

Individual Reflections

Transformed by Being IN His Family

By Kim Keene

Day 1

There was a lot of grumbling, roaming about and angry voices at the O'Hare terminal. I was already anxious that our flight had been cancelled. The next flight out kept getting later and later. Ned, the kids and I were returning from "the best vacation ever." Tomorrow we had an important early appointment back in PA. I am an 'early is on-time' girl, so my internal pressure was building. Ned had posted on Facebook one of those sorry looking posts of the rain pouring outside with angry passengers inside. I was getting a play-by-play of the 'likes', which was doing nothing to calm me down. Then God broke through that hot mess at O'Hare.

A message came from one of our Chicago small group friends from 16 years earlier. Erika, without skipping a beat, said they would come get us and we could stay with them overnight. It definitely looked and sounded like the heart of God, amidst all of the very human reactions and reality all around us. It stopped me in my tracks. We still didn't know what the outcome would be. The situation hadn't really changed. However, we had gotten a love letter right over Facebook. Our friends were willing to drive, take us in, make space and upend their schedules because we had built a bond all those years ago. I don't remember much else about getting home, but I do remember the grace, the care and the hope that her message delivered.

Community is complicated, like family. There have been misunderstandings, sacrifice, hard partings, but also healing, growing, help, truth, safety and hope. Our community has delivered meals, built a side walk, watched our kids, moved us four times, listened, grieved with us, come to funerals, celebrated our wedding and birthdays. They have eaten meals with us and encouraged us to grow or heal. Sometimes our community doesn't even know us, like when I have been on a mission trip and

received love and care from the national church. Community has walked us through some dark hours, waiting in a doctor's office, praying with us, walking close through some of my/our most difficult hours.

The Father designed us to be in community. Jesus modeled it and the Holy Spirit empowers us through it.

I need it as we all do. I can think I am doing pretty awesome at being like Jesus until I have to work it out. Then I desperately need my tribe, my group, my spiritual family to encourage, help and challenge me. 1 John 4:20 says if we say we love God but hate our brother, we are a liar. Community is my "spiritual gym" where I get to work out my love of others, to sacrifice, to learn to love God well.

For reflection

What would an ideal community look like to you? How can you practically help build that this week?

Day 2

Jesus spoke and the New Testament gave over 100 expressions of "one another" commands. These are all challenges for me. After a sermon a few weeks ago, I chose Ephesians 4:2: "*Gently, patiently tolerate one another.*" I have the verse taped on my work monitor to remind me of my goal. The main thing I have gained from this reminder is how far I am from achieving this! Jesus knew I would need specifics to target in living in God's Family and God's world.

I had a friend that would challenge me before we went to church, to pray for and find the person I was to encourage that day. I had thought encouragement was a good idea before, but it wasn't until I was practicing it (and debriefing about it later) that I began to get the idea that practicing and working out my faith required some thought, some preparation.

I had another friend that would make spaghetti every Sunday and invite all of us over to her very small apartment to hang out. She helped me consider using what I did have and not wait for more space, more money or more

whatever before jumping in to practice hospitality. In our early marriage, still following her example, we invited a couple over for dinner. After dinner, they asked why we invited them. We looked a bit confused and said that we just wanted to get to know them better. They told us that they were often invited to buy something when invited over.

So, the Jesus way, the “Family” is a countercultural experience. Living like Him, in His Family has given us the opportunity to express his great and gracious love, in ways that we would not always choose.

“Here Comes the Boom” was a sleeper movie that had a nugget of truth hidden in it. The main character is a science teacher who talks about one cell, having life in it, can affect the other cells around it and bring life back to them. (Imagine this being taught in an over the top way with lots of dancing.) I love that image of us.

We all have been dead or dying spiritually, but as a member of our Jesus Family, we have the power, through the Holy Spirit, to bring and encourage life! You and Me! That is a storyline I want to live out.

For reflection

1. Browse a list of “one another’s” with God in prayer. What is God nudging you toward in your spiritual family?
2. Have an audacious experiment, plan and do a ‘one another’ toward someone this week, someone outside of your usual circle.

Day 3

I was talking to my spiritual Mentor and expressing frustration that some of my old habits and sin patterns still popped up. This certainly has affected me, but it also leaks out in unpleasant ways to people around me. She introduced me to Dallas Willard’s idea of intentional spiritual growth.

He uses the acronym V I M. It stands for Vision, Intentionality and Method.

So, in the focus of Community, I chose Humility (Gal 5:13) Serve One Another. This gets back to my verse on my monitor.

For me my vision is one where I am a person who responds quickly (eventually immediately) to a need. I would find a practical way to be of service to someone else at work, at home, in my spiritual family. And I would do it with a humble attitude (not put out or complaining.) I know now that there are certain people or situations where this will be more challenging, so those I am praying preemptively over.

Intentionality means making a plan. I am planning on two specific tasks I can do for a coworker, an unseen task that no one will know about at work and how to do an unpleasant task before my coworker.

At home, there is a certain task that neither of us like to do. I am planning on taking that without talking about it or complaining.

Method means, putting on my daily list, strategically choosing a time (early so that the other people involved will not have to do it or it won’t be lingering.

And now I’ve put it out there. As part of my spiritual family, you can ask me how it’s going and pray for me!

For reflection

1. Spend some time with God in prayer. What area/s is He showing you that you could partner with Him in practicing ‘one another’?
2. Is there a plan you can make to build a habit/ practice into your life and schedule.

Do this prayerfully. This is not to be a heavy, overwhelming list, but a light, easy yoke. (Matt 11:30)

Group Talk

For Starters

Can you recall a moment where you tried to do something “solo” and had to stop and ask for help?

To Discuss

A New Command (John 13:34-35)

What makes this command to love one another a “new” one, considering love was already commanded in the Old Testament?

How do you hear that phrase when Jesus says, “as I have loved you”? What specific examples of Jesus’s love come to mind that are personal to you?

What’s the difference between loving someone because you like them versus loving them because Jesus commands it?

Scenario: You’re explaining to a curious neighbor what makes Christianity unique from other religions using only John 13:34-35. What would you say?

How might these verses challenge your perspective or understanding of Christian community?



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The Big Idea

Best Practice

Commit yourself with a high priority to be connected IN God’s family.

Passages

John 13:34-35; 1 John 4:7-11, 19-21

Group Goal

Becoming more like Jesus means loving more like he does. How does that happen? By committing to doing life with other followers. Doing life together will give you plenty of opportunities to practice radically loving others. We must be willing to commit to a rhythm of engaging with other Christ followers and allowing them to love us while we learn to love them.

This is a high priority for us to commit to being the body of Christ to each other. That means committing in real time and real space to be present with other Christ followers and allow God to use them to draw you closer to Him.

Loving (1 John 4:7-11, 19-21)

How has your understanding of God's love evolved throughout your life? How has it changed since before you came to Jesus, or even since then?

How is "God is love" different from saying "God loves" or "God is loving"?

What evidence does John provide that God truly loves us? How does this compare to the way we might define or describe love?

Why would claiming to love God while hating a brother be impossible according to John's reasoning?

How does the sequence in verse 19 ('we love because he first loved us') change how we might approach difficult moments or relationships?

How might our Life Group create more of a culture where God's love is tangibly experienced?

Next Steps

Which commitment from the Sunday message do you need to practice this week?

- We commit to be connected to each other.
- We commit to caring for each other's welfare.
- We commit to courageously loving each other in truth.

Make a point to reach out to a group member over the next 6 days and demonstrate that to them. Communicate your love with time and attention to them.

Prayer Focus

"One minute" idea: Announce at the beginning of prayer & sharing time: "You have 1 minute each to bring us up to date or make a new prayer request. You can add more detail as you pray, and we'll eavesdrop."

Use this only when the group is close & cohesive, and you know one another well. The advantage is that it encourages people to carefully edit their sharing to the most pertinent points.

Leadership Tip

Everyone Gets a Turn: A healthy group allows each member the chance to share their thoughts, opinions, and feelings. No one person does all the talking; everyone gets a chance to speak.

If you're inclined to talk, practice a moment of silence. Don't be the first to comment; count to 10 before speaking.

Likewise, for those inclined to be quiet, the group would love to hear your thoughts! Go ahead and share – they will be blessed by what you say.