase when you are a kid, and your parents say it to you, and you think, “If I am ever a parent someday, I will never say that to my kids,” and then you become a parent. It is like, “I am so exhausted. I don’t know how to answer. Just do what I said because I said so,” right? You are like, “Uh oh. I did it. I just became my parents,” and you are horrified, and you have to go to counseling after that, or maybe that is just me. I do not know, but it is this moment where we have all been, and the kids are like, “Hey, why do I have to brush my teeth at night?” and the parent says, “Because I said so.” Thank you, or the kid is like, “Hey, why do I have to make sure that I wear a coat when it is cold outside?” “Because I said so.” Yeah, exactly, or “Why can’t I paint the cat and make it look like a tiger?” Like the parents say, “Because I said so.”

Now here is the thing. You are like, “What in the world are we talking about? Why are we talking about Bluey? I have never even seen that TV show.” Here is the thing. It is because so many times when we see a commandment or we tell our kids to do something or someone tells us to do something, it comes with this understanding, “You just need to do it because I am telling you to. Just do it because I said so.” Here is the thing about Jesus’ command to love one another. Jesus is not telling us to love one another because He said so. Jesus tells us to love one another because He lived so. Jesus is not just setting this standard, this impossible standard for us to live up to, what it means to be in community, and just saying like, “good luck.” He is setting that standard because that is how He lived. The standard of love that Jesus sets for his followers is the standard that He lived out every day of his life.

This call to be in Christian community together is not just this random thing that is good for us and will help us with our loneliness. Jesus is calling us to become like Him and care for the people in our community as He has cared for us, but Jesus does not just call us to this standard. He also says that this commandment, this new commandment that He gives us, is rooted in this very deep purpose. He says in verse 35, “by this standard of love, all people will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.” Jesus does not just call us to love each other because it is good for us. He also calls us because there is a purpose to a community that reflects God’s heart and loves each other the way that Jesus has loved us. He says this is the distinguishing mark of what it means to be a follower of Jesus, not how well we know our Bible, not how passionate our worship is, not even the things that we do to go out of our way to help other people, but it is by our love for one another. That is how people will know that we are disciples. The question is, “Why is this such a distinguishing mark? Why is this type of love such a distinguishing mark that if people see this standard of love, this purpose of love, then they will automatically know and recognize that they must be followers of Jesus?” It is because the kind of love that Jesus calls us to is completely countercultural to what we experience most days in our lives.

I want you to think for a moment about the different people you have interacted with in your life, the people who have maybe hurt you, who have caused harm in your life, who maybe did not show up in the way that you expected or that you hoped. How would our culture tell to interact with that person? “You need to cut them off. Maybe you need to set some boundaries. You need to make sure that they do not engage with you.” It is all about self-preservation. In our culture, you only give as much as you have been given, and yet this call of Jesus is for us to show up, and it is not just polite or kind. It is sacrificial. It is forgiving. It is unconditional. Jesus calls us to step into community with each other and love in a radically countercultural way. In a culture that is obsessed with self-care and boundaries, and we sometimes use

those boundaries as an excuse to withhold grace, or we treat relationships as transactional, Jesus invites us to something so much deeper. It is the kind of love that makes the world stop and ask “Why?” Why would you love someone who has hurt you? Why would you forgive someone who wronged you? Why would you continue to be in a community with people who are different than you? The simple answer is because Jesus changes everything, and when we have encountered his love in our lives, then we extend that love to others, to the fellow believers who want to follow after Him too.

So, we have this standard of love and this purpose of love, but let’s be honest, it is anything but easy. It happens in the context of real, messy relationships. It happens when you are in a small group, and someone says, “I just voted for this person,” and you are thinking, “I do not know how in the world they voted for that person. Honey, we are never coming back,” right? Like that’s the context where Jesus calls us to love one another, and I want to talk for just a moment about some of the challenges that we feel in community, some of the barriers that we have to forming deep and intimate relationships, the kind of relationships that Jesus calls us to.

I think one of the just blatant barriers that we all experience, one of the challenges that many of us experience in community is that we simply do not have time. We have this addiction to busyness, where we are running around doing all of the different things. We have so much on our plate. We have endless demands of life. We feel like there is not time to meaningfully invest in relationships with one another. Community feels like just one more thing on the to-do list. Has anybody else ever felt like Thursday night shows up, you are supposed to go to a small group, and you are like, “I just wish we could stay home tonight.” We have all been there. We have this busyness, this obsessive addiction to making sure our lives are full and packed to the brim and that we have purpose and meaning, and so it hinders us from being able to be in community with each other, but aside from just busyness, there is also this element of vulnerability, this aversion we have to be in raw and real and honest with each other.

We think if we actually open up and if we are actually vulnerable with our community, if we actually let people in and tell them, “This is what I am like. This is what I am struggling with,” how will they respond? Will they judge us? Will they condemn us? Will they think we are weird or strange for the things that we are struggling with? What if we get hurt, and that is ultimately what it really comes down to, barriers and challenge to community, is what if we experience hurt? We want to avoid the hurt that happens in the context of relationships. We have all been let down. We have all had people who have not shown up like they said they would. We have all experienced that, and sometimes, let’s be just brutally honest, sometimes Christian communities, sometimes the church can be the place where we experience wounds the most deeply, because we may feel ignored or unseen or judged by the very people who are supposed to welcome us in with open arms. So, there are so many reasons we could go through, why we experience challenges to community, why community is not easy, and we can just list them, but here is the thing, community, whatever the reason that you feel a challenge to be in community, it is not an option to opt out. It is not an option to opt out of community.

It goes back to the very beginning of the scriptures. Do you remember what God said about part of our identity when He created us? He said that we were created for community. Do you remember when he sees Adam, and Adam is all alone? He says this is not good for him to be alone, and that is not just a statement about marriage. That is a statement about humanity. We were not created to experience

loneliness or to be alone. From the very foundation of who we were created to be, we were created to be in community with one another, and so it is not an option for us to opt out, but beyond that, it is impossible to follow Jesus alone. To experience life with Jesus is to experience life in community, because if we want to become like Jesus, Jesus is inherently communal and relational. He exists in a perfect relationship with the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and if we want to reflect, if we are supposed to become like Jesus, then we have to not only live in community with Him, but also with each other

I mean, think about it. This blows my mind. Jesus, the Son of God, who lived in perfect community with the Father and the Spirit, even while He was a human walking this earth, still lived in community. He still chose to walk alongside and do life with twelve other brothers who were following after Him. He chose women to be his disciples and live in community with Him. He, the son of God, still chose, knowing that He would be betrayed, knowing that He would be let down, still chose to live in community with others. If even Jesus did not choose to walk this world alone, how could we think that we could ourselves? John Mark Comer says it this way. He says, “You cannot follow Jesus alone, not should not, but cannot. It is not even an option. Jesus did not have a disciple. He had disciples, plural, and he called people to apprentice under Him in community.” Do you believe that following Jesus inherently means you have to be in community with other people, or do buy into this myth of American individualism, that I can just figure it out on my own? I am self-sufficient. I can take care of myself. I do not need other people.

Here is the deep truth, the idea that we were created for community. We can't follow Jesus alone, but Jesus promised that He would send his Spirit to empower us to live in community, but let's go back to that image for a moment again. It is so important for us to realize that this standard of love that Jesus calls to, you cannot do on your own. It is impossible to love people who are different than you, or that you do not get along with, or that you think, whatever it might be. You on your own power cannot love them the way that Jesus has called us to love Him, but we have been empowered by his Spirit to make this kind of loving community possible. We need the Spirit to go beyond our own strength to make this kind of community possible. It is why we began last week talking about practices, anchoring it in this idea that we have to be a people of presence, connected to the vine, because apart from Jesus, apart from being connected to Him, apart from being empowered by his Spirit, we can't do any of it, so we have to realize that even in community, it is something that we are empowered by the Spirit to do, to love and serve and grow together.

So, here is the thing. How do we make this happen? What does it look like for us to practice community, to step in and make this kind of community a part of our everyday lives? Because it does not just happen if we show up on Sunday morning, walk in, walk out, and just sing some songs, listen to the message, and do not engage with each other. We have to go further than that, and here is the reality, practicing community is a spiritual discipline. It is something that has to be practiced. It is a skill that we have to develop for our spiritual health. None of us are just inherently good at practicing community, even the most gregarious, outgoing person, who just loves being around people and is totally extroverted. I know some of you are like, “I hate those people,” right? I get it, but even those people who just naturally love being around people still need to practice this type of community that Jesus is talking about, and it requires something from us to step into, to develop, similar to how we develop the skill of reading scripture or praying. Community is a habit that we intentionally develop, and so what does it look like for us to

practice community together? How do we build the type of community that we are all longing for and so many of us feel like we do not have?

The first step, I think, is pretty profound and yet incredibly simple, and it is just this, show up. Show up, be a part of the community. You know where it is really hard to be in community? At your house, watching Netflix by yourself, right? You have to intentionally show up faithfully. Hebrews says this, “and let us consider how we may spur one another along toward love and good deeds,” and listen to this, “not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing.” It anchors it in this idea that community is a habit, something we practice, something we have to work at, but why does he have to say this? Why does the author have to say this? It is because some people are in the habit of giving up meeting together, giving up gathering together, not showing up. Real community is built slowly over time, but it is one intentional choice at a time, and that choice is continually showing up, and here is the truth. Our schedules reflect our priorities, and when we are so busy, when we have so much going on that we cannot participate with one another in true, honest, deep community, then we are being disobedient to the command Jesus has given us, and that might feel like a harsh thing to say, but this is a command. This is what the church is supposed to look like, and so we have to ask ourselves, “Am I too busy to follow the command Jesus has placed on my life if I want to follow Him?”

So, we start with showing up, but if consistently showing up for one another is the foundation of community, then opening up honestly, vulnerability is the glue that holds the community together. We are made to be in relationships with one another, and this means sharing not just our strengths and not just our successes, but also our struggles, our weaknesses, that messy, imperfect work in progress, you, that you feel like you do not want to let people see. This is the place where we feel the tension, right? This is the place we feel scared, because showing up and being vulnerable, opening up about what you are struggling with, what if people judge? What if people say this? What if people, and here is the reality. I think that fear is well founded. There are people who have experienced that, but do you also remember what it feels like to open up in vulnerability and to have someone welcome you with open arms?

A number of times in my life I have been amazed where I have shown up, and I have said, “This is like an area where I am struggling,” and rather than receiving judgment or condemnation that I was afraid of, people just said, “Yeah, you know what? Actually, me too,” or “Hey, what can we do to help you with that? If we do not open up, if we do not allow other people to know us, then we will never be known, and so opening up in community is important. It does not mean that the next time you go to a small group, and you write your name on your name tag, that you need to list every sin you struggle with. I am not saying you just have to throw it all out there, but we have to find spaces, safe spaces where we can be honest about the things that we struggle with, and it is only in the context of community that we will find the growth and healing that we are looking for in those spaces.

So, we show up faithfully, we open up honestly, and then we lift up others sacrificially. Community is about carrying one another’s burdens, that we show up for one another in the joys and struggles of life, the moments where people are at their worst and the moments that people are experiencing their greatest successes. In fact, in Galatians, Paul says this, “Carry each other’s burdens, and in this way,” this blows my mind, “If you carry each other’s burdens, then you will fulfill the law of Christ,” that by showing up and caring for one another, what a profound statement, we fulfill the law of Christ simply by saying, “hey,

let me carry that for you. Let me help you with what you are going through,” and this does not have to be some huge, massive gesture. Sometimes the things that have the deepest impact are simply showing up at someone’s house with a meal after they have a baby. It is just giving them a note of encouragement when you heard they were having a bad day. It can be small things, but things that are so countercultural to what we experience in our culture. It says, “I see you. I know what you are going through, and I am here for you.”

You want to know what is really hard about this one is putting yourself on the other side, not just showing up and lifting someone else up, but allowing yourself to be lifted up. That is where I struggle. I hate asking for help. I hate asking for help. I hate letting people know like, “Hey, I can’t do this on my own.” If you want to help develop community, go to someone and say, “Hey, I need you,” because let’s be honest, it feels really good when you can show up for someone and say, “Yeah, you need me.” It feels really crummy when you have to say, “I can’t do this on my own.” If you want to experience the type of community you are looking for, maybe it simply begins by asking someone to help you, and what I have found is most of the time my fear around asking for help has way more to do with me than the people around me. People love being asked for help, so ask for help. Be brave. Go first.

So finally, we show up faithfully, we open up honestly, we lift up sacrificially, and then we forgive freely, and that does not make any sense in the whole list of these things here. I tried really hard to, oh, we did not even update the slide, did we? No, that’s all right. Let’s keep going, so we forgive freely, and when we forgive freely, this is so counterintuitive and so countercultural. Paul says in Colossians that we, “bear with each other and forgive one another. If any one of you has a grievance against someone, forgive, as the Lord has forgiven you.” Here is the reality. Forgiveness does not mean pretending that everything is fine, that people have not hurt you. It means choosing to let go of bitterness and choosing to work towards reconciliation, and the model for that is Jesus. If we did these simple things, if we just showed up, if we were just able to be honest and open up, if we were just vulnerable with each other, if we helped each other when we were in need, and if we were a community that could forgive people when they let us down, that is the kind of love that causes the world to stop and pause, and say “Why?” The answer is, “Because Jesus changes everything, and I want to become more like Him, and this is what he has called me to do.”

Practicing community is not easy, but when we choose to step into this kind of life, we find that it changes us. We are changed in a community. When we experience and we brush shoulders with people who are different than each other, and we can pull ourselves around the idea that Jesus is more powerful than all of that, it changes us. When we experience vulnerability, it changes us. When we experience forgiveness, it changes us, so the question is, “What step will you take? How will you show up? How will you open up? How will you lift up, and how will you forgive?” Because when we do, we find that we do not just experience community, but we actually become the kind of people that Jesus has called us to be. The church can be this kind of countercultural community of love that demonstrates the beauty of God’s kingdom that causes the world to pause and go, “What? Why?” and want to be part of that too.

Adele Calhoun says this: “God’s family is meant to be the show-and-tell of what true belonging and love looks like. God’s one plan for reaching the world is rooted in community of broken people who gather with a desire to love Him and bring his kingdom. We will never be perfect people, but imperfect people committed to a radical, Spirit-empowered love can change their relationships and the world.”

We do not have to be perfect. We can be broken, but when we are empowered by the Spirit to love one another radically like this, it is the antidote to loneliness in our culture. This is the death of that disease, of loneliness, and the great paradox of our Christian community is that while we have potential for great hurt, it is only in the context of community that we find true healing. As Jesus walked around, and as He did his ministry, He encountered so many broken people, and we could go through the list, but I want to call your attention just to three.

The woman at the well, who had been divorced multiple times, passed around by people, men who had abused and left her, Jesus meets her. She encounters Him, He changes her life, and then do you remember what happened? She is restored to her community. Zacchaeus, the wee little man who had a massive appetite for ripping people off, encounters Jesus. He changes his life, and he gives everything back to the community that he had stolen from. Jesus restored him to community. Peter, who betrayed Jesus, on the night that Jesus washed his feet, he betrayed Him, and what does his restoration story look like? Not just reconciliation between him and Jesus, but He calls him to feed his sheep. He restores him to community. Jesus is not just about restoring us to relationship with Him and reconciling us through salvation to Him, although He is, but it is also his desire to restore you to the community that you were always meant for, and it is in the context of that community that we experience the life that Jesus has promised us, and apart from that community, we cannot experience it. So where will you step up? Where will you lean in? Where will you lift up those around you? Let me pray for us.

Heavenly Father, God, this standard, we freely admit, is beyond our capability. It is beyond our capacity, and yet we recognize that we have been empowered by your Spirit to live in this kind of community with each other. God, despite our differences, despite ways that we may not see the world the same, despite the different views that we may hold, we come together around the person of Jesus Christ, because He is the only one who can change everything. We commit now, at this moment, to taking next steps in this community, to loving one another as you have loved us, to show up for each other, to go first in vulnerability and honesty, and we pray in those spaces, as we take those steps, as we take those risks, that your Spirit would infuse all of it with your presence, and that we would experience the transforming power of who you are in the context of deep relationship with one another, and it is in Christ's name that we pray, amen.

45:28 minutes