

# this is LOVE

week three

Instructions for the group:

*(Anyone in the group can read these instructions to the group. Note: The group should run no longer than 90 minutes and it is **not** imperative to answer all of the provided questions each week.)*

1) Welcome everyone in the group and invite everyone in the group to share how their week has been going. Have everyone answer the question, "What did you do for fun this last week, or, what was the most recent thing that you did for fun?" (15-20 min)

2) Going around the group, have each person a story of a time that they met a famous person and what that experience was like. For example: Did you feel valued, loved, important or something else? How did that experience impact you? (An example within the chapter was that of James meeting his hero Karl Malone and having Karl spend time with him.) (10 min)

3) Starting with one person in the group and going in a circle, have each person read a few sentences from the excerpt provided from Chapter Two of *This is Love* (see the back of this page). (5 min)

4) After reading the excerpt answer these questions: (20-30 min)

*(Everyone in the group should have a chance to answer the question if they choose. Note: be comfortable with quiet moments to allow people to process or think.)*

- How have you experienced someone who embodied 'love one person at a time'?
- How do you interpret the statement, "Don't be so focused on the destination that you miss the journey?"
  - In what way have you missed the journey or learned how not to be so destination-focused?
- How do you think your life might be different if you were to more fully embody the statement, "love one person at a time?" What ways would you act different or move different?
- Can you relate to James' imagined meeting with Jesus someday, where Jesus might tell him, "Good job, but you missed the point. It was about the journey and not the destination."
- One of the things about Abram's life is that God's vision for his greatness was something that would only occur many generations after Abram. How might our world be different if people were not just seeking for greatness in their lifetime, but seeking God's greatness many generations later?

5) Is there something you might do differently in the coming week that could help you better live out the 'love one person at a time' approach to life? (15 min)

6) Go around the group and ask if anyone would like prayer for anything specific in their life. Ask one person in the group to briefly lift up the prayer concerns of the group in a short time of prayer.

5) Revisit the schedule for the coming weeks. Have someone sign up to bring a treat (cookies or cake) to the next meeting.

# Chapter 2 *(excerpt)*

- When my brother and I were starting Highlands Church, we decided to set an appointment with a pastor of a thriving church near Sacramento. The pastor's name was Rick Stedman (son of Ray).

We met him in the lobby of his church, which was designed like a café, and we simply asked him if he had any tips or best practices that he would recommend. We had our legal pads in front of us and were ready to take as many notes as we needed.

Then, he held up his pointer finger to the sky and this is what he said, "Love one person at a time." I remember being kind of frustrated. He had experienced such a great career as a pastor and we had travelled for over an hour! And the only thing he told us was this one sentence! Love one person at a time?!%?

I remember that for years I would tell my friends the story of our interaction with Rick and I would do so to illustrate my disappointment with his lack of generosity. I knew that if someone came to me I would have shared every single idea or helpful hint I'd ever acquired along the way.

Today, I don't see things the same way. Now I see the genius of what Rick was offering us that day. If he had rambled on for hours about how to counsel people in grief, or how to mentor parents, or how to structure a recovery ministry, we would never have really remembered what he said. To this day, I clearly remember every point he made...because he only made one point: love one person at a time.

What if that is the absolute best way to summarize God's work in the world? What if God's plan all along has been for the world to be blessed, in entirety, through one single person?

I wonder if this is the kind of realization that the disciples had when Jesus appeared as a stranger beside them on the way to Emmaus? Perhaps, when he recounted the stories from the Old Testament that day, they began to perceive how perfect God's plan had been from the very beginning. Perhaps Jesus opened their eyes to the profound and miraculous way that God had blessed the entire earth through Abram. Moreover, they might have sensed that if God had done such a significant work through one person in the past, maybe God might do something incredible through their life too.

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Perhaps one of the big problems that we have with love is that we have turned it into a destination. We have made love an object or a thing to strive toward rather than something we can embody and experience as we travel toward our final destination. Love is not about going somewhere; it is about being somewhere...or rather with someone. Since beginning Highlands Church, we've always loved to use the phrase "where the journey begins" to describe God's work here. One way that I've vamped on this theme with my staff is by encouraging them "not to be so focused on the destination that you miss the journey."

I always imagine the day that I will meet Jesus face to face. And, as I'm standing there with him, I could easily see me asking him, "Did I do a good job? Look at all the things I accomplished." That's when I think Jesus could just as easily say, "You missed the entire point." And, just like he did with those disciples on the road to Emmaus, Jesus would carefully tell the story of God. I'll bet it would be really simple. And, I'll bet that the point would be, "the purpose of life is to love one person at a time."

Especially in ministry, it is easy to get so caught up in the details. It's so easy to see how each project or initiative can bring about vast good for the people of the world. With the destination and the dream out in front, God brings together fantastic teams of very smart and talented people and they get to work. The goal looms large and day by day everyone can see lives being changed. The planning meetings go well and the goals of the project at hand are met. Then you move on to the next project. This pattern then has the potential to repeat itself indefinitely for the rest of your life. But, there is another way. The other way to travel forward doesn't look all that different. You still reach the final destination and you still accomplish your goals. The difference is that along the way you appreciate each moment and you realize that God's bigger purpose (bigger than getting to the finish line) is for you to love the people you are working with. In this way of looking at things, life is more about the journey than about the destination.